

speaking birth



'Your attention is not perfect. Your production is slower, you feel, than it was without the tiny person squirming in the corner or calling from the next room. You are divided. But you are also more than your practice, more than your parenting. You are—that is, I am—more than one kind of subject. I knit together more than one kind of knowing. I have more than one kind of attention. *I am a different kind of creator than I was before.*'

Powell, A.

for Alma, my little girl.

should you ever decide to create and grow life within you, may you know yourself as capable, free, sovereign, and powerful.

This page features a hand-made embossed art piece on Somerset Velvet paper. The original work exists in the physical edition of the book.

speaking birth:

the birth we do *not* talk about.

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contents

of births [and beginnings]

09

birth speaks in many languages.

Some we can share—those that take form in
words, in images, in sound.
Others remain unspoken and unseen, known
only to the one who gives birth:
the tremor of emotion, the pulse of *pain*, the
vast exhaustion and surrender.

Each contraction is a word in that secret
language—
the body opening, shifting, yielding,
as bones, muscles, and breath make space for life
to pass through.

More than traces on a monitor, it is a dialogue
felt from within—
a rhythm that belongs to no one else.
Only one—or perhaps two—can truly hear it.

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Parir: from the Spanish, *act of giving birth*.

I do not remember much about the room when I first stepped in.

The world was a blur of pain and dizziness, and time seemed to stretch and slow, with every movement unfolding like a dream in slow motion.

The room was quite big, as though drawn from scenes I had seen in films before. It was cold—so much cold. Everything was white, sterile, and weirdly clean.

There were hundreds of machines whose purpose I could not even guess, while a tangle of coloured cables—red, green, black, grey, yellow, even blue—snaked across the room.

A brilliant and heavy light in the middle of the room, illuminating a high, narrow bed underneath.

The smell in the air only reminded me where I was— like a mix of bleach and air conditioning.

The only sound was the rhythmic beeping, endlessly repeating. No one had told me beforehand: I would be anchored here, unable to move for hours to come.

The blue sheets attached to my left side, while every part of my body trembled.

I was about to experience something extraordinary, the most sublime moments of my life so far, but my mind was overwhelmed with fear.

I was about to bring life into the world.

El parto nos toca a todos—todos venimos de él.

Cuando hablamos de parto, suele percibirse como un asunto de mujeres. La verdad es que el parto nos abarca a todos—como individuos, como sociedad, como humanidad. Es una experiencia humana fundamental, profunda y universal, que nos conecta a todos al menos una vez en la vida. Y, aun así, seguimos sabiendo sorprendentemente poco sobre él.

Durante mi propio embarazo, hace más de tres años, recuerdo haber pasado tiempo diseñando la habitación de mi bebé, comprando un kit para la recolección de células madre, aprendiendo a amamantar y a cambiar pañales. Incluso leí sobre primeros auxilios, estilos de crianza y métodos de alimentación. Pero nunca pensé en preguntar—ni en prepararme—para el parto en sí. Nadie a mi alrededor hablaba de ello tampoco. Simplemente asumí que sucedería.

No sabía ni entendía bien la naturaleza de mi cuerpo en ese momento, qué haría mi bebé, qué posiciones podrían ayudarme, cómo la respiración o el movimiento podrían sostenerme, o cómo el entorno podría influir en la experiencia. No entendía de intervenciones médicas, el impacto de la medicalización, ni siquiera sabía lo más básico: cómo pujar—bien.

Ni siquiera en mi círculo cercano—donde hay muchas mujeres mamás—se mencionaba el tema.

Imaginaba el parto tal como se muestra en las películas: gritos, sudor, miedo, horas de agonía y caos. Parecía un tema tabú—algo invisible, indigno de conversación. Lo único que se mencionaba era el dolor. Pero el parto es mucho más que eso.

Antes de comenzar el Máster en *Interior and Spatial Design* en UAL, sabía con certeza que quería explorar una temática relacionada con la maternidad. Convertirme en mamá ha sido la experiencia más expansiva y transformadora de mi vida—y, al mismo tiempo, la más desafiante y desconocida. Me ha hecho más sensible, reflexiva, empática y humana. Ha desmantelado estigmas que había absorbido durante años y me ha hecho replantear qué es lo realmente importante.

Durante mis estudios, me encontré con un ensayo reciente, *Birth Places: From the Bedroom to the Hospital and Back Again*, de Millar y Winick. En él, cuestionan cómo los espacios y sistemas que soportan esta experiencia universal suelen permanecer invisibles y poco investigados—haciendo foco en el rol que cumple el diseño sobre la experiencia del parto. Ellas señalan que, el diseño de un lugar de parto puede definir e impactar estas experiencias de maneras profundamente significativas.

of births

[and beginnings]

Birth touches all of us—we all come from it.

When we talk about birth, it is often perceived as a woman's concern. The truth is, birth encompasses all of us—as individuals, as a society, as humanity. It is a fundamental, profound, and universal human experience that every one of us is connected to at least once in our lives. And yet, we still know surprisingly little about it.

During my own pregnancy, over three years ago, I remember to have spent time designing my baby's room, purchasing a stem cell collection kit, learning how to breastfeed and change nappies. I even read about first aid, parenting styles, and feeding methods. But I never thought to ask—or prepare myself—for the birth itself. No one around me spoke about it either. I simply assumed it would *just happen*.

I didn't know or fully understand the nature of my body during that moment, what my baby would do, which positions might help, how breathing or movement could support me, or how the environment might affect the experience. I didn't understand medical interventions, the impact of medicalisation, or even the most basic part: how to push—properly.

Not even my own relatives—despite there being many mothers among them—brought the matter up.

I imagined childbirth as it is portrayed in films: screaming, sweating, fear, hours of agony and chaos. It felt like a taboo subject—something invisible and unworthy of proper conversation. The only thing anyone ever mentioned was the *pain*. But there is so much more to birth than that.

Before beginning the MA in *Interior and Spatial Design* at UAL, I knew with certainty that I wanted to explore a theme related to motherhood. Becoming a mother has been the most expansive and transformative experience of my life—yet also the most challenging and unfamiliar. It has made me more sensitive, reflective, empathetic, and human. It has dismantled stigmas I had absorbed over the years and made me reconsider what truly matters.

During my studies, I came across a recent essay, *Birth Places: From the Bedroom to the Hospital and Back Again* by Millar and Winick. They questioned how the settings and systems that underpin this universal experience often remain unseen and under-researched—focusing on the role of design in shaping the birthing experience. They expressed that 'the design of a birthplace can make or break our experiences in profound ways'.

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This essay was deeply inspiring—emotive, transformative, and thought-provoking. It resonated with me not only professionally but personally, reflecting aspects of my own birth experience.

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Fue impactante y revelador darme cuenta de que la forma en que los sistemas contemporáneos esperan que vivamos el parto está, con frecuencia, lejos de ser humana, respetuosa, natural o de apoyo. Puso en evidencia lo defectuoso que puede ser el modelo médico de atención materna—y cómo nosotros, a nivel individual y colectivo, hemos normalizado este enfoque.

Decidí profundizar más, explorando la historia, la fisiología, la sobremedicalización, las creencias culturales, las políticas, los derechos, los partos en casa, el arte, el diseño y otros campos relacionados de alguna manera con el parto. Entre los muchos autores, textos, documentales y profesionales de parto, Grantly Dick -Read, Ina May Gaskin, Michel Odent y Debra Pascali- Bonaro influyeron profundamente en mi trabajo. Todos coinciden en que el *miedo* es una de las mayores barreras en el parto y que la educación sigue siendo una necesidad.

A través de mi investigación, descubrí que el parto ha sido, y continúa siendo, un *tema silenciado*. Su significado, manejo y representación han estado moldeados por fuertes narrativas culturales, sociales, espaciales y religiosas que anteceden y sostienen su medicalización.

Aún persiste una dependencia social hacia los eufemismos y las analogías para describir la anatomía, un énfasis en el atractivo sexual y el control, y una sensación constante de que el parto es algo ‘impactante’, ‘ofensivo’, ‘incómodo’ o ‘indeseable’. Términos como *sacrificio* o *indigno* siguen apareciendo en el discurso común. Todo esto revela cómo el parto continúa existiendo como un espacio de tensión entre naturaleza y cultura, pureza y tabú, cuerpo e identidad. En conjunto, estos discursos ilustran cómo las creencias arraigadas siguen dando forma a la manera en que el colectivo ve, habla y experimenta el parto.

La hospitalización del mismo, entonces, no es su punto de origen, sino una **expresión espacial** de estas creencias culturales más profundas—ambientes diseñados más en torno a la autoridad, la vigilancia y el control que a los ritmos instintivos del cuerpo que da a luz.

Este proyecto se basa en reconocer la desinformación generalizada y la falta de comprensión que aún rodean al parto—lo tabú, lo invisible, lo no dicho, lo implícito y lo ignorado que sigue siendo.

El parto continúa siendo un tema que carece de visibilidad y de debate abierto. Recuperarlo exige revisar no solo los sistemas médicos que lo gestionan, sino también las narrativas culturales, las representaciones y los **marcos espaciales** que lo han definido durante tanto tiempo.

Solo a través del diálogo pueden comenzar a transformarse las narrativas sociales y culturales—pasando de discursos estrechos, centrados solo en el miedo y el dolor, hacia relatos más amplios y matizados de las experiencias vividas por las mujeres.

Dicha transformación no se limita a una reforma médica o a un cambio de políticas, sino que implica reconfigurar las historias generacionales que contamos sobre el parto: cómo lo percibimos, cómo lo vivimos y cómo nos relacionamos con nuestros propios cuerpos.

Change begins with dialogue—with listening, understanding, and sharing the stories that have too long been silenced. By challenging inherited beliefs and reclaiming birth as both personal and sacred, women can redefine it as a deeply human act: one grounded not in fear or control, but in autonomy, dignity, confidence, and connection.

That is what this project seeks to be—not just a book, but a *conversation*. A voice. A story. A question. It is art. It is an **encounter**. It is activism. It is memory and language.

As mothers, as women, and as humans, we need to talk about it. We must educate ourselves, reclaim our worth, believe in our strength, raise awareness, and become a voice.

Through storytelling, drawing, printmaking, embroidery, and reflective writing, this work seeks to spark reflection and provoke change. It amplifies this deeply human event and encourages **spatial encounters** where stories are shared, questions asked, perceptions reshaped, and empowerment nurtured.

The narratives within are diverse in both tone and form—from intimate letters and reflective accounts to chronological stories—mirroring the multiplicity of voices and experiences. Some extend into pregnancy and the postpartum period, while others focus solely on labour and birth.

There are both home and hospital births; some attended by midwives, others by obstetricians. They range from unmedicated vaginal births to those involving medical interventions such as labour augmentation, epidural anaesthesia, lithotomy position, stirrups, episiotomy, forceps, and both planned and emergency caesarean sections. Birth presentations include both cephalic and podalic cases, and one multiple birth is represented.

The emotional spectrum is equally wide—spanning fear, frustration, confusion, and impotence, to calm, joy, empowerment, and transcendence, described by some as *magical* or *expansive*.

Only through dialogue can social and cultural narratives begin to shift—from narrow, fear- and pain-centred discourses towards fuller, more nuanced accounts of women’s lived experiences.

Such transformation is not merely a matter of medical reform or policy change, but of reconfiguring the generational stories we tell about birth: how we perceive it, how we experience it, and how we relate to our own bodies.

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Importantly, the narratives also capture generational diversity. While most accounts occurred within the last decade, one story—my mother’s—dates back more than thirty years. Its inclusion introduces a valuable intergenerational perspective, revealing how discourses, practices, and power relations surrounding childbirth have evolved—yet remain bound to enduring patterns of control and silence.

Each story is shared with honesty and heart: some raw, some empowering, some unsettling—but all profoundly human.

Although this project does not seek to represent all women’s experiences, the narratives collectively affirm that childbirth is far more than a biological event. It is a deeply cultural phenomenon—one shaped by spatial design, institutional systems, emotional environments, social narratives, inherited beliefs, and interpersonal relationships.

This compilation underscores the urgent need to restore women’s voices to the discourse of childbirth. It opens space—both literal and metaphorical—for dialogue, reflection, and reconnection with *our* origin and *our* story.

It challenges taboos and invites new narratives that reimagine and transform the **spatial experience of birth**.

Ultimately, this reclamation begins with conversation—with speaking and listening, with spreading and normalising *the birth we do [not] talk about*.

De manera significativa, las narrativas también capturan una diversidad generacional. Aunque la mayoría de los relatos ocurrieron en la última década, una historia—la de mi madre—data de hace más de treinta años. Su inclusión aporta una valiosa perspectiva intergeneracional, revelando cómo los discursos, las prácticas y las relaciones de poder en torno al parto han evolucionado, aunque siguen atadas a patrones persistentes de control y silencio.

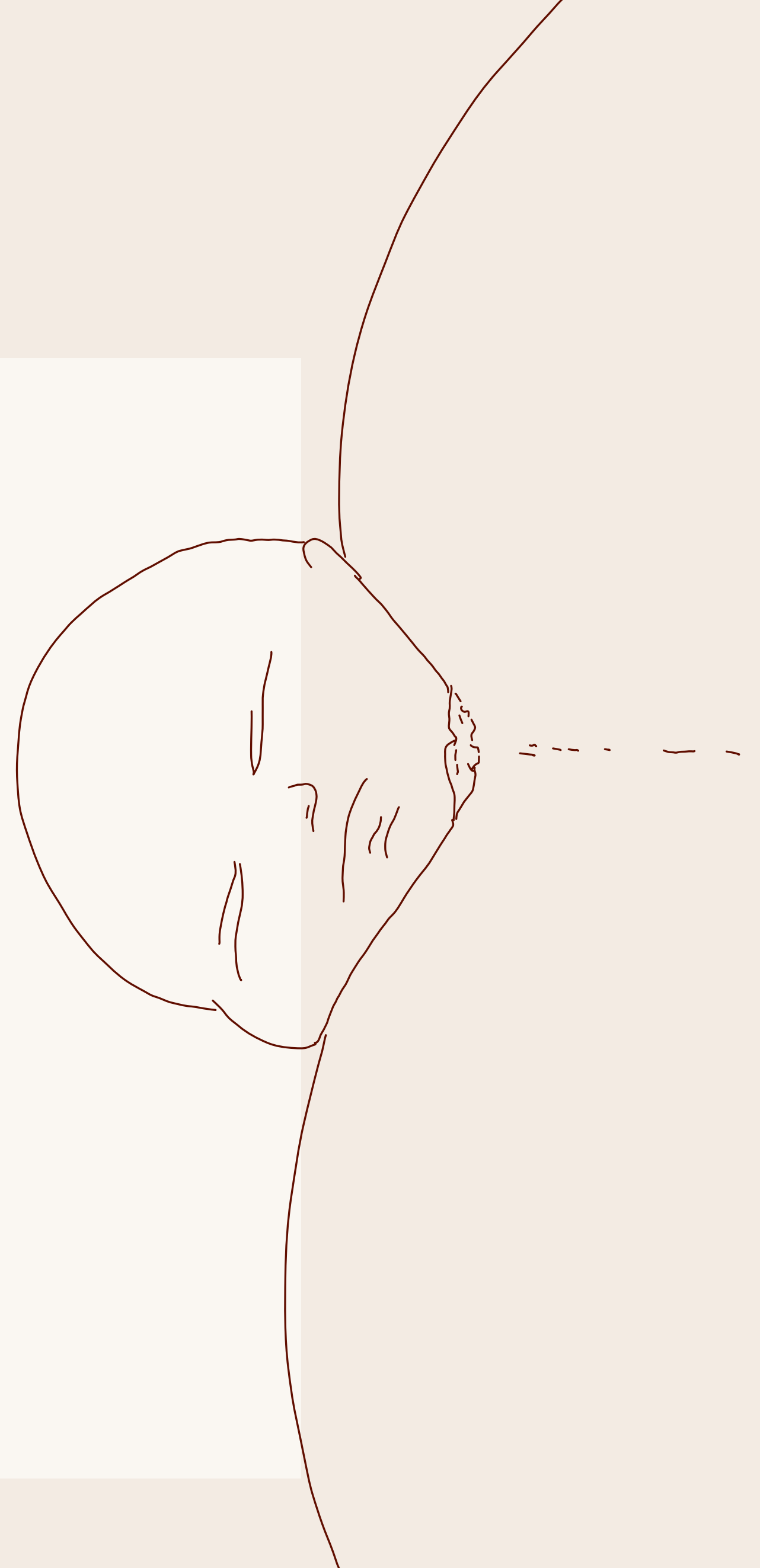
Cada historia se comparte con honestidad y corazón: algunas crudas, otras empoderadoras, otras desafiantes—todas profundamente humanas.

Aunque este proyecto no pretende representar todas las experiencias de las mujeres, las narrativas en conjunto afirman que el parto es mucho más que un evento biológico. Es un fenómeno profundamente cultural, configurado por el diseño espacial, los sistemas institucionales, los entornos emocionales, las narrativas sociales, las creencias heredadas y las relaciones interpersonales.

Esta compilación subraya la necesidad urgente de devolver la voz de las mujeres al discurso sobre el parto. Abre espacio—tanto literal como metafóricamente—para el diálogo, la reflexión y la reconexión con **nuestro** origen y **nuestra** historia.

Cuestiona los tabúes e invita a nuevas narrativas que reimaginen y transformen la **experiencia espacial del parto**.

En última instancia, esta reivindicación comienza con conversación—con hablar y escuchar, con difundir y normalizar **el parto/nacimiento del que [no] hablamos**.



*For those wishing to explore the roots of this work more deeply, my *Critical Research Paper* traces the theoretical and conceptual threads that nourish it—where reflection meets research to shape this project’s form and voice.

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De manera significativa, las narrativas también capturan una diversidad generacional. Aunque la mayoría de los relatos ocurrieron en la última década, una historia—la de mi madre—data de hace más de treinta años. Su inclusión aporta una valiosa perspectiva intergeneracional, revelando cómo los discursos, las prácticas y las relaciones de poder en torno al parto han evolucionado, aunque siguen atadas a patrones persistentes de control y silencio.

Cada historia se comparte con honestidad y corazón: algunas crudas, otras empoderadoras, otras desafiantes—todas profundamente humanas.

Aunque este proyecto no pretende representar todas las experiencias de las mujeres, las narrativas en conjunto afirman que el parto es mucho más que un evento biológico. Es un fenómeno profundamente cultural, configurado por el diseño espacial, los sistemas institucionales, los entornos emocionales, las normas sociales, las creencias heredadas y las relaciones interpersonales.

Esta compilación subraya la necesidad urgente de devolver la voz de las mujeres al discurso sobre el parto. Abre espacio—tanto literal como metafóricamente—para el diálogo, la reflexión y la reconexión con *nuestro* origen y *nuestra* historia.

Cuestiona los tabúes e invita a nuevas narrativas que reimaginen y transformen la experiencia espacial del parto.

En última instancia, esta reivindicación comienza con conversación—con hablar y escuchar, con difundir y normalizar *el parto/nacimiento del que [no] hablamos*.

Mother—not only a noun or adjective, but a **verb**.

[**muht-er**] *verb*:

to be the mother, origin, or source of;
to care of or protect like a mother; act maternally toward.

The word *mother* is often linked with the idea of *home*, yet *home* can mean many things. Our first ever home may be the womb.

Mother’s womb. The *place* we all come from.

A *place* as unique as every human on Earth. The *place*, a container, continuously adapts, evolving and stretching to accommodate the growing life.

Flexible, warm, compact, rhythmic, fluid, smooth.

Initially, the *place* is about the size of a lemon, it’s commonly described as an upside-down pear. Throughout nine months, the *place* stretches to the size of a watermelon.

That growing life’s *home* contracts during labor and delivery helping him push its way into the world.

By then, the *place* can weigh up to two pounds, and it takes around six weeks to shrink down to its usual size.

*For those wishing to explore the roots of this work more deeply, my *Critical Research Paper* traces the theoretical and conceptual threads that nourish it—where reflection meets research to shape this project’s form and voice.

Importantly, the narratives also capture generational diversity. While most accounts occurred within the last decade, one story—my mother’s—dates back more than thirty years. Its inclusion introduces a valuable intergenerational perspective, revealing how discourses, practices, and power relations surrounding childbirth have evolved—yet remain bound to enduring patterns of control and silence.

Each story is shared with honesty and heart: some raw, some empowering, some unsettling—but all profoundly human.

Although this project does not seek to represent all women’s experiences, the narratives collectively affirm that childbirth is far more than a biological event. It is a delectable cultural phenomenon—one shaped by spatial design, institutional systems, emotional environments, social narratives, inherited beliefs, and interpersonal relationships.

This compilation underscores the urgent need to restore women’s voices to the discourse of childbirth. It opens space—both literal and metaphorical—for dialogue, reflection, and reconnection with *our* origin and *our* story.

It challenges taboos and invites new narratives that reimagine and transform the **spatial experience of birth**.

Ultimately, this reclamation begins with conversation—with speaking and listening, with spreading and normalising *the birth we do [not] talk about*.

*For those wishing to explore the roots of this work more deeply, my *Critical Research Paper* traces the theoretical and conceptual threads that nourish it—where reflection meets research to shape this project’s form and voice.

How much do you know about your own birth?

Not just when or where—but how, in what atmosphere, with what thoughts, what interruptions, what silences?

Where did it happen?
Who was she with?
What time of day was it?
Was there music playing, or just the hum of a machine?
Did someone boil water? Did a dog bark? Did a window stay open?
Was the light bright or soft? Fluorescent or morning sun?

Did she cry, or did she stay quiet?
Did she feel strong? Did she feel small?
Did she make jokes between contractions? Did she laugh?

Did she ask for a mirror? Did she want to look away?
Was she hungry? Did she eat? What?
Did she drink tea, water, or nothing at all?
Did she vomit? Sweat?
Did she feel warm, or cover herself in a blanket?
Did someone bring her socks?

Did she make the bed before it all started?
Did she feed the cat?
Did she think about the laundry still wet in the machine?
Did she pack her bag twice—just in case?
Did she answer a message or scroll through her phone?
Was she annoyed by the wrong playlist?
Did she take a shower? Step into a warm birth pool?
Did she lock herself in the bathroom for a while?

Did she feel fear, strength, autonomy, invisibility?
Did she move freely? Walk around the house? Lie still?
Did she curl to the side, waiting?
Did she wear a hospital gown? Was she totally naked?
Did she rock on a ball?
Did she try to clean the house while contracting?

Did she forget to lock the door?
Did she worry about the neighbours hearing her?
Was there waiting? Hours where nothing happened?

Was there silence between contractions?
Did she notice how the curtain moved? How the room smelled?
Did she reach for someone's hand?
Was she touched gently, or told to stay still?
Did someone say something that stayed with her forever?
Was she told how to push, how to breathe, how to be?

Did she feel like the main character?
Was she comforted? Was she believed? Heard?
Was she taught anything beforehand? By whom?
Did the antenatal class help?
What did she expect—and what surprised her?
Did she light a candle?
Did she pray? Sing? Look at the moon?



El parto como ceremonia.

Mi nombre es Melisa, tengo 34 años, soy psicóloga y madre de dos hijos: Rafael, de casi cinco años, y Fausto, de dos.

Antes que nada, quiero agradecer a Dani, creadora de este libro, por abrir este portal sanador donde las madres podemos reconectarnos, desde lo más profundo, con nuestros relatos de parto. No tengo duda de que no hay nada más terapéutico y liberador que compartir y poner en palabras nuestra experiencia, cuando estas surgen desde la libertad sin juicios.

Quisiera comenzar diciendo que el parto va mucho más allá de un evento fisiológico. Según mi experiencia, es más una ceremonia espiritual, quizá la más grande a la que una mujer puede enfrentarse en su vida. Cuando el parto transcurre sin intervenciones médicas, el cuerpo de la mujer despliega su propia sabiduría. En las etapas más avanzadas de la dilatación, gracias a la alquimia interna que provocan las endorfinas y la oxitocina, muchas mujeres entran en un estado de trance natural. En ese portal sagrado, algunas describen una experiencia conocida como el viaje al 'Planeta Parto': un lugar espiritual al que la madre viaja para encontrar el alma de su bebé. Otras hablan de visiones intensas, sensaciones y colores que se asemejan a los que surgen bajo los efectos de un estado psicodélico, como si la consciencia misma se expandiera para abrir paso a la vida.

En ese umbral se revelan, uno frente al otro, los conceptos más profundos de la existencia: la vida y la muerte, la fuerza y la fragilidad, el poder, la capacidad y la vulnerabilidad. Entendí entonces que este suceso no solo marca el nacimiento de un hijo, sino también una transformación que determina la manera en que las personas habitamos la vida y nos movemos por el mundo.

La primera vez que supe que estaba gestando fue a través de un sueño: me vi pariendo en la calle, bajo una carpa de comidas—un lugar muy poco convencional—y en esa misma visión se me reveló el sigilo que hoy representa el logo de mi marca. En aquel momento no podía imaginar que, con el nacimiento de mi primer hijo, también nacería un propósito de servicio distinto a todo lo que había soñado sobre mí y sobre mi futuro.

Recuerdo que comenzaba la pandemia. Pasé una gestación tranquila, aislada—me volví, desde entonces, un poco ermitaña—, descansando y practicando sungazing, una práctica milenaria en la que se contempla el sol bajo un protocolo que nutre al cuerpo de fotones y sana cuerpo, mente y espíritu. Menciono esto porque estoy convencida de que fue determinante para la energía, la salud y el desarrollo tanto mío como del bebé.

childbirth as a ceremony.

Melisa Isaza Henao—*birthpalce* Colombia.
Gave birth in Medellín, Colombia.

My name is Melisa, I'm 34 years old, a psychologist, and the mother of two children: Rafael, who is almost five, and Fausto, who is two.

Before anything else, I want to thank *Dani*, the creator of this book, for opening this healing portal where mothers can reconnect, from the deepest part of ourselves, with our birth stories. I have no doubt that there is nothing more therapeutic and liberating than sharing and putting our experiences into words—when those words arise from a place of freedom and without judgement.

I'd like to begin by saying that birth goes far beyond being a physiological event. From my own experience, it is more of a spiritual ceremony—perhaps the greatest one a woman can ever face in her life. When birth unfolds without medical intervention, a woman's body reveals its own wisdom. In the more advanced stages of dilation, thanks to the inner alchemy triggered by endorphins and oxytocin, many women enter a natural state of trance. Within that sacred portal, some describe what is known as the journey to '*Planet Birth*': a spiritual place where the mother travels to meet her baby's soul. Others speak of intense visions, sensations, and colours similar to those that arise under a psychedelic state, as though consciousness itself expands to make way for life.

At that threshold, the most profound concepts of existence stand face to face: life and death, strength and fragility, power, capacity, and vulnerability. I came to understand then that this event not only marks the birth of a child but also a transformation that shapes the way we inhabit life and move through the world.

The first time I discovered I was pregnant was through a dream: I saw myself giving birth in the street, beneath a food tent—a very unconventional place—and in that same vision, the symbol that today represents my brand's logo was revealed to me. At that moment, I couldn't have imagined that with the birth of my first child would also come a calling to serve—a purpose unlike anything I had ever dreamed for myself or my future.

I remember that it was the beginning of the pandemic. I had a calm pregnancy, isolated—I became somewhat of a hermit from then on—resting and practising sungazing, an ancient practice where one contemplates the sun under a specific protocol that nourishes the body with photons and heals body, mind, and spirit. I mention this because I'm convinced it was key to the energy, health, and development of both myself and the baby.

Did she feel pain? How did she describe it?
Did she want pain relief? Did she get it?
Was it a vaginal birth, a caesarean, an assisted one?
Did she push lying down, kneeling, standing, or somewhere in between?

Was she alone when it started?
What position were you in before coming out?
Did she whisper your name before she even saw your face?

Was it fast? Endless?
Did she cry out, or stay quiet?
Did she tear? Did she bleed?
Was she stitched in silence or distraction?

Was she alone when it started?
What position were you in before coming out?
Did she whisper your name before she even saw your face?

Was it fast? Endless?
Did she cry out, or stay quiet?
Did she tear? Did she bleed?
Was she stitched in silence or distraction?

Did she hear your cry first—or her own?
Did she see the placenta? Did she touch it, eat it?
Who cut the cord? Who held you first?
Did she smell your head? Did she say your name?

Did she fall in love—or fall apart?
Did she feel joy? Rage? Relief?
Did she know what day it was?

And what happened after?
Did she sleep? Eat? Cry through the night?
Did she know how to feed you?
Did anyone ask how *she* was?

La Vida me trajo mi renacimiento.

La Vida brought me my rebirth.

([La] Vida, from the Spanish, meaning [The] Life).

Paula Andrea Montoya Zuluaga—*birthplace* Colombia. *Gave birth* in Medellín, Colombia.

There is a great difference between speaking, thinking, feeling and writing.

I must begin with this, because I am about to express the most surreal experience of my 49 years of life—an age where the rational blends perfectly with the emotional, and the result is a description that attempts to be faithful to what happened, a reasoning that seeks to narrate the unnameable. It is so complex that psychology itself has not yet given it a name—or perhaps has not cared to—nor any other discipline. I am referring to an emotion, one of those that is not felt several times in a lifetime, that is not triggered by everyday situations. These are special, immense. An emotion unleashed only once, because the circumstance that calls it forth can only be lived once. Unlikely to ever happen again—or at least, from my experience, it is only activated by the person who gave it to me. No one else.

There is a false belief that we speak what we think and feel, and if we wish to capture it in physical form, we simply write it down. But it is not so. Least of all when the subject surpasses the psychological and physical, and transcends into a realm beyond the spiritual, which is to say, it is very likely that these words will fall short of the immensity that overwhelms my soul when return 31 years into the past.

It was April. I was 18 years old, with everything that stage of life implies—a tangle of the mental, physical and social, a feeling of believing I knew everything, when I did not. I only longed for freedom, for experience, for something new. I thought the hormones of wellbeing would remain switched on forever. And so, at that age, during my first semester at university—already a greater freedom—*La Vida* began to grow within me. Yes, that is what I call what society names ‘pregnancy’. For me, it was the beginning of my rebirth.

Was that *Vida* growing inside me a surprise? Of course—I had not sought it, I had not expected it, and much less had I imagined it. But from the very first instant when my human instinct realised that something was happening to my body, I felt something that resembled grandeur, and it went beyond that once it was confirmed that the change I was sensing was real, that it was truly happening. It was at that moment when I finally understood what an authentically emotional and spiritual connection meant—surely, at that moment I would not have named it like that, but today, it is the expression that best suits that sensation. In spite of having to face the negative emotions of others and, as a consequence, their behaviours, *La Vida* that was growing within me gently led me to build a kind of self-absorption where it was only she and I, weaving life, connection, a present, a future.

Hay una diferencia muy grande entre hablar, pensar, sentir y escribir.

Debo iniciar con ello, porque estoy a punto de expresar la experiencia más surrealista que he vivido en mis 49 años de vida, edad donde ya lo racional se combina de manera perfecta con lo emocional y el resultado es la descripción real de lo sucedido, un razonamiento tratando de manifestar de manera real lo vivido, buscando desde él mismo, relatar lo innombrable—es tan compleja que aún la psicología no le ha podido dar nombre, o simplemente, no le ha interesado descubrirlo, ni a ella ni a otra disciplina—y me refiero a una emoción, de esas que no se sienten varias veces en la existencia, que no se desata frente a situaciones cotidianamente que se piensa y siente, son especiales y grandiosas, una emoción que se desata una sola vez, porque la situación que la propició, solo se vive una sola vez, improbable que lo haga de nuevo, o por lo menos, desde mi experiencia, esa emoción solo la activa la persona que me la regaló, nadie más.

Socialmente se tiene la falsa creencia de que hablamos lo que pensamos y sentimos, y si deseamos plasmarlo en algo físico, pues solo es escribirlo, pero no es así, y menos cuando el tema central sobrepasa lo psicológico y físico y trasciende a un plano superior al espiritual. Con esto quiero decir, que es muy probable que lo que se vive en estas líneas no abarque la inmensidad que embarga mi alma cuando me remito 31 años atrás.

Era un mes de abril, con mis 18 años y todo lo que implica este ciclo evolutivo, un entredo mental, físico, social, una sensación de creer saberlo todo, cuando no era así, solo con deseos de libertad y tener experiencias, vivir cosas nuevas, pues en ese momento, pensaba que las hormonas del bienestar se mantenían encendidas por siempre, en fin, con esa edad y experiencia, dando mi primer semestre como universitaria, que yo suponía mayor libertad, empezó a crecer *La Vida* dentro de mí, sí, así nombro lo que socialmente le llaman embarazo, fue la etapa, o, mejor dicho, fue el inicio de mi renacimiento.

¿Sorprende aquella *Vida* que estaba creciendo dentro de mí? Obvio, ni lo buscaba, ni lo esperaba, y mucho menos me lo imaginaba, pero desde el primer instante que mi instinto humano se percató de que a mí cuerpo le estaba pasando algo, sintió lo que se asemeja mucho a una grandiosidad y traspaso la misma cuando se confirmó que era real ese cambio que estaba sintiendo y realmente se estaba dando. Fue en ese momento, donde por fin entendí qué significaba una conexión auténticamente emocional y espiritual—seguro en ese momento no lo hubiera denominado así, pero hoy, es la expresión que más se ajusta a esa sensación. Bese a tener que enfrentar las emociones negativas de los otros y como consecuencia de ello, sus conductas, *La Vida* que estaba creciendo en mí, con sutileza me fue llevando a construir un ensimismamiento, donde solo éramos ella y yo, tejendo vida, conexión, un presente, un futuro.

Where is that story now? Has she told it? Written it? Hidden it?

Have you asked?

Do you [really] know how you were born?

lifeline

Nutrients. Oxygen. Connection.

The placenta is the *lifeline* between mother and baby—a living organ that sustains and protects new life throughout pregnancy.

Through the umbilical cord, it carries oxygen and nourishment, functioning as the baby's lungs, heart, and digestive system during development.

After birth, blood continues to flow for a few moments, as the cord slowly narrows and fades in colour—a quiet transition from shared to independent life.

In the third stage of labour, the placenta is naturally delivered, completing its purpose.

With the clamping or burning of the umbilical cord, the final physical bond between mother and child is gently released.

with thanks

En primer lugar, quiero agradecer a este Máster—no solo por ampliar mis conocimientos, perspectivas y práctica creativa, sino por alentarnos a cuestionar el *status quo* y desafiar lo convencional. Por impulsarnos a seguir nuestros intereses personales, demostrando que no existe un único camino. Por guiarme a descubrir el mío—único, personal y libre—y por brindarme el espacio para explorar y ser verdaderamente yo misma.

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También quiero agradecer a todas las mujeres increíbles que creyeron en este proyecto y contribuyeron con sus historias. Estoy profundamente agradecida por su tiempo, sus palabras y por abrir sus corazones para compartir sus experiencias únicas. Gracias por creer que el parto es digno de ser contado, por empoderar a otras mujeres a compartir los suyos también, y por mostrarnos que, por diferentes que sean nuestras historias, cada una es valiosa y merece ser escuchada.

Gracias a mi madre—por creer en mí y en este proyecto, y por contribuir con su propia narrativa. Gracias por permitirme verte como mujer, no solo como mi mamá; por volver a visitar un momento de hace más de tres décadas, reviviendo su fuerza y emoción para compartir la historia de mi propia llegada a este mundo.

A mi esposo—gracias por animarme siempre a soñar en grande, por ser equipo, por creer en mí, por acompañarme mientras encontraba mi voz, y por apoyarme en cada parte de este camino.

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Firstly, I want to thank this Master’s course—not only for expanding my knowledge, perspective, and creative practice, but for encouraging us to question the status quo and challenge convention. For pushing us to follow our personal interests, showing that there is no single way. For guiding me to discover my own path—unique, personal, and free—and for giving me the space to explore and truly be myself.

Thank you to all my tutors for sharing your knowledge and experience, and for opening new possibilities for us all. Special thanks to Sophie, my project tutor, for always believing in and encouraging me—to think, to create, to keep going. Thank you for ‘getting my back’—on a topic that remains sensitive—, for our long and honest conversations, for sharing this same interest, and for opening up a bit of her personal self—as a woman, as a mother that has experienced birth twice.

I also want to thank all the incredible women who believed in this project and contributed to it with their stories. I am deeply grateful for your time, your words, and for opening your hearts to share your own unique experiences. Thank you for believing that childbirth is worthy of being spoken about, for empowering other women to share theirs too, and for showing us all that, no matter how different our stories are, each one is valuable and deserves to be heard.

Thank you to my mother—for believing in me and in this project, and for contributing with her own narrative. Thank you for allowing me to see you as a woman, not only as my mum; for revisiting a moment more than three decades old, reliving its strength and emotion to share the story of my own arrival into this world.

To my husband—thank you for always encouraging me to dream big, for being my teammate, for believing in me, for accompanying me as I found my voice, and for supporting me through every part of this journey.

And finally, the most important of all—thank you Alma, my little girl. For inspiring me always; for all the transformation and expansion you have brought into my life; for being that daily sunbeam; and for constantly inviting me to *look within*.

credits

Opening quote from 'How to: BE A WRITER—my contribution to Invisible Spaces of Parenthood' by Alison Powel (2012).

Every birth story in this book was generously shared by the women credited in each narrative. Anonymity was optional and respected; however, all contributors chose to have their names included.

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