

OUR  
BODIES  
BREATHE  
UNDERWATER

This publication is part of the << Public Health>> project which includes an exhibition, film screenings, talks and workshops that took place between June 2020 and February 2021.

**Our bodies breathe underwater**

*(a collection of workshop writings on illness and care)*

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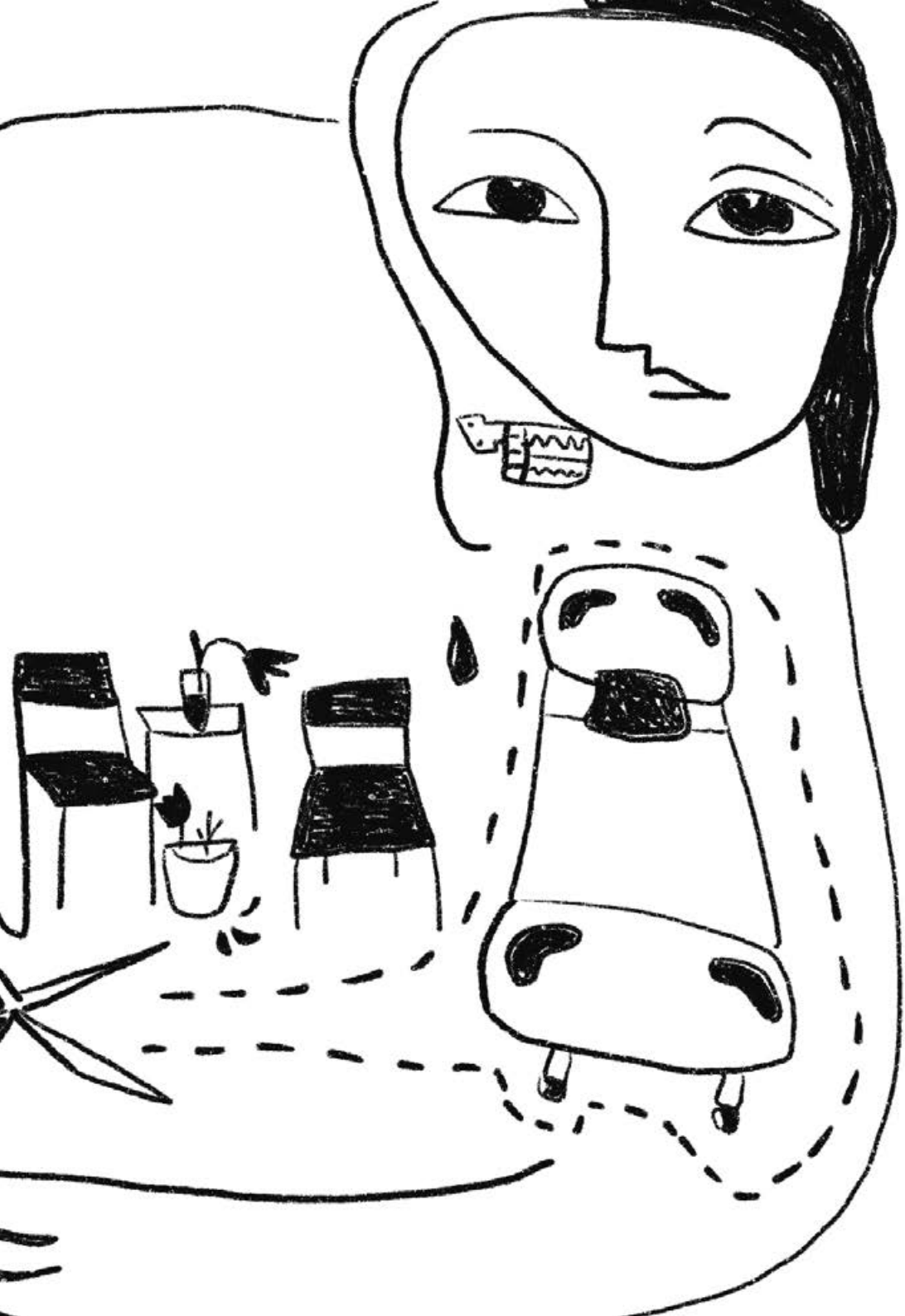
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# An Attempt at Exhausting Mother's Hospital Room

Manar Moursi





## **Oct 8th, 2020**

Double movements:

Air becoming part of my body

Air becoming part of the world

From my dryer,

I retrieve sedimentary traces you left behind

In a muddy-grey ball of fluff

Containing human cells, plant cells, hairs, fibers, dust, microorganisms

That aggregated and convened on my sheets

But did not form chemical bonds.

We are not flowers,

But do our hairs sense danger?

## **Oct 16th, 2005**

To turn you, I have to lay you flat on your back, bend one knee up, then rotate you to the side so that your bent knee rests over the straight leg.

Turning you allows better access to insert and remove diapers under you.

I will turn you to either side every three hours, turn you carefully so your arm does not get stuck. I have perfected folding your arm onto your chest, then folding your knee, so the rolls are smooth from side to side.

**Inventory:**

A bed with wheels  
Connected to a monitor.  
A bed with rails  
A bed that can elevate  
To ease your swallowing and breathing  
So you do not choke in your sleep  
If you sleep too long on one side,  
Bed ulcers.  
Deep vein thrombosis.  
Anti-coagulants, peripheral illnesses.

**Trajectories:**

A plastic tube brings fluid and medicines to veins in your hand and then to the rest of your body.  
From your bladder, another plastic tube, to drain fluids into a bag.  
If infected from these plastic tubes, the bacteria will eventually find ways to resist antibiotics.  
The bacteria survive, but you, their host, does not — a zero-sum game.

With butterfly-shaped brain tumors,  
There are no dreams in waiting rooms.  
There are no dreams on sofas in hospital rooms.  
There are no dreams in brains swollen and trapped with excess fluids.

**Mar 21st, 2006**

I feed you soup. You cannot swallow because you have lost capacity to swallow your own saliva. You choke. We are now suctioning your saliva for you.

Your hands circle around my hand. I still like to think you are holding my hand, but I also know that all your hands have now are a newborn's grasp reflex, or palmar reflex, which allows babies between one to four months to grasp and hold tightly anything pressed into the center of their palm. After four months, babies outgrow this reflex, discovering other ways to use their fingers.

Ungrowth.

...

*I am nails: long and curved.*

*I can send myself across an ocean to scratch scalps and hairs.*

*I can console you.*

*I can also scratch out the eyes of anyone who harms you.*

...

**Colors:**

Orange/red in urine bag — undesirable;

So are foggy or unclear shades of yellow.

Red and pink on your skin — irritations.

Red and yellow, even green blobs in PET scans,

Indicate irregular cellular behavior.

Cyan, magenta, and green lines

Erratically sketch your heart's movements on a black monitor.

**Smells:**

Baby lotion after changing diapers.

. . .

*I am a love shampoo.*

*Subtle smells,*

*Smells like summer,*

*Gardenias.*

*You can bathe in my love.*

*You can soak,*

*Or swim in swimming pools of lukewarm water mixed in with me,*

*Pools with thick waters, the consistency of lentil soup.*

*You must shower every day,*

*Until you ooze my scent.*

*Massage your scalp and body carefully,*

*Lather, until you get frothing bubbles of love — love suds.*

*You can also use me to cleanse the spaces you occupy.*

*Hygiene is now measured by the amount of me you spill on the ground.*

. . .

**Dec 10th, 2005**

What has changed since yesterday?  
Do you still not remember me?

Many things have not changed:  
You are still silent, you can only make sounds that do not resemble words.

Bad art still hangs on the wall.  
Thin blankets.  
Disposable sheets to make way for new bodies.  
Drawstring robes washed at the highest temperatures.

Sometimes, we hear laughter leaking from adjacent rooms during visiting hours.  
They say the last sense you lose before you die is hearing.

. . .

*I am a tree,  
I yield infinite gummy bears,  
And salted chips,  
Sunlight seeps through my eaves,  
And momentary distractions from bad TV.*

. . .

**Sounds:**

Beeps. Alarms. Breaths.

Waiting for doctors' footsteps in a corridor.

Waiting for nurses that miss administering doses.

**Apr 6th, 2006**

How many more needle pricks do you have to endure?

There are so many holes in your story. I wish one day I can find out who you really were. But perhaps also, I will never find out. No more veins to search for to prick.

. . .

*I will make a future that is ~~not~~ abundant.*

*A future that could have been, but was not.*

*I will insist on certain things.*

*Surviving will no longer be a fantasy here.*

. . .

**Inventory:**

A bed with wheels

Connected to a monitor

A bed with rails

A bed that can elevate

To ease your swallowing and breathing.

## **Trajectories:**

A bed that takes you to MRI caves.  
A bed that takes you to surgery chambers.  
A bed that takes you to the next life.

...

*I am the substance of sleep. I do not see or hear anyone except in my dreams. When you are within me, you are surrounded by silence and peace.*

*All figures I create are made of recycled memories converted into illusions. There is nothing solid in the world I make except my body, and the mattress that supports it.*

...

*I am the letter Alef. I am the first letter. I sound like a scream if uttered continuously — AAHHHHHHHH*

*I sound like an uttering of extreme pleasure and satisfaction — AUHHHHHHHHHHHH*

*In Arabic, I am elegant, a vertical line. I am independent in my form, I do not connect to other letters in writing. Self-sufficient. In the Latin alphabet, I look like a pyramid.*

*Sometimes, I sound like an unfinished thought or sentence.*

*Or a sigh of relief and exhaustion. Ahhhh.*

*I do not need throat or tongue acrobatics to be uttered, just a slight change in breath.*

...

**Nov 7th, 2005**

I dreamt I lived in the sky  
Without being a bird.

When I let myself feel,  
I feel heavy.

**Nov 10th, 2020**

What is more useful?  
To have two minds: debate!  
An extra hand?  
To touch and make things and write —  
An extra colon to digest all the things you're not supposed to eat?  
A second pair of feet,  
To take your body somewhere other than this room —  
Or infrared ears to hear the sounds of the recently deceased chatting in  
graves?  
What would my mother be saying?  
I search for her nightly in my dreams.

Exquisite

**Corpse**

# Womb

Stretchy fiber.  
Will reproduce itself.  
Only in the winter solstice,  
In ideal conditions of exposure to the sun  
And stars at night.

Will not shed.  
Will filter out unwanted guests.  
Will accept giving up  
When unfruitful

Shaped not like a pear  
And not like a banana  
Not like a fig  
Not like a watermelon  
Maybe a coffee bean?

Will emit smells related to bodies that enter it.  
New daily hints, tints, perfumes

Will thicken its skin  
Only when ready  
To hold a child.





Currently too much pressure:  
Controlling the networks of blood vessels  
And nerves that direct flow of blood to the  
pelvis  
And to the external genitalia, including the  
ovaries,  
Vagina, labia, and clitoris for sexual response.  
— Sex brain.

Will have calmer job description,  
In non-hierarchical organization:  
Each part controls its own nerves.

Chamber of relief.  
Warm.  
Humid.  
Soft,  
Smooth...

Grapefruit,  
Egg.

New mucus plugs  
And long canals.

Infrastructure projects,  
To re-engineer the system,  
Will support future generations of human-mind  
dictatorships  
And their cell workers.