Breathe In and Out

“Politics of Love: Long Distance Relationship” is a special issue for Tohu Magazine, using Etel Adnan’s text *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay* as a compass in the troubled times of COVID-19.

Essay / Tuçe Erel December 31, 2022

In about 16 seconds, after 4-5 slow-paced breaths in and out, the blood circulation completes one cycle. In those 16 seconds, one drop of blood starts its journey and ends back in the heart. Although all our organs are connected to one another, the relationship between the lungs and the heart is a bit different. They are entangled inside the human chest. They act together. Breathing allows the heart to pump. Breathe in and out, think about this cycle and collaboration, entanglement in the body. Have you recalled the diagrams from your biology class already?

I was reminded about this connection recently in a presentation by the artist Jane Prophet. When she was talking about her work, she said that when a heart or lung transplant takes place, the medical team has to handle lungs and hearts together due to this strict connection.

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[1]Tobias Klein and Jane Prophet, Common Datum, 2020, ProGlass blown, 3D printed black polymer (SLS), Calcium Chloride, Water
Photo credit: FONG Hin Nam

It was striking to hear this, many years after learning about this basic system at school. In mid-August, when I wrote my editorial contribution for this special issue, “Politics of Love: Long Distance Relationship,” my text was utterly different. But after this lecture, I had to restart… I had to rethink the lungs and the heart… I was also looking into the word longing from an etymological perspective for its connection to belonging. (And I am aware of the fact that the translator will be mad at me, because this logic may not work in Hebrew or Arabic. I trust them to use their creativity to explain this connection to you.)

Long
Longing
Belonging…

They seem to be connected. But I was surprised and disappointed to learn that belonging has nothing to do with longing. Hah, I was ready to expand my mind map by connecting *belonging* to the *longing* in relation to Etel Adnan’s art, writing, and autobiography. Nope, belonging is belonging… It has nothing to do with longing.

But then, another surprising encounter related to the connection of the lungs and the heart has changed the course of the text: a blog post by Anatoly Liberman, in which he explains the etymology of lung and long. Old English had langian, and longian, “to desire” and “to grow long,” either two distinct words or two meanings of the same verb.1 It gets even more interesting when Liberman makes the connection to German, which happens to be my second foreign language that I have resigned myself to never being as fluent as I am in English. He says:

> "In German, we find *erlangen* "to attain," and *langen* "to reach for something." Speakers, naturally, connect *langen* with *lang* "long" (you reach for something = you stretch yourself and make yourself longer, as it were), but scholars dissociate them. *Langen*, they point out, seems to be related to the verb *gelingen* "to succeed," and this makes its affinity with lang improbable. … The same scholars … also say that German *verlangen* "to attain" and *long* should be separated. Finally, German has Belang "importance, significance" and *anbelangen* "to concern."2

Well, there is another exciting point when it connects and maybe disconnects to the human respiratory organ, the lung in English and German: "Engl. *lung* ~ German *Lunge* resembles *lungre* and *lungern*, but they, most definitely, have nothing to do with length and longing. There was an ancient root, whose modern continuation is Engl. *light* "not heavy"; it spawned several words sounding like those we have seen. Lungs float on water."3

"Lungs float on water."

Although lungs and longing may not be directly connected, as someone who is not a native speaker of English, I cannot ignore the feeling of the entangled heart and lungs' connection to longing and desire. Since I started reading and thinking about these connections in English, I had tried to find something similar in my native language, Turkish. In Turkish, we do not have anything that connects the lung (akciğer) and heart (kalp) phonetically or etymologically to desire (arzu) and love (aşk). So again, there is an interesting connection that I cannot translate into my native language. Then I remembered that we use ciğer*im*4 (= my liver) to refer to someone that we love and care about dearly. I like to think this idiom refers not to the liver here but to the lung. So at least I can make one connection with love and lung in my native language. The reason behind this deep dive into etymology is to introduce you to several texts and contributions to this special issue on TOHU. And hey, you may have already started reading this special issue without reading this text first, which is fine, but I intend to change your perception a bit. But, hang on, I am not done with lungs… In Turkish, we use *nefes* for breathing. The word comes from Arabic and its root *nefs* means human body, reason, desire, longing, and lust in Turkish. For example, in the Islamic faith, one should tame their *nefs*, or lust and desire. With every breath one takes, one must be moral. That is what makes a person good and worthy according to the Islamic faith.

Scudery,_Le_Pays_de_Tendre,_1800,_Cornell,_CUL_PJM_1029_01.jpg **[2]**



[3]Le Pays de Tendre by Madeleine de Scudery, 1800

[Cornell University: Persuasive Cartography, The PJ Mode Collection] [4]

How can one tame their love and lust? What is the boundary between desire and love? Where do my lungs take me and where does my body float in this burning desire?

As a guest editor for this issue, with dear colleagues Leah Abir and Avi Lubin, we brought together artists, authors, and curators to reflect on and contribute to this special issue. Even though you don't need to follow an order, I still would like to suggest one, if you feel like tagging along with me. Please start with Saadi Nikro's contribution that will help you expand on the concept of *Nefs* I introduced above. Saadi explores the AutoBioGraphy of Etel Adnan, *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country,* and links it to Ahmad Ghossein's short film *My Father is Still a Communist: Intimate Secrets to be Published*. The film focuses on the long-distance relationship of a family whose patriarch is far away from home to earn money. It is a story shared by many families that have been broken when a parent had left to seek work elsewhere.

After this text, I suggest you move on to Liz Rosenfeld's contribution, which is about the relationship between a child and father who are going through a massive transformation simultaneously while being separated by distance. The distance that may be overseas but also needs to be maintained due to health issues, even while they share the same space. An experience that the whole world went through with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a text about love stories of blood-tied family members and selected ones. Stories of lust and loss.

If you are still with me, please turn the page to the third text, “Love Letters,” written by Mine Kaplangı & Naz Cuguoğlu. It is not just those usual love letters that two people write to one another. These two drifted away from each other by choice after working together for many years in the same city. Since then, they have been working over a distance. It is a friendship with a strong foundation and is kept alive beyond temporal and spatial divides. These poems and letters are notes on moments that they wished to have shared together.

Rula Khoury is the writer of the fourth text in this special issue, which is a thought on Saodat Ismailova’s video installation *Chilltan*, a labyrinthine work, a search for true love. Rula’s text goes through layers of narratives and traditions of ancient tribes or nations, and Ismailova brings us back to the origins of ancient beliefs and beauty.

Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime by Noa Giniger is a reinterpretation of her existing work for an intimate, one-to-one experience on the screen. Turn on the sound now. And once you are fulfilled, please move to the Zoya Cherkassky series, a selection of her image diary during the first COVID-19 lockdown.

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[6]Tobias Klein and Jane Prophet, Common Datum, 2020, ProGlass blown, 3D printed black polymer (SLS), Calcium Chloride, Water
Photo credit: FONG Hin Nam

Khalil Barakat's text *About a Stroll that We Take Every Day – Love* invites you to the love life of renowned French author and playwright Marguerite Duras. His text delves into the meaning and experience of desire. The word desire, as Khalil also investigates etymologically, means 'thirst for light.' The lust that one nurtures for a loved one has also been transformed during the times of COVID-19. How does one share their love in these troubled times? What does care mean in these strange times?

Talking about questions, we lastly invite you to Michal B. Ron's text, "What to do for the Sake of Love?" Based on James Lee Byars's *World Question Center* (1969) performance, which was broadcast live on Belgium's television. Ron shares her experience of rewatching the video documentation of the performance during the first COVID-19 lockdown. One of the questions raised during the performance belonged to Marcel Broodthaers: *in this condition of this strange world: what to do to make love?* Using this question as a compass, you are invited to ask one question that troubles you these days.

- 1. Liberman, 'The Long Arm of Etymology, or, Longing for Word Origins'. https://blog.oup.com/2006/09/the_long_arm_of [7]/
- 2. Liberman.
- 3. Liberman.
- 4. Ciğer can be translated as liver, however, it also means lungs. In biology these two organs are translated into English as follow: *akciğer*=lung *karaciğer*=liver; ak=white, kara=black. Well, using color for the organ is relevant since they have a certain color difference and both organs have the function of cleaning and filtering purposes in the human body.

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[7] https://blog.oup.com/2006/09/the_long_arm_of/