



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embody – Broke Bodies

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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I have a body like a weather vane, right ankle signaling cold weather with sharp accuracy, right shoulder attuned to deep rains. I have a body like sonar, sounding out dead spaces in medical knowledge. I have a body like tarot, signaling imminent changes.

I made my peace with chronic pain decades ago, arthritis at 18 and a life of physical labor didn't leave much choice. We've always been comrades in the fight, my body and I, though providing for us both is no easy task. It's not enough to have a roof and walls, light and heat and water and a door that locks. It's not enough to eat regularly, and even have protein and produce and bread that isn't filler. These are the basics that keep a wage laborer laboring, though of course, even these aren't guaranteed.

I did ten hour workdays on a breakfast of Ramen; four months of graveyards on peanut butter and Roman Meal; six years of college serving good food to everyone else while scrambling to do

homework and pay rent and get to class, missing semesters due to work related injuries. Swallowing insults, swallowing anger, swallowing words. They make an acid in the belly, corrode the heart, crack fractures in teeth and nail and bone. All the while I'm trying to live in it like home.

I'm good at cobbling things together and highly motivated, and I've managed to build a life for myself where I get many of my basic alternative body needs met in fair trade. The western medicine infrastructure, however, is still mostly a vast frustration studded with fragments of care.

I've been shelling out money for dental insurance I can't afford because teeth are important and mine are already compromised. A molar broke in my sleep last week, probably from stress clenching because I'm broke and life is expensive. I thought I was finally playing the game right because I only had to wait a week for an appointment and the insurance rep assured me that fillings are covered. I pushed through the dental anxiety and went in, only to find out my tooth is so bad off I need a crown, but my insurance doesn't cover that until you've been paying a full year, and that makes the filling not just a filling so it's not covered after all.

I'm sitting in the chair doing the math, and the out of pocket cost is greater than my whole checking account, and I know I'm leaving with this same broken tooth. The dentist is very nice about the options with no class shaming but there's really no way around it. They offered to file down the sharp edges for free so I don't make mincemeat of my inner cheek while hustling 'extra' money for the next two months and I swallowed my pride along with that bone dust and said thank you.

This is the reality. Random acts of kindness from health care providers, themselves working around the system. Off book barter for herbs and medicine and massage. Deferring doctor visits whenever common sense and time off will do. Grateful for an uncomfortable day on the couch and a can of soup. Grateful to have a job where time off is even an option, despite the lost wages.

Other times I've just had to downplay the limp, poker face the pain spike, offer to clean the bathroom for a break from heavy lifting, wish that I liked peanuts better since it's all they have at the gas station

across the street. Buy peanuts on my break anyhow because I'm light headed and the day is only half done. Walk home because I bought the peanuts with my bus money. Collapse and wish someone would rub my feet, knees, back, neck, head.

How has a nation literally built on bodies managed to convince us that the care of bodies is not their problem, but rather their profit? Why do we have to buy back our health? Who decided parceling out our sex and organs and extremities and bones and senses and teeth and skin and minds was a smart choice?

Not the midwives. Not the witches or the crones or the medicine men. Not the curanderas or the traditional healers or that compassionate grandmother with a just in case garden of pennyroyal and feverfew and mugwort.

We are stretching out tired hands into the past, looking for answers, spreading them like passkeys: Bone broth. Fermentation. Elderberry. Echinacea. Learning the spellings, the leaf patterns, the chemistry, the properties. Learning how to borrow and share, not plunder and steal. Learning our own anatomy, chasing down a charlie horse in the arch of the tired foot, the curve of the aching calf. Startled out of sleep and trying to run away from your own body. Trying to remember if it's bananas or tomatoes you're supposed to eat, wondering if you can afford them.

Rubbing and rubbing at the knot of muscle that is stress grappling with rage. At your temples where the migraine lurks. At the small of back, the bend of neck, the bone deep flex of forearm or fingers. The snap, the crackle, the twinge. The sigh and the wince.

Our overworked bodies. Our underinsured bodies. Our plate carrying, pot scrubbing, paint rolling, child tending, stuff lifting, floor cleaning, caretaking, customer serving bodies. Our sex working bodies. Our veteran bodies. Our sorrowful way down low bodies. Our poisoned bodies. Our misfit bodies. Our bodies that move differently.

The system would have us buy and hoard, alone in the struggle for the rest of our lives. What I want to know is how we can help each other survive.

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