

↳ UPON
RECEIPT
OF CARE

BRITTANY
UTTING

Architecture¹² as² Measure⁷
Ölçü⁴ Olarak⁶ Mimarlık⁸

Mrs. K___ has been taken to the emergency room of a renowned hospital on Manhattan's Upper East Side. The doctors "work her up." More than \$200 worth of blood tests are ordered ("cancer tm lab," "lab serology out"), \$232 worth of X-rays taken, \$97.50 worth of drugs administered. I never saw Mrs. K___, she wasn't in my hospital, I don't know her medical history. But I am a doctor, and can reconstruct from her hospital bill what is going on, more or less. She is sick, very sick.

Mrs. K___ has been moved to the Intensive Care Unit ("room ICU"). It costs \$500 a day to stay in the ICU, base rate. California has the highest average ICU rates in the country: \$632 a day. In Mississippi, the average is \$265. ICUs were developed in the 1960s. They provide technological life-support systems and allow for extraordinary patient monitoring. An inhalation blood-gas monitor ("inhal blood gas mont") is being used to keep a close check on the amount of oxygen in her blood. Without the attention she is receiving in the ICU, Mrs. K___ might already be dead.

Mrs. K___ has been running a high fever. The doctors have sent cultures of her blood, urine, and sputum to the lab to find out why. She is put on gentamicin ("lab gentamicin troug"), a powerful antibiotic. Such strong drugs can have toxic side effects. Gentamicin kills bacteria, but can also cause kidney failure.

It is Mrs. K___'s fifth day at the hospital, and she is slipping closer to death: her lungs begin to fail. She is put on a respirator ("inhal respirator"), which costs \$119 a day to rent and requires a special technician to operate. A hospital can buy the machine for about \$15,000.

DATE	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL
09/23	EMER RM DRUG	150.00		150.00
09/23	EMER RM LAB	500.00		500.00
09/23	LAB X-RAY CHEST	150.00		150.00
09/23	EMER RM DRUG	100.00		100.00
09/23	X-RAY CHEST RIN	150.00		150.00
09/23	X-RAY CHEST RIN	150.00		150.00
09/23	EMER RM PHARMACY	200.00		200.00
09/23	ROOM ICU	500.00		500.00
09/24	LAB AUTO BLOOD CT	1402101	17.00	24037.70
09/24	LAB ACT PAR THROM	1404001	27.00	729.00
09/24	LAB BLOOD CULT	1405002	27.00	729.00
09/24	LAB CHEM-8	1401111	31.00	930.00
09/24	LAB CHEM-26	1401104	23.00	646.00
09/24	LAB RIN CULT	1405003	37.00	1033.00
09/24	LAB RIN CULT SM	1405001	16.00	448.00
09/24	LAB DIFF	1402099	15.00	405.00
09/24	LAB DIFF	1402099	15.00	405.00
09/24	LAB FUNGUS	1405008	31.00	866.00
09/24	LAB TRC CULT	1405014	42.00	1164.00
09/24	LAB AUTO BLOOD CT	1402101	17.00	459.00
09/24	X-RAY CHEST-BED	1501228	74.00	2101.32
09/24	PHARMACY	2601000	8.00	208.00
09/24	SPECIMEN WUGES TRAP	2709035	4.00	109.60
09/24	INHAL BLOOD GAS MONT	2101034	354.00	1180.74
09/25	LAB SALICYLATE	1401050	40.00	1600.00
09/25	LAB CHEM-26	1401104	23.00	529.00
09/25	LAB CHEM-8	1401111	31.00	961.00
09/25	LAB BACTERIA SP	1405011	38.00	1422.00
09/25	LAB AUTO BLOOD CT	1402101	17.00	459.00
09/25	LAB ACT PAR THROM	1404001	27.00	729.00
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tissue cultures, x-rays, equipment rentals, and dosages, the repetition of the room charge produces “the low affect that accompanies the perception of minor differences against a backdrop of the generic”.² The dull affect of the list—a deadpan aesthetic that reflects Mrs. K__’s “slow and costly death” in the words of Dr. Hellerstein—embodies the spatial and temporal alienation of modern healthcare, abstracting the actual lived experience of illness, loss, and grief. While architectures of health often reproduce this abstraction, characterized by hushed waiting rooms, generic labyrinths of overly conditioned corridors, and curtained grids of beds bristling with tubes and equipment, what other forms of spatial practice can re-inscribe care into this mystifying flow of bodies, medicine, and capital? Rather than obscuring the invisible infrastructure of costs, assessments, and risks in medicine, how can architecture overcome the dull dread of hospital bills, invoices, administrative overhead, and insurance claims to produce a new interface with our spaces for care?

2 Sianne Ngai, “Our Aesthetic Categories,” *PLMA, Special Topic: Literary Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* 125, no. 4 (October 2010), 950.

About the author

Brittany Utting is Assistant Professor of Architecture at Rice University and co-founder of HOME-OFFICE. Her research centers around the spatial, social, and ecological arrangements of collective life. She previously taught at the University of Michigan as the 2017-2018 Willard A. Oberdick Fellow. Brittany received her Master of Architecture from Yale University and a B.S. in Architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology. She practiced at Thomas Phifer and Partners as project designer for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. She also has editorial experience at Log, Journal for Architecture and served on the board of CARTHA Magazine.