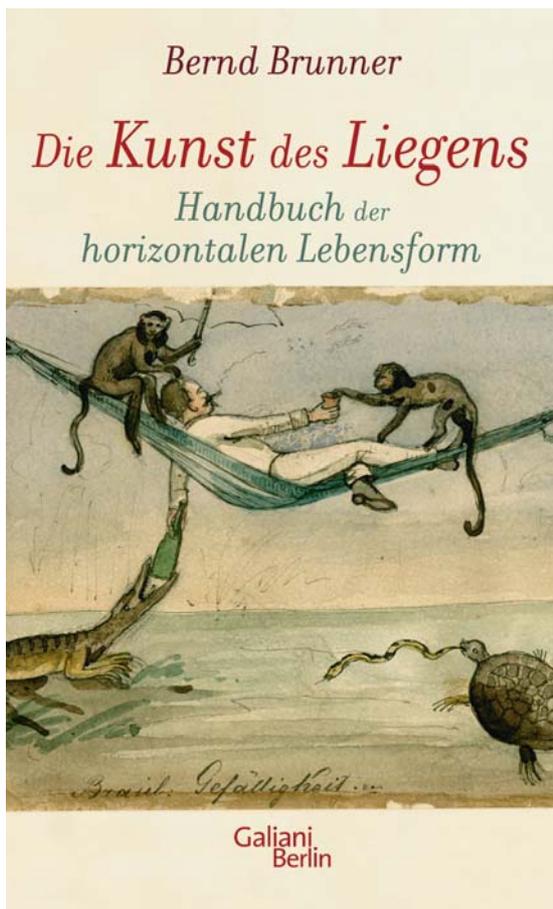


## Sample Translation

# The Art of Lying Down: A Guide to Horizontal Living by Bernd Brunner

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Verlag Galiani Berlin © 2012, Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch GmbH & Co. KG, Köln  
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Publication: September 2012 (Hardcover)  
176 pages

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Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch GmbH & Co. KG

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“A thing that can’t be done in bed isn’t worth doing at all.” – Groucho Marx

(pp. 1-24)

## Are you lying down?

If you’re lying down right now, there’s no need to defend your position: we all do it regularly, and often enjoy it. We lie down to relax, assuming the posture that offers the body the least resistance and demands the least energy. And we perform all sorts of activities this way: we sleep and dream, make love, contemplate, give ourselves over to wistful moods, daydream, and suffer. But there’s one thing we rarely do in this state: move around. When we stretch out horizontally, we come the closest we can to standing still.

In a society tuned to measurable performance, where quickly making and acting on decisions is what matters and people prove their mettle by sitting for long hours at their desks and in front of their computers, reclining often goes unappreciated. Even worse: it is seen as proof of indolence or a sign of powerlessness in the face of a fast-changing world. You can’t keep up when you’re lying down. Those who indulge anyway are considered weak or criticized for not putting their time to better use. Yet lying down can feel like taking a walk in the thick fog – we often emerge with clearer thoughts than before. As a calculated move to escape the ever-present pressure to be fast and efficient, conscious reclining costs nothing and is nevertheless extremely valuable.

Lying down is the horizontal counterpart to the dreamy rambling of a melancholy flaneur, who walks without pursuing any goal. Someone in repose may meander through town and countryside, too, but generally only in his or her imagination. These fanciful strolls demand a higher level of creativity, since no real face and places appear to stimulate the resting wanderer’s thoughts.

When we lie on our backs and direct our gaze upward to the ceiling or the sky, we lose

our physical grasp of things and our thoughts can soar. Our entire mental makeup changes with this shift of position. We can't react in the same way we did while standing upright a minute ago. And questions that preoccupied us appear in a different light when viewed horizontally. Voices and even the ringing of the telephone no longer reach us with the same intensity. In no other position can certainties suddenly seem less certain. When we lie down – perhaps because we feel overwhelmed – a burden falls from our shoulders.

Thinking about what it means to recline not only involves questions of physiology, psychology, and creativity, but the economy of time and pace of our lives – a system the American psychologist Robert Levine once tellingly described as “a tangled arrangement of cadences, of perpetually changing rhythms and sequences, stresses and calms, cycles and spikes.” If and when lying down is acceptable depends on the attitudes about time in which we operate and that govern our behavioral cycles like a silent language. In an age and culture like our own, which has so fully internalized a compulsion for constant movement and bred an internal agitation that rules every aspect of our lives, there is little we can do but turn the screws of time and adapt to its demanding rhythm. In a country that ticks differently and perhaps more slowly than our own, where activities emerge from what's happening at the moment rather than being planned, we can get a sense of what it means to live within time that follows different laws. In other societies, a period in which, at first glance, nothing really happens may not be seen as a “waste of time,” – indeed, this concept may not even exist – but rather as something pleasant and essential to life. Another reason to give the horizontal world a closer look.

## The grammar of horizontal orientation

Our bodies are designed for performance well beyond the limited movements we demand of them today. We spend far more time sitting and move much less than our ancestors just a few generations earlier. Thanks to our genetic makeup and physical disposition, we are born to vary the way we move, from walking to lying down, standing, sitting, and more. Reclining horizontally is just one of these many possibilities, but the urge to give in to gravity is a strong one. Gravity pulls us toward the earth, and we are constantly negotiating its demands. Although we aren't consciously aware of this effort – we are so accustomed to it that we do it automatically – a great deal of our energy is dedicated to our struggle against this elemental physical force.

Lying down and walking or running are counterparts, since from a certain perspective one determines the other. Only someone who has walked, hiked, or run to the point of exhaustion can fully appreciate the infinite sense of relaxation that lying down can bring. Others never fully experience this sensation. But reclining can also have a different purpose: it offers a way to retreat when our bodies and situations become too heavy to bear. Lying down is like powering down to zero.

We orient ourselves in two directions from the earth's surface: vertical and horizontal.

When we walk, we are connected to the earth solely through the horizontally positioned soles of our feet, but when we lie down this contact takes place throughout our body.

The horizon – the distant line separating heaven and earth – offers a promise of something beyond what we know but also represents a limit. It is a fleeting construct that retreats into the distance whenever we try to approach it; a goal that can never be reached.

Lying down is possible in many locations. Yet while a cot or a bed are not essential, reclining does require a stable surface. If we can't lie comfortably and are worried about

our safety – perhaps because we’re in danger of falling or rolling away – we won’t be able to relax. For this reason, the preparations we make for lying down shape our experience of this (in)activity; they equip us for the horizontal experience. In the end, a person’s chosen method of reclining is a response to a particular resting place. The more comfortable we make ourselves – and the better whatever is below us supports our weight – the greater the renewal we feel.

Defining what it means to lie down is not as easy as it might seem. One proposal: someone is lying when most of his or her body is in a horizontal position or clearly tending in that direction, shifting the body’s weight to the underlying surface. It is possible to lie on our backs (“supine”), on our sides, or on our stomachs (“prone”). We can lie next to, on top of, or – at least for a short time – under another person. Lying down can also take the form of leaning back the torso horizontally and putting the legs up higher. Le Corbusier’s chaise longue, in which the upper body rests at a 45-degree angle, is designed for this sort of reclining.

Unlike sitting in a chair, which requires a certain amount of physical control, lying down requires no effort at all. It is therefore perhaps the most archaic of all positions and reminds us of earlier states of existence. But standing up, especially if there is no pressing need to do so, involves overcoming resistance. Lying down also entails a certain risk, because it’s easy to fall asleep and drift off into unconsciousness.

A great deal can happen when we are lying down. This position can span the full spectrum of the human condition, from complete passivity to the most passionate of activities. Furthermore, human life begins and ends horizontally. According to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, the “three great acts of life” that a writer must master are “birth, coitus, and death” – all of which generally involve lying down.

## Drawn to the center of the earth

We tend to consider someone lying down as passive, paralyzed, or at the power of others. But of course, such impressions often bear little relation to the reclining individual's motivations. Perhaps he wants to let go, rest, and relax; perhaps she wants to gather her energies for her next move. For someone lying in wait, lying down can form part of a clever strategy. It can also be an act of rebellion, as when large numbers of people come together as a flash mob and lie down to block passers-by or traffic as a form of protest. Of course, reclining is also the preferred posture of the lazy. As the German writer Hans W. Fischer once wrote, "Yet utter laziness seeks after nothing: no joy, not even complacency. It does not occur to laziness to make the slightest preparation to enjoy itself. Instead, it simply lets itself collapse and – as long as a wall does not happen to be in the way – follows the laws of mechanics to end up in an approximately horizontal position. Its preferred spot is the sofa, because it is so convenient; a dim remnant of consciousness warns it away from the naked floor, which would hurt to fall on, and keeps it from the bed, which harbors associations with the complicated act of getting undressed. But laziness does not seek out the sofa to sleep or enjoy a luxurious stretch; no, it simply needs a landing place for the weight of a body that feels drawn toward the center of the earth."

Being tired often seems like the only acceptable reason to lie down. Why is this pleasurable position so frowned upon? All too frequently, we have internalized the sense that we have to be moving at every moment – that anything less reveals a lack of discipline, strength, and ambition. In a world that demands we stay on the go and "make the most of our time," and where flipping out the office lights late in the evening is a source of pride, time spent lying down automatically seems to be time wasted. In our culture, lingering in the horizontal is only acceptable for the shortest possible period required to power the next bout of activity.

## Chesterton and the secret of Michelangelo

Is there such a thing as a philosophy of lying down? Many people have expressed their disapproval of lying late in bed, dismissing such behavior as nothing but senseless laziness, while others have simply practiced the rite of leisure without feeling the need to explain themselves. But has anyone actually thought through the act of lying around and had something positive to say about it? One man in particular did just that: the prolific English social critic Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936). His essay “On Lying in Bed” begins with a thought experiment: he imagines how nice it would be to have colored pencils long enough that he could draw on the ceiling while doing precisely what the title indicates. After all, only the ceiling offers a surface large enough for his artwork – all the walls are completely covered with wallpaper. His thoughts then turn to Rome: “I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realized how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.”

He opposes the general disdain for lying down, which he considers “unhealthy” and “hypocritical,” with the freedom and flexibility of each individual to decide for himself when to get out of bed as he sees fit, or to enjoy his lunch “sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in the top of a tree.” Although Chesterton recommends that these bouts of leisure (which, in his description, do not involve sleeping) should be “very occasional,” he insists that it is completely unnecessary to justify such behavior, except in cases of serious illness. “If a healthy man lies in bed,” he explains, “let him do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man.” However, he continues, “If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may get up a hypochondriac.”

## Shaking up the act of lying down

Reclining can be a more active or passive activity depending on the mood of the person doing it. And the way we work influences how we spend the rest of our time: those of us who spend most of our working hours seated – for example, in front of the computer screen – are likely to first want sports and movement in their free time. Only then can they truly enjoy the relaxation that lying down provides. On the other hand, people who work with their muscles, perhaps even to the point of exhaustion, generally want to spend their leisure time simply relaxing. In this situation, lying down takes on a completely different character.

How do the significant changes taking place in the world of work today affect the relationship of work and free time – both in terms of the various stages of lounging and lying around we practice and the time we spend sleeping? Does a greater degree of flexibility allow more doing nothing, more playful ease – more active laziness, if you like – in the form of a kind of lying down that adds up to more than regeneration alone? In a time when progress occasionally veers off track and misses its mark by a wide margin, lying down is a preliminary exercise for thinking things through. In any case, it has the pleasant quality of being removed from the compulsive forward-and-backward logic of progress and decline.

Have we forgotten how to lie down, just as we forget how to cook when we eat nothing but ready-made meals for too long? Perhaps. Just as eating is more than a way to fuel further work and physical processes, lying down has dimensions beyond those that prepare us to sit at our desks again. Although it's true that reclining rarely produces any directly visible or economically exploitable outcome, resting is certainly not its sole purpose either – just as free time and the options it offers provide more than simply an occasion for activity.

Evidence exists that our society's attitudes about lying down are currently undergoing a

transformation. In recent years, French commentators have noted the rise of the *génération vautreée*, the lolling generation that consistently refuses to sit upright. Instead of simply sitting down, its members collapse on the sofa or bed and get comfortable in this position – without wasting a thought on what those around them might think. An enviable attitude. It's possible to read this laxness as a revolt against sitting still and standing up straight, and a silent protest against parents who may be beholden to more authoritarian guidelines. But physicians are likely unperturbed by this development: they are aware that, in physiological terms, a normal sitting position in a chair is actually unsuitable for most people. Reclining at a 127-degree angle, in turn, seems to do a good job of eliminating the tension that builds up in the spine when we sit.

Adherents of “the art of slow living” or *l'arte del vivere con lentezza* offer further signs that attitudes are changing. For this new movement toward deceleration and reflection, the point is not to achieve a goal in the shortest time and with the least effort, but rather to have an enjoyable experience of the process itself, in keeping with the saying “The journey is its own reward.” Like the slow food initiative, this movement has its roots in Italy.

Human creativity has brought forth a range of devices and furnishings to facilitate lying down. Of course, the most prominent examples are the lounge chair and the bed. Regular escapes into the unconscious state, which we usually attempt in bed, are essential to our well-being. But having the leisure to simply lie on a lounge chair is truly a fine thing: in short, a luxury. As a piece of furniture, the lounge chair concentrates comfort to the essence of relaxation required for the contemplative life – for situations in which traveling the distance to bed would be far too much effort.

## Of common and uncommon ways to lie down

Between the eternity that precedes the moment of birth and follows that of death, beds and lounges offer opportunities for a respite – for the phases of rest, sleep and the host of other activities that we habitually or occasionally carry out while lying down. In fact, the time we spend horizontally adds up to at least two-thirds of our lives, although the exact figure can differ greatly from person to person. After all, a reclining position is a given for some kinds of work or sports – repairs carried out in mine shafts, for example, or the luge – although neither activity is particularly relaxing. The “horizontal profession,” as it is known in some languages, also comes to mind. For example, the term “grandes horizontales” referred to the top-tier courtesans of 19th-century Paris, who did business under particularly exotic or elegant names.

Lying down is also important in the ritualized world of the *hamam*, or Turkish bath. There, after stretching and undergoing a massage and thorough scrubbing, the visitor enjoys a lengthy rest on a warm stone slab. This relaxation period is no mere luxury, because the hamam treatment – which removes the upper layer of the skin and loosens the muscles – can be draining or even painful. In some Moslem countries, this type of bath continues to be a social institution where people relax and recharge.

Finding oneself in a horizontal position with nothing solid underneath sounds like a nightmare, and yet it happens all the time. Swimmers lie on or just below waterline because the buoyancy of the water counteracts their mass – an effect that is even stronger in water with a high salt content. But it remains to be seen whether the horizontal shower recently touted by a Swiss manufacturer will catch on. Although bathers can use the shower on their stomachs or backs, the English newspaper *The Guardian* was less than impressed, dismissing the device as “an absurd contraption,” “sheer stupidity,” and “the worst invention ever.” The idea that, in the future, showering could force the entire English nation to “writhe helplessly like beached seals on a platter

of dead skin cells and tepid body fluids” filled the author with dread.

How can we distinguish lying down from other horizontal states? Roland Barthes once described floating as “to live in a space without tying oneself to a place.” Whether we float thanks to the absence of gravity or the presence of intoxication, the sensation itself is always very real. And whether in water or the air, floating requires neither a direction nor a destination. This very lack of purpose underlies the use of floating as a therapeutic treatment: adherents believe suspension in a salt-water bath kept at body temperature brings profound relaxation and even happiness.

Another form of floating may look like lying down to outside observers, but is the result of a far more mysterious process. Under hypnosis, it is possible for people to take on a stiff, horizontal posture. In such a state, the subject appears to lie comfortably like a board across the backs of two chairs. The sight of someone in such an unusual condition raises a host of questions: Why doesn’t the body bend without a solid surface beneath it to hold it up? What does the reclining subject feel? Does he sense a force supporting him, or are his thoughts somewhere else entirely? The situation is reminiscent of astronauts drifting horizontally in space: while it looks like they are reclining, the absence of any resistance to their bodies makes lying down technically impossible. Once again, we encounter the paradox that a horizontal position does not automatically equal lying down.

[...]

(pp. 31-36)

### Lying down correctly

“Furthermore, the resting place should neither be completely horizontal nor excessively sloped,” wrote Isidor Poeche in his 1901 book *Sleep and the Bedroom*, which bears the unwieldy subtitle *A Hygienic-Dietetic Handbook as a Guide to Achieving Natural and Regenerating Sleep*. According to Poeche, a fully horizontal position brings the risk of

stroke, “especially for those with a short neck and a head that sits low, wedged between the shoulders.” The reason for this, he argues, is that “lying completely flat facilitates the flow of blood to the brain, which is already stronger in sleep than during our waking hours.” On the other hand, if the bed is too slanted, “the inconvenience easily arises that the body, which makes no intentional movements during sleep, follows the physical laws of gravity like any other lifeless mass; in other words, it tends to fall toward the center of the earth so that, instead of sleeping on the straw, one can awaken on the naked ground.”

As if unaware that we cannot control our movements during sleep, Poeche also warned, “Neither sleeping on the back nor on the stomach is healthy, but rather damaging.”

Furthermore, he connects sleeping in a supine position with unpleasant dreams. The upshot is that “one should sleep on one’s side, specifically the right.” The ideal posture, in fact, is “somewhat curled, free of any force or pressure, in a position that allows our muscles and limbs to fully relax. A completely straight position produces as much tension as a tightly curled one, and because both variants involve effort, they prevent us from completely achieving the purpose of sleep. The feet, abdomen, and chest must be horizontal, but the head must lie approximately a half-foot higher.”

Actually, none of the typical sleeping positions can be considered unhealthy; even sleeping on our stomachs impedes our breathing only minimally. However, it is true that slightly raising the upper body can help those who suffer from respiratory problems, such as sleep apnea, to breathe more freely. In more severe cases, sufferers must turn to technical devices that support their breathing.

Today, research has provided us with a far more detailed understanding of sleep than Isidor Poeche could boast. Just the study of the movements people make while sleeping constitutes an entire field of research. We now know that changes in position usually occur during phases of more shallow sleep and directly influence how refreshing we

find a bout of slumber to be. If our motor functions are affected during sleep or we lie in the “wrong” position, we can wake up feeling exhausted. In any case, it’s normal to move about while sleeping: a healthy sleeper with full motor abilities changes position up to 100 times per night. These movements follow an individual rhythm – a unique nocturnal choreography, if you will.

No consensus exists among doctors about whether a certain amount of activity during sleep beyond the normal level is good for the muscles, or whether the greatest possible relaxation is better. One factor in favor of relaxation is that this state leads to less tension-related pain.

If sleep researchers are correct, more than half of us sleep primarily on our sides. Older individuals in particular tend to sleep in this position. However, lying on the left side can be uncomfortable for people with heart conditions. As we age, sleeping on our backs increasingly leads to snoring. If a snorer is consistently woken up in flagrante delicto to turn on his or her side, this response can eventually become unconscious. Sleeping on our stomachs requires a high level of flexibility in the neck, which tends to diminish with age. “In a prone position, the head must be turned to the side, leading to problems for those with limited mobility,” says Thomas Laser, a noted German orthopedist. “One wakes up due to neck pain and, as a result, tries to avoid lying on one’s stomach.” Furthermore, eating too much right before bedtime presents issues for prone sleepers because, as Dr. Laser explains, “pressure on the abdominal area can cause heartburn and belching if we sleep facing downward.”

Both when we are asleep and awake, something – a mysterious-seeming impulse – suddenly signals that it’s time to change our position. What triggers this need to move? The most important factor is the sense of pressure that a particular position exerts on certain parts of the body. Gravity and our weight compress the body at the points where it contacts the surface below. If we’re on our backs, we feel the pressure most in our

shoulder blades, pelvis, and heels, while on our sides it's more apparent in the shoulder and elbow joints, the outside of the hip, and the knee. The pressure is most evenly distributed when we sleep on our stomach or back because these positions maximize the area resting on the underlying surface. If part of the body is subjected to significant pressure over a longer period, blood circulates there less freely. The resulting lack of oxygen creates an unpleasant sensation, causing us to change position and correct the imbalance. This biomechanical response is not under our rational control. Without this regular release, the compressed soft tissues would develop serious circulatory problems that could, in severe cases, lead to bedsores. Sleepers are at risk of such consequences if the number of spontaneous movements they make drops to three or fewer per hour.

When sleeping, our bodies also tend to seek a position in which the arm and leg joints are centered, allowing the opposing muscles to relax. It's easier to find this balance when lying on our sides. We can get a better sense of the physiological need to change position by consciously resisting it for a few moments, so that we feel how the part of our body affected "falls asleep."

By letting the feet fall slightly outward and turning the palms of the hands upward, a supine yogi brings the spine into a naturally comfortable position. This relaxation spreads through the entire body, and the shoulder blades drop to the ground. Although yoga practitioners call this position *savasana* – the corpse pose – they rarely give a thought to the name's macabre connotations.

But in most cases, we end up sleeping in whatever position is most comfortable. The postures we assume while sleeping are not under our conscious control, but they aren't entirely random either. If we pay attention to our bodies, we can sense our personal patterns. In addition to pressure points and spatial orientation, a number of other factors play a role in whether we feel comfortable. Sometimes, for example, it's pleasanter if the thighs touch one another, while at other times we avoid this contact and the friction

it produces. Or we pull a blanket over our heads to ward off a draft or the cold, but then sense a need for fresh air.

For some people, the act of lying down brings a highly attuned consciousness of the dimensions of their bodies – or even of their very selves. Hermann Broch vividly describes this process in *The Death of Virgil*: “He rolled on his side, his legs drawn up a little, his head resting on the pillow, the hip pressed into the mattress, the knees disposed one above the other like two beings alien to him and very far off in the distance reposed the ankles and the heels as well. How often, oh, how often in the past had he been intent on the phenomenon of lying down! Yes, it was absolutely shameful that he could not rid himself of this childish habit! He recalled distinctly the very night when he – an eight year old – had become conscious that there was something noteworthy in the mere act of reclining...”

[...]

(pp.42-45)

## Lying down together

We are rarely so alone as we are in our sleep and in our dreams. When two people lie and sleep in the same bed, they are expressing a deep intimacy. Choosing to share a bed is a ritual of coupling that symbolizes togetherness. Nothing is as intimate as “pillow talk” – the conversations we have lying next to one another. A double bed with wide sheets and a single blanket for both partners makes it easier to sleep side by side.

In bed, a couple’s struggles to find the appropriate mix of distance and closeness take practical form. No matter what the outcome, their bodies speak a clear language. In her book *The Secret Language of Sleep*, Evany Thomas identifies no less than 39 possible sleep positions – from the classic Spoon to the Tandem Cyclists to Excalibur, in which the partners are almost inextricably entwined. Other options include the Zipper, in

which the couple lies back to back, with their offset lower bodies touching, and the extreme Bread and Spread, in which one partner lies directly on top of the other (who somehow manages to avoid being crushed or suffocated.)

Despite this variety, hasty conclusions about what a particular position means for the quality or psychological features of the sleepers' relationship are unwarranted. Whether your partner turns his or her back to you when sleeping has more to do with how comfortable this position is than anything else. At the same time, the practice of sleeping together as a couple raises all sorts of interesting questions. How much physical contact – stomach on back, leg on leg – can and should we tolerate? Does the level of shared proximity in bed say anything about the state of a relationship? Does sleeping in separate beds mean that, deep down, a couple have given up on their relationship – is it a signal of that the end has already begun? There are no simple answers.

Some lucky people will never have to worry about such thoughts keeping them awake. For them, sharing a bed becomes a habit they never question. For others, sleeping in the same bed is more problematic due to snoring (which can reach 100 decibels, approaching the sound of an engine starting), sleeptalking, rhythmic flailing of the limbs, or restless leg syndrome. These problems are triggered by inner compulsions the sleeper cannot control. Other couples have different biorhythms and go to bed hours apart. In such cases, a wider bed or separate blankets can sometimes help. Some couples also decide to stop sharing the same bed as they get older so they don't disturb one another's sleep.

Gerhard Klösch, an Austrian sleep researcher, has notoriously claimed that women sleep worse with a man at their side because they feel responsible for him, and that men sleep better next to a woman for the very same reason. Yet there may be some truth to this thesis: it's not uncommon for heart attack sufferers to get help more quickly because

their partner noticed their distress in bed.

The question of whether it's better to sleep alone or together can only be answered on a case-by-case basis. Many people can't image doing without this physical closeness. But even when spending the night in the same bed leads to problems, a willingness to compromise can allow couples to still enjoy falling asleep next to each other. For example, one partner can switch to a separate bed or room during the course of the night. Zip-and-link beds are also an option. These single beds can be flexibly joined with a zipper to create a larger bed when the couple craves intimacy and separated again when they prefer to have some space. And for some couples, the solution is simply to sleep in the same bed but face in opposite directions. In the early 1920s, architect Otto Bartning designed a bedroom that sound like the setup to a joke: the beds were separated by wall of clear glass that allowed the happy couple to sleep side by side without suffering any inconvenience as a result.

It was long taken for granted that couples would sleep in the same bed, and it rarely occurred to anyone to question the practice. For many people, it has only become an issue in the last few decades. Now, we have a range of options to try as we grapple with the right amount of nearness and distance to one another. In some cases, sleeping apart – or sleeping side by side – may be what makes or breaks a relationship.