

feel
me

how to dwell in daily sensation

a manual for finding feeling

Kyla Kegler
2018

THANK YOU

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f e e l m e

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Artist's note

This book is about the potential of sensation as an agent of embodied empathy and a radical act of resisting apathy. I define embodied empathy here to be the combined feeling of emotion and sensation, both physiologically experienced in the present.

I frame the research for this work between the fields of art and therapy. As an artist I communicate with a visual, experiential language of sensory expressions, inevitably structuring my explorations around and within the intellectual infrastructure of art history and theory. As a therapeutic bodyworker, the language I use deals with the nuanced, essential, base experiences of the body. These two paradigms of language share a topical concern and reverence for feeling, and for uncovering the wealth of dynamic experience available in the most fundamental aspects of existence and engagement.

This work represents my endeavor to bridge the gap between the language I use as a therapeutic bodyworker and the one I use as an artist. In merging the already-overlapping wisdom of these two fields, we can deepen and diversify our engagement with the internal world of the self.

In my research I often observe the paradox of what I will call the mindfulness industry, which has grown from the commercialization of practices like yoga, meditation, natural medicine and foods, and guided self-therapy. By virtue of its commercialism, this industry has a necessarily exploitative and perverse quality. But at the same time, it popularizes and advocates the idea that individuals and communities have vast resources within them. It frames what it is we should be able to source directly from ourselves, and gives an accessible starting point for the examination of sensation and self.

Through this work, I suggest that as humans we have an itch for genuine presence that will never be wholly satisfied, but also that we can move toward its satisfaction through embodied empathy which connects us radically to the present moment and present state. This drive is truly generative if we reduce dependence on outsourced methods of self-connection marketed by the mindfulness industry, and instead source these longed-for connections from our internal knowledge of physical empathy.

Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*

The notion of affect bears the connotations of bodily intensity and dynamism that energise the forces of sociality. It cannot be thought outside the complexities, reconfigurations and interarticulations of power. The semantic multiplicity of the notion of 'affect' emerges as particularly suggestive here: affect as social passion, as pathos, sympathy and empathy, as political suffering and trauma affected by the other, but also as unconditional and response-able openness to be affected by others— to be shaped by the contact with others. [...]

How does compassion become a way of remaining untouched by others, and thus turn into the sanitised, normative sentimentality of our humanitarian era?

—Patricia Clough, *Towards a New Epistemology: The "Affective Turn"*

The Manual

This manual contains a set of images that suggest methods for dwelling in daily sensations using everyday objects and situations. It is designed to bring awareness to the vast personal microcosm of subtle feelings that we have access to inside our bodies, but that we often don't explore due to the business of practical daily tasks.

The organism of the world and the organism of the human body both experience and accumulate metaphorical noise as they age. As the noise grows louder, more complex and chaotic, the individual notes become less perceptible, and the organism becomes less sensitive to subtle information. This decrease in sensitivity is a necessary coping mechanism for withstanding the cacophony of input.

As the world gets older and the human population expands, more noise is produced and added to the collective sensorium. If we zoom out on this noise, it can sound like a meaningless, anxiety-provoking overstimulation, and sometimes even becomes painful. Experiencing the expansiveness of this collective noise as a blur can result in the shutting down of subtle sense faculties altogether, a condition commonly experienced as apathy, anesthesia, or vacancy.

Zooming in: inward looking; using an introspective macro-lens on one's own inner world, or on the subtle information of a small detail in one's outer world; the ideal mode for dwelling in sensation.

However, if we zoom in on the building-blocks of this noise, then we may hear the individual melodies within it. If we zoom in a little further, we can hear the individual notes comprising these melodies; we zoom in still a little further, then we can begin to not only hear, but also to feel the vibrations of the the frequencies that produce these notes, as physiological currents running through our bodies.

Zooming out: experiencing the big picture, void of subtle details; a mode often used for goal-oriented endeavors.

Zooming out is the common mode with which we navigate this collective noise in order to efficiently complete daily tasks. Zooming out takes us outside of ourselves and into proximity to the ecology around us, to have a big-picture view of our own livelihoods, and contribute to the world. If we are always zoomed in, then we cannot endure the world: we would have no big-picture awareness of the practical aspects of sustaining life. However, we are often so well trained to zoom out, that we may forget how and when to refocus and engage ourselves with the vital, subtle details of our experience.

The following images depict exercises for zooming in on subtle sensations using daily objects and situations. Practice these methods at home on a regular basis. Once you become familiar with the suggested methods, you will begin to understand the mechanics of subtle sensation. Once you are familiar with these sensory mechanics, you can begin to explore your own methods of dwelling in it.

Dwelling: remaining in or sustaining the present for the sake of the present, rather than for a projected or anticipated outcome.

As you uncover your intuitive relationship to your body as an intelligent sense-organ and incorporate zooming in into your daily routine, the range of your organism's sensorium will continue to expand to reach more and more previously obscured frequencies. As you reach these frequencies, you will experience a constitutional increase in embodied empathy and connection to the natural world around you.









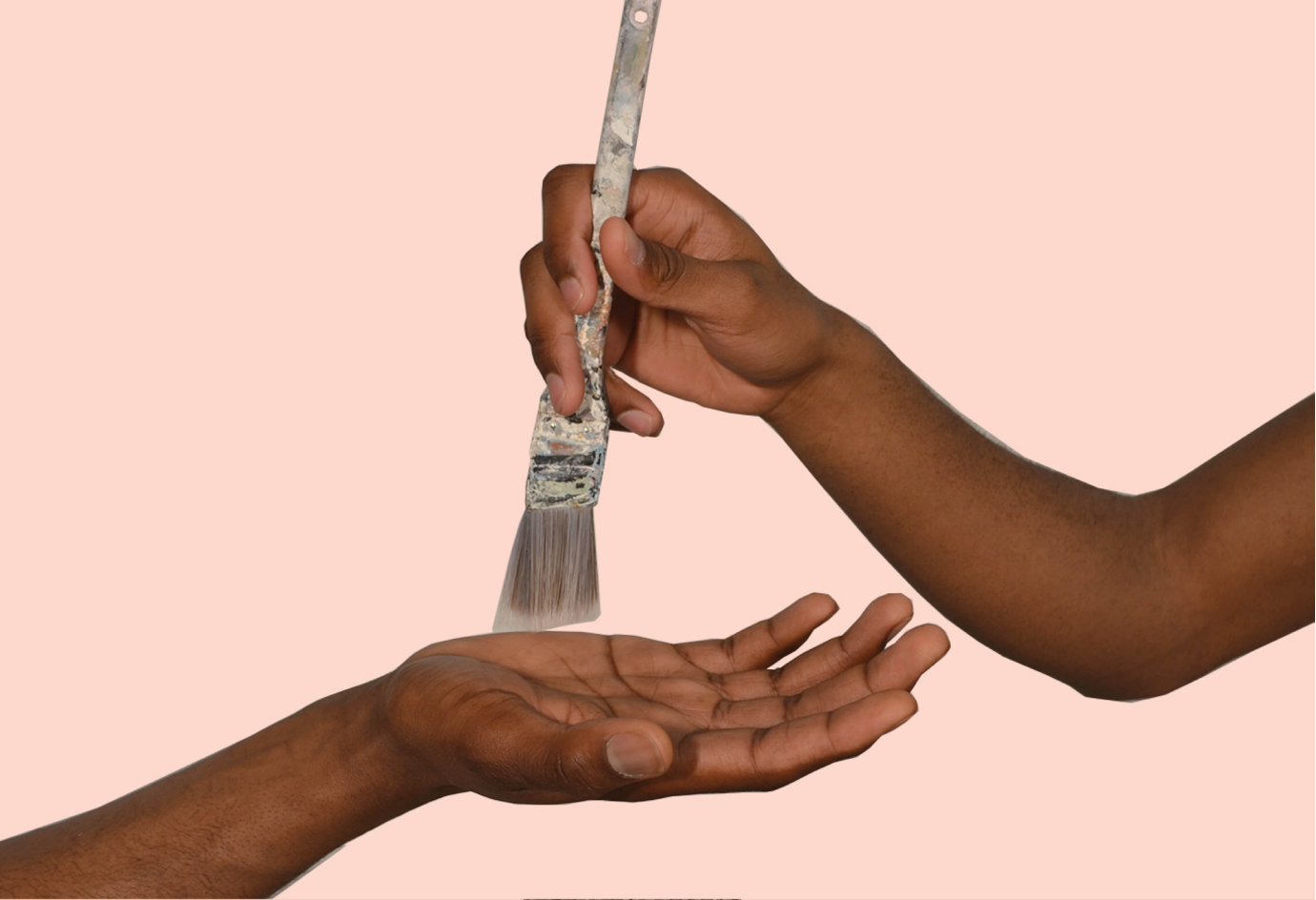


































































I ask you if you feel me because I know you feel me.

—Fred Moten, *The Little Edges*



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