the other side of empathy

JADE E. DAVIS

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Cover art: A spectator looking through binoculars at the
Derby horse races, Epsom, Surrey, June 1923. (Photo by
Topical Press Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

To the women who had names of their own, even if we don't know them today.

Contents

Preface.

I'd like to preface this with . . . I feel you, man.

Because we can never truly know another's feelings or perspective, it is better that we not feel at all. It's better than going down the path of self-actualizing at the cost of temporary self-annihilation coupled with cannibalization that we have come to call "empathy" across all parts of society tasked with cultural reproduction. That is to say, empathy is an illusion at best, or simply—as is said in moments of deep refl ction—bullshit!

Here is the list of things I know to be true (not to be confused with Truth) about empathy:

1. Feelings and emotions are chemical pollution of the brain that cloud the accuracy of experience.
2. Reaching radical empathy is to have successfully dehumanized oneself.
3. Empathy leaves the Other stuck in time and place.
4. You are my Other, and I too am yours; this does not mean we ar e the same .
5. Mediated experiences and the empathy that they *inspire* is an illusion.
6. To be in the shoes of an Other still leaves you with your own feet.
7. Empathy is deployed and used politically as though it were pure transference or communication.

8. Respect, compassion, mutual recognition, and assumptions are better frameworks for understanding.
9. Your irrational feelings are my murder, and you cannot empathize with the dead.
10. The body's empathetic sensations are the body being seduced and overwhelmed by its own feelings.
11. Empathy = d e h u m a n i z a tio n and a lie na ti on (fi st of the Other and then of the Self).

The disenfranchised, the marginalized, and the at-risk are expected to perform their pain and discomfort for those who know only comfort. Those who know only comfort do not realize they sit in a position of privilege and power. Rather than trying to step into the discomfort of others, people should learn to confront, interrogate, and be aware of their own discomfort, preferably with a smile, because empathy is empty.

Empathy Manifesto #3: Kill the body. Leave it behind.
It is forever lost in time.

Empathy is your imagined present and the future made up of the past. Feelings displaced corporeally and temporally temporarily reduce the ones living to anchors for their feelings about a fabricated past we call "History." Th s is domination by agents of oppression and interpreted by those attempting to absolve themselves of guilt. Their word for freedom to do as they please is empathy , the evil eraser. The dead and silent of us create an archive for them. An archive of those who can't tell them, "You are out of line." And of those who are not invited to speak when all they want to say is: "I am human. I am human. I am human!"

A call met with calls for silence, a cultural shushing, so others can make sure the time we are lost to is a time of suffering.

For the anger that can't be contained
and the feelings that are often left   ut of words.
For the dead who cannot speak now and whose words were lost in the past,
this is a call to feminism, the decolonial, Blackness, and invisibility.
Th s is a call to a political practice in a time of crisis that is now generations old.
Th s is a rejection of the postcolonial.

There is a call to decolonize *your* version of the past.

st op tr ying t o c ompr ess time so you can ge t l os t in your
feelings .

Acknowledgments.

By way of an introduction.

If good emotions are cultivated, and are worked on and towards, then they remain defined against uncultivated or unruly emotions, which frustrate the formation of the competent self. Those who are "other" to me or us, or those that threaten to make us other, remain the source of bad feeling in this model of emotional intelligence.
—Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*

Empathy is an expression of the colonization
of psychic space.

Th s book is a critique of empathy culture, not the ideals behind empathy. By empathy culture, I mean the current cultural narrative in which a lack of empathy is used for all forms of disavowal: the goodness or worthiness of people, humanness of the self and others, or any degree of compassion and caring. I mean the culture where empathy is lobbied, uncritically, as a solution to techno-determinism, medical malpractice, racism, in-equality, war, and all other ills plaguing humanity. I mean the culture of workshops, self-help books, ted talks, and lesson plans to make everyone more empathetic without doing the work of modeling goodness, human-ness, compassion, or caring. Empathy is a quick fix for a broken culture, and like most quick fi es, it is prone to distortion, peeling away, not quite fitting, or failing altogether. Empathy is a binary. You either have it, or you

don't. And if you aren't empathetic, you are a lost cause. The altruistic impulse, the ability to function in society, to make a living, work in a team, lead people, follow people, not kill, and every other matter of being today is dependent on empathy.

Change and action stop being necessary in empathy culture because the feeling and sense of understanding are action enough. In empathy culture, understanding and care for the Other requires personal empathy, a process by which, in theory, one completely gives the self to the idea of the Other as though that idea were the actual other person. In this process, the empathizer temporarily must lose the self in order to care for the Other. There is no space for structural change, discussions of biases, or imagining reality otherwise as a collective. Everything is done at the level of the individual and is based on individual emotional connection, maturity, and perspectives. That is to say, empathy culture deploys empathy as a cure for structural issues without critically engaging its limits or allowing for other means of affective engagement. It asks, at an individual level, that we use a technique of colonization and allow the Other to have a seat in our psychic space so we can, in turn, use the perceived fi sthand knowledge that we gain psychically to create a narrative.

My argument on the necessity of forfeiting empathy on the road to decolonization is informed primarily by the monumental thinking of political philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. In line with Fanon's work, the work of culture and the dominant gaze cannot be separated. Before I discuss the empathetic gaze, though, I would like to discuss "empathy." When these narratives are fed collectively through ideological structures, the limits of individual culture are shifted back to the collective understanding of the dominant culture.

Empathy is a relatively new concept. It entered the English lexicon in 1909 as a translation by the British psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener from the German word *Einfühlung*, itself an invented term with origins in German phenomenology and German aesthetics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Einfühlung* is often translated as "in feeling" or "feeling into." From there, the concept can be traced through various philosophers and aestheticians until it is adopted as a foundational concept in modern social science.[1] The more modern use of the concept of empathy can be traced to philosopher David Hume who had the insight that "the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they refl ct each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible

degrees."2 He was, of course, speaking of sympathy, understood by Hume as the "communication of sentiments from one thinking being to another."3 I do not think it is a coincidence that this appeared in a section titled "Of Our Esteem for the Rich and Powerful."4 In empathy culture, sympathy has been replaced by and is still riddled with power dynamics based on the cultural esteem given to the rich and powerful.

For the purposes of this project, the empathy being discussed is the empathy that reemerged of empathy in the 1960s, when it becomes tightly bound with ideas of altruism and colonialism.5 Interestingly, defin tions and discussions of empathy in the 1960s often separated feelings from the mindset of an Other, as highlighted in "Development of an Empathy Scale" by Robert Hogan: "The consensus of dictionaries is that empathy means the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feelings."6 Empathy culture lost this part; or rather, it has conflated what "I" feel with the feelings of another. Objectifi ation is central to the concept of empathy and linked to its roots in aesthetic theory. Over time, as the objects of empathy became people, the focus shifted to emotions and feelings.

Recent defin tions of empathy have refl cted this shift by acknowledging that the roots of the word involve taking on mental states; but the current meaning ends up being situated in the philosophy of emotions. The philosopher I fi d myself turning to when I need a defin tion is the British philosopher of aesthetics and ethics Derek Matravers, the author of such books as *Art and Emotion* (1998) and *Empathy* (2017):

> Empathy at least involves this: imagining oneself (whether consciously or unconsciously) into another's circumstances and replicating their mental states. For the epistemologists the relevant mental states are cognitive attitudes, and the result is grasping what other people are thinking. For the philosophers of emotion, the moral philosophers, and quite possibly the folk, the relevant mental states are feelings and the result is that one feels what the other person is feeling.7

Going from mirroring another's mental state to feeling what a person is feeling is a major shift. Regardless of the realness of empathy, the shift to centering the defin tion on feelings creates the potential for irrationality to become central to empathy. In my experience, the cultural understanding and use of empathy tends to posit that people are capable of both the epistemological and cognitive aspects of empathy. One can "feel what the other person is feeling"—with a bit of training and practice.

In the essay "These Thi gs Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," social psychologist C. Daniel Baston states that empathy is an answer to two questions: "How can one know what another person is thinking and feeling?," and "What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another?"8 Baston's work is important as it eloquently states the risk, or pity, inherent in a feelings-forward version of empathy:

> There is considerable evidence that feeling distress at witnessing another person in distress (concept 7) can produce motivation to help that person. Th s motivation does not, however, appear to be directed toward the ultimate goal of relieving the other's distress (i.e., altruistic motivation); the motivation appears to be directed toward the ultimate goal of relieving one's own distress (i.e., egoistic motivation; Batson, 1991). As a result, this distress may not lead one to respond with sensitivity to the suffering of another, especially if there is an opportunity to relieve one's own distress without having to relieve the other's distress.9

With sympathy, action is the acknowledgment of the Other's suffering, even if the sympathizer is unable to relate to the event that led to the suffering. In contrast, to tend to the self, not before, but above, the Other is related to what counts as action in empathy culture.

The resurgence of empathy and its move into popular culture coincides with the post–World War II world-building of the 1950s and the global social transformation of the 1960s. Th s period is defi ed by global civil rights movements, decolonization, the atomic age, the threat of nuclear war, and Western wars in faraway third world countries.10 The rise of empathy also coincides with an emergent high-defin tion technology—television—entering homes. All these dynamics created a new sense of proximity across people and places as the world remade itself and people tried to understand each other. The culmination of this can be seen in two studies of humans of the same name through different media. The fi st was the Museum of Modern Art's 1955 photographic-essay exhibition, "The Family of Man," organized by Edward Steichen. The photo-essay was designed to show universal aspects of the human experience and toured the world for eight years. The exhibition is bookended by John Percival's 1969 seven-episode bbc mini-series of the same name and concept.11

The exhibition highlights how distressing experiencing the Other through media can be. By week eleven, a decision was made to remove the photograph of the aftermath of a lynching in Mississippi. Th s photograph was not included in the exhibition book either. The need to censor material

designed to evoke the experience of the Other because it distressed the viewers is an early illustration of some of empathy culture's limits. Today, in the age of reaction videos and gamifi d experiences, creating distress is often the point. Distress highlights an implicit power differential between the body creating the empathy-enriched experience, the empathizer, and the individual or group who is the subject of the empathizer's gaze. By turning the subject into an object, the subject can be reshaped, discarded, or dismantled. The empathizer can decide an experience is too much and avoid the reality presented to them by walking away. The body/person who created the experience (which is often different from the body/person who had the real-world experience) determines whether the potential encounter with objectifi d people is "too much." If the discomfort is too much, the experience can be removed altogether.

Empathy culture rewards experiences for producing strong feelings or emotional reactions, the more traumatic or negative the better, to the point of exhaustion or apathy. Striving for the fastest path to a reaction often involves taking shortcuts by leaning into implicit biases. More credit is granted to the empathizer willing to cross interpersonal and interracial divides. When social biases (especially race) are involved, feeling empathy for the Other (without obligating oneself to do anything except express one's empathy) is the easiest form of social credit—and the hollowest. In empathy culture, suffering is central to this system of rewards for feeling and managing distress levels. Suffering is an expected and necessary part of the background of existence and meaning-making. It is always a click away, but it is never supposed to be our own.

The click, the ability to see suffering on demand, makes empathy culture possible by centering the empathetic gaze. Caroline Pedwell, in her article "Theorizing 'African' Female Genital Cutting and 'Western' Body Modifi a-tions" states this clearly and highlights the shortcomings of relying on the current forms of empathy popular in Western culture; and in doing so, she provides a meaningful defin tion of the empathetic gaze:

> In aiding the "western self" to see hidden similarities between herself and the "non-western other," this approach to transnational empathy may collapse into a sameness which, in flattening histories of embodied differentiation, simply reifies the essentialist differences identifi d as problematic in the fi st place. Consequently, histories of othering and violence through which particular embodied identities and practices have been (re)constituted are again effac d. At this point we can see how

problematic the erasure of race, cultural difference and nation which I associated with the continuum and analogue approaches above, may be linked to the appropriative construction of the 'western' empathetic gaze.[12]

From this defin tion, I would like to extract some of the ways in which the empathetic gaze creates harm as a part of empathy culture. Th s occurs in tandem with Fanon's idea of epidermalization and a cultural drive to reproduce colonization: the empathetic gaze harms because it defi es appropriate reactions and understandings of the event or person being seen; the empathetic gaze orients toward the past and is ahistorical; the empathetic gaze reduces a person to an object, denying them their full humanity; the empathetic gaze transforms and consumes suffering as an aesthetic experience; the empathetic gaze comes from a position of power and dominance; and finally, the empathetic gaze uses power and dominance to disassociate suffering of the Other by replacing the distress of the Other with the distress of the self. Without heightened suffering, the empathetic gaze cannot exist.

However, the empathetic gaze avoids direct suffering. Instead, the empathetic gaze desires the end of unmediated cultural guilt for the suffering of others. That is to say, it seeks to mediate all guilt. From my perspective, the goal of a good and universal empathy-based cultural encounter is to not go so far as to cause true distress but, rather, to cause a bit of guilt. The desire of the empathetic gaze is to end guilt when the ability for concern is diminished or impossible due to the distance of time, difference, power, and privilege.[13]Empathy is a cultural tool designed to assuage potential unmediated cultural guilt when the oppression of the past collides with the present, or when people imagined as outside of the present become visible.

New hyperrealist, interactive technologies are offered as a prosthesis, designed to secure and ensure empathy, especially in fraught episodes in which empathy may fray. These often look like colonial struggles and fallout.[14]Virtual reality (and its cinematic counterpart, the 360° video) remains the most prominent technology being used in to envoke empathy, though it is not the only one. The medium has had limited advancement into new forms of experience since its resurgence in 2015, with the emergence of high-end consumer headsets alongside di y mobile-based solutions like Google Cardboard. An example of how this works is *The Guardian*'s 6 × 9 project, a virtual reality experience in which a viewer can be placed in a 6 × 9 cell and experience what it's like to be in solitary confi ement for twenty-three hours a day for weeks, months, or years—in a matter of minutes.[15]The experience

is overlaid with six testimonies from disembodied voices of people who were in solitary confi ement.

The viewer, limited to a 360° video experience, is asked to understand solitary confi ement as torturous and inhumane. But when power and the controlled gaze of the experience come into play, the suggestion is that the person should be doing more to end this experience, and that they are somehow individually responsible for doing something.[16] Th s leads to guilt. This guilt has no way of being absolved, as it is tied to systems and structures of power and oppression beyond the individual. Empathy is an attempt to erase both one's own culpability and the existence of the Other by making the suffering of the Other transferable and transactional. Rather than guilt becoming transformative, empathy asks that it be replaced by a secondhand, fi st-person experience of an event that could lead to action, regardless of the authenticity of experience.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Sara Ahmed argues that the empathetic gaze demands the passivity of the Other as a "negation that is already felt as suffering."[17] It is a passivity in which suffering becomes the passion of other people, in as much as it is a doubling down of past suffering. Th ough rendering the body as a vessel to be occupied by a permanent state of suffering and colonizing experience, empathy performatively enacts additional suffering. The empathetic gaze seeks suffering. Empathy is appealing because, in reinforcing the passivity of suffering people, suffering people are left behind and reduced to their circumstances and oppression.

The primary emotions of a person objectifi d by empathy experiences are not experienced by choice: they are a reaction. Reactions, in the power hierarchy of emotional response, are "'lower' as a sign of weakness" so that the controlled, predictable, designed, and reason-based experience by choice emotions of the empathizer remain "elevated."[18] It is imperative to not lose sight of who is rendered passive by history, society, culture, and colonization. The bodies, experiences, pasts, and whole beings of the people left behind are reduced to empty vessels for the elevated emotional state that is touted as the cure for any given social ill and called "empathy." By focusing on the experience of the Other, by going further and claiming to occupy it, the empathizer does not have to confront their culpability in reproducing social injustices, oppression, and marginalization.

Letting go of the empathetic gaze is not asking a person to be neutral. Instead, it is a demand that a person be truthful about the biases they hold and open to experience, voices, and realities of others, even if they are excluded from the experience of the Other. It is the ability to acknowledge

the biases we have in our own analysis, and to understand the experience of others. It is an acknowledgment that even in our own work, we reproduce the thing we are fi hting against. In this book, for instance, when I take a colonial photograph and reproduce it, I reproduce colonization even as I attempt to expand the context of the photograph. When I take in images of the Other, especially when the Other is suffering and distant, my colonial gaze will more quickly attempt to go toward empathy and feeling for and as the Other instead of feeling guilt about my inability to fix things—even if interrogation of that guilt and the other complex emotions that bubble up have the potential to be transformative and turn into meaningful actions of more productive ways of being and engaging with humanity. Empathy has the potential to stop me from questioning for whom the story needs to be told this way versus another, and who is given voice and authority. The academic gaze in the archive is just another empathy manhunt, to borrow from Ross Truscott who, in reading Chamayou, states that empathy "is a technology of hunting" that, with the human at the center as prey, "gives the hunt its 'supreme excitement,' its pleasure: one is not merely hunting an animal, but rather, an animalized human who is not like the hunter."[19]

Seeing the other side of empathy, the side where so many people fi d themselves, requires a radical turn. To radically engage with people and not their stories, whiteness must stop being the frame. Those on the other side must be allowed to be complicated, whole people with agency and choices instead of being limited by systems of oppression or lack of care. Rather than filtering the experience of those culturally deemed "Other" by institutions and structures of power, those "Other" people are the focus. People cannot be stand-ins for structures that limit their being. They are whole, despite the fact of whiteness and white supremacy, colonization, and modernity seeing them as incomplete. Whiteness is neither essential nor permanent. To make it so transforms white feelings into the only valid feelings. Whiteness demands that we care for white guilt rather than taking restorative and decolonial action. It moves through the world as though it is a human zoo and interprets the world through the empathetic gaze.

I am interested in the ways technology, media, archives, and culture come together to make sense of the banality of suffering at scale, often through the reliance on or imposition of empathy as the catch-all affective turn. I am fascinated by how the individual is pulled into various problematic situations or technological projects through the deployment of empathy as a rational goal, as discussed in "Mathematics Black Life" by Katherine

McKittrick: "Breathless, archival numerical evidence puts pressure on our present system of knowledge by affirming the knowable (black objecthood) and disguising the untold (black human being)."[20] If we've lost control of the archives, we must move to control our emotions. We cannot stop the bleed of meaning and humanity, but surely there is a stoppage if we make the emotional point of departure for everyone the suffering of the Other. The body moving socially as an archive of the dark past encounters the same reads through the epidermalization of the archive: "In many ways, the racial economy of the archive begins a story that demands our betrayal of the archive itself."[21]

As I think through empathy in this book, I will repeatedly return to a central idea: that empathy is itself a form of innovative media (a tool) by which the empathizer's body becomes the medium for abstracting and internalizing the experience of the Other. To state this boldly: *Empathy is a medium for suffering, and its message is the retraumatization, as imagined through the white gaze and other power structures, of the persons who are actively suffering, suffered in the past, and their descendants.* Decolonization and time are central frameworks for understanding the "other side of empathy." Letting go of empathy must be central to any decolonial project as we work across differences to imagine and create new worlds. The Other, unfeeling and unreal, as birthed and killed through empathy, is incapable of fostering a critical awareness of the self.

The Other, as experienced through empathy, is defi ed by a tragic past through which everything is filtered. Empathy disregards actual interactions with the Other and disables the possibility for a dialogue. The person who comes into being through empathy stops in time through the same mechanism. The more intense the suffering of a person or group is, the more likely the person or group is to being consumed and arrested. People involved in empathy on both sides are understood as mediums of experience. The closest the two sides come to having a shared experience is a form of citationality, marred by the structures of culture, where the dominant position will hold more authority than the actual experience and people on the other side.

Them.

Empathy is the embodiment of a colonial sentimentality based on missionary thinking. People with more power, put in the position to empathize, point to the people who are more oppressed, with whom they can empathize in

lieu of understanding their own suffering. People with more power empathize with those who are allowed no other story. Occasionally, people with more power come up with plans to help or to speak for these wretched or damned people who have less power, so that the damned wretched may have a bit more of something (but never everything, and never equal, and never power). When helping or speaking for the damned wretched fails, the people in power point to those with less and enforce a collective understanding by those caught between the two groups: "At least we are not as bad off as them. They must really deserve it." It is important to note that the belief in a group "deserving" certain types of suffering is oriented toward the past. Some past action or circumstance of the individual or group, even if the interaction was generations prior, allows for this type of empathy and its subsequent failure when it bumps against distress.

As Fanon has argued, "The structure of the present work is grounded in temporality. Every human problem cries out to be considered on the basis of time, the ideal being that the present always serves to build the future. And this future is not that of the cosmos, but very much the future of my century, my country, and my existence."[22] The statement "these people are backwards" refers not to a spatial location of people, but rather, denotes a temporal orientation, always past, never capable of creating a future. Other words are often used to denote a similar temporality, such as "primitive," "savage," "boorish," "uncivilized," "undeveloped/developing," "unrefi ed," "unsophisticated," "uncultured," and so on. Empathy is an inherently colonial phenomenon as it tries to tie the ontological present to an imagined past through mind or psychic control.

Empathy cannot exist without history.[23] Th s control feels like embodiment, which then defi es and creates the future. It does this by ensuring there is always a group denoted as primitive, uncultured, uncivilized, or boorish. In empathy, the Other is reobjectifi d and voiceless to ensure the Other can be either ignored, saved, or condemned not by themselves but by those who have the liberty of their imagination becoming reality. I understand decolonization to be a project of undoing. Letting go of empathy and facing its other side is a decolonial project. Understanding decolonization as an orientation toward the future complicates empathy, as empathy creates a false engagement with the past. Empathy erases the present and denies those who are not part of the existing power structures, those who are only real through empathy, the ability to be part of the future. Th s is an enforced affective incompleteness for those who exist outside of the dominant power structures.

I do not have an answer to how we might replace empathy other than that an affect suitable to the task of decolonization must start with radical love of the self and the Other. What I do have are thoughts on the temporality bound in colonial ideals of goodness and badness, of missions, and almost humans, where we might imagine what might become if we replace empathy with mutual recognition, action, and perhaps compassion. Without compassion based on a radical transcendent self-love, to let go of empathy does not stop the self-alienation and annihilation so central to colonial thinking and designed to launch people into a psycho-existential crisis that requires the Other so the self can be defi ed and valued.

Us.

In *The Colonization of Psychic Space* Kelly Oliver suggests "the negative affects of the oppressors are 'deposited into the bones' of the oppressed. Affects move between bodies; colonization and oppression operate by depositing the unwanted affects of the dominant group onto those othered by that group in order to sustain its privileged position."24The unwanted suffering and pain of oppression are the domain of empathy. Empathy forces these dynamics into a cyclical configur tion by displacing temporalities and asking people to step into a painful past when that past is not their own. In empathy culture, we look toward the past and see empathy even when empathy did not yet exist.

Often, when I speak with people about empathy, they ask why I do not cite Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* more. Hartman's fi st chapter does a deep dive into the slipperiness of empathy, which will be engaged in later chapters. Though the book's discussion is useful, the example in the book is a predecessor to empathy and not quite empathy. For me, this illustrates the "us" problem. The colonization of empathy and empathy culture is so universal, we have lost the ability to speak of things or understand things in other ways, or even to imagine anything before empathy. Th s allows modern society to believe that today's choices are based on a better and more ethical understanding of the Other because empathy is at our cultural core. What this elides is that certain bodies are allowed to exist only as an empathetic death. The structures of society contain and limit their potential while the imagined endless suffering infects the present as an infestation of the empathetic gaze. The desire to frame things through empathy causes an engagement with the past based on confi mation biases.

And then there is me.

Letting go of the empathetic gaze is not asking a person to be neutral. Instead, it is a demand to be truthful about the biases we harbor and open to the experiences, voices, and realities of Others. It is an acknowledgment that I am excluded from the experience of the Other. It is the ability to acknowledge the biases I have in my own analysis and understanding of the experience of Others. It is acknowledging the reproduction of colonial and other problematic dynamics inherent in doing my own work, even as I fi ht against those dynamics.

In chapter 1, "The other side of human zoos," I attempt to unflatten the shame, guilt, and anger that we inherit, which causes us both to confront people with their own oppression in an effort to understand them and to form affective responses through empathy that limit the narratives we tell. In this chapter, I look at two contemporary critical and historical studies of nineteenth-century exhibitions in the United States and Europe of colonized people and others put on display for the amusement and edifi ation—and, of course, sentiments—of visitors. I am as interested in the role empathy plays as a critical apparatus for twenty-fi st-century scholars looking back to the nineteenth century as well as its role in the nineteenth-century gaze these scholars reconstruct. Photographs of exhibits and, indeed, nineteenth-century photographs are also key to the "human zoo" of twenty-fi st-century publications. I am affected by photographs as I search through digital archives and the winding paths they create to learn more about people whose photographs have the potential to spread digitally and decontextualized.

In chapter 2, "We have names," I look at human zoos and their related remnants through the medium of photography. I recontextualize colonial photographs of a girl named Héiliani from Oubangui Chari, French Congo, who became the cover model of a coffee table photography book called *Eve Noire* years before this random photograph was digitized with additional biographic information. I also expand the narrative of a series of photographs from 1888 of "Hottentots," 25 members from various tribes in South Africa, that included men, women, and children, brought to Paris, France, to be examined by scientists and then put on exhibition at the Jardin d'Acclimatation. With both these groups of photographs, I explore beyond their archives to piece together who people may have been rather than getting caught up in my feelings about their suffering, which has already been reproduced countless times across culture and research. I explore how images are often used to highlight the subject's suffering without questioning the

structures that created this suffering or allowing the subjects to be more. Historical photography is an important medium to explore because it paved the way for the culturally mediated empathy culture of today by showing far away "colonies" and their people to Western audiences mediated by a lens rather than by the words (as in novels or stories) or the hands (as in drawings and paintings) of another.

Finally, in chapter 3, "New media and emerging technology will kill us all, though," I think through the limits of the current technological trends with emerging media and the new ways we encounter other people through the literal and metaphoric lens of technology often marketed as "enhancing empathy." I explore virtual reality, touted as "the empathy machine," and the vr project "Becoming Homeless," which highlights some of the limits of focusing on the fi st-person perspective. I also explore the mit project, "Deep Empathy ai ," which attempts to crowdsource an empathetic response, and other experiments in ai . Finally, I engage the concept of the digital twin to highlight how, with technology, even the self becomes Other through data that is more real and valid, which is the ultimate end of colonization. I look at the rise of empathy as a central cure-all and tie this to the themes of race, colonial exploitation, and dehumanizing empathy.

What the world today highlights, with digital movements and their inherent disjointedness, is something that has always been true. Understanding and knowledge-production will always create something incomplete for the people and objects of study. Reconstruction is an impossibility. In deciding to create something, I am sharing my knowledge and perspective as though it is whole and complete. The format of its delivery will validate this. I am not the whole, though, and my people and objects of study will never be, either. I am writing into the incomplete. Th s book is an attempt to bring sense to the disjointed, messy, coherent, and incoherent that come from doing digitally born or digitally augmented work. It is about sitting with the sources, feelings, and ideas that fill in spaces, seeing connection, and looking for more.

Th s book is an attempt to do trauma-informed work while minimizing the need to retraumatize in order for the story to be more complete. Th ough algorithms and scripted experiences that purport to be elevated forms of feeling, the digital world seeks to create empathy machines to reframe suffering and oppression. These technologies attempt to dictate how and what our affective responses should be in ways powerfully analogous to the "human zoos" of the nineteenth century, which is why it is important to reexamine what we know about human zoos. I argue that we do

not need to accept this future. We have the ability to do more. Th s book is an attempt to rethink the technologies of empathy in order to decolonize a popular affect and, beyond that, to fi d other, complex emotions that are more meaningful and truly transformative. In writing *The Other Side of Empathy,* I hope to open a space for people to have feelings about their own formative encounters that shape the world and the past to help us move toward a more equitable and complete future.

Notes.

By way of an introduction.

1 Lipps, "Einfühlung, innere Nachahmung und Organenempfindungen"; Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*; Bloom, *Against Empathy.*

2 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* 365.

3 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* 363.

4 This is in "Book II. Of the Passions" in Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature.* The interesting thing about the section of this book is that the quotes most often used are related to possessing objects, giving possessions, and the pleasure that derives from these acts. I think it is important to note that the emotions discussed were positive emotions and sentiments in this instance, whereas empathy is used in the context of negative emotions or experiences.

5 Matravers, "Empathy and the Danger of Inventing Words."

6 Hogan, "Development of an Empathy Scale," 308.

7 Matravers, "Empathy and the Danger of Inventing Words."

8 Batson, "These Things Called Empathy," 3.

9 Batson, "These Things Called Empathy," 9.

10 *Third world* here refers to the original French meaning of *tiers monde*, which implied the country was part of a Communist bloc.

11 The television series was broken up into seven "universal" life stages, "Married Life," "Children," "Teenagers," "Weddings," "Birth," "Old Age," and "Death."

12 Pedwell, "Theorizing 'African' Female Genital Cutting and 'Western' Body Modifications," 64.

13 Guilt here is understood through the developmental lens established by Winnicott. I am also influenced by the idea of "transformative guilt," a subject often talked about by Martha Crawford on twitter @shrinkthinks. I find these frames productive as they see guilt as a normal and, at times, necessary state of being that isn't just negative. Martha is the one who suggested I read Winnicott.

14 Nakamura, Lisa. 2019. "Virtual Reality and the Feeling of Virtue," 3–3.

15 "6×9: A virtual experience of solitary confinement," *Guardian*, accessed September 23, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive /2016/apr/27/6x9-a-virtual-experience-of-solitary-confinement. I want to highlight *The Guardian* project because its creators worked to go beyond the experience by providing articles, resources, podcasts, and other media that delve deeper into solitary confinement from various perspectives. Many VR experiences designed to introduce people to the suffering of others do not provide such supporting materials, and it is worth highlighting ways to address some of the limits of the medium.

16 I often wonder if part of the reason that sharing buttons is so useful on these types of digital experiences is because sharing creates a tiny action that feels like "at least I did something" and alleviates some of the pressure to do something because something, though small and more likely than not inconsequential, was done.

17 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 2.

18 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 3.

19 Truscott, "Empathy's Echo," 14.

20 McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," 16.

21 McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life" 22.

22 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* xvi.

23 Truscott, "Empathy's Echo," 15.

24 Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space,* xix.

25 This is a derogatory term. However, without use of the term the work of this book would not be possible due to metadata standards and the "hiddenness" of some of the items explored in this book. In this context, even though the items exist, they are hidden because of the limited data associated with the objects which makes finding the objects more difficult than one that has extensive metadata attached to it.

Chapter 1: The other side of human zoos?

1 Blanchard, Boetsch, and Snoep, *Human Zoos*; Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love?*

2 Blanchard, Boetsch, and Snoep, *Human Zoos*, 13.