



the  
other  
side  
of  
empathy

JADE E. DAVIS

the other side of empathy

*This page intentionally left blank*

# the other side of empathy

**JADE E. DAVIS**

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Durham and London*

2023

© 2023 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*All rights reserved*

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project editor: Bird Williams

Designed by A. Mattson Gallagher

Typeset in Minion Pro and General Sans

by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Davis, Jade E., author.

Title: The other side of empathy / Jade E. Davis.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2023. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022048185 (print)

LCCN 2022048186 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478025016 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478020035 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478027010 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Empathy. | Other (Philosophy)—

Social aspects. | Human zoos—History—19th century. |

Photography—Social aspects—History—19th century. |

Racism in anthropology—History. | Colonization—Social

aspects. | Technology—Social aspects. | BISAC: SOCIAL

SCIENCE / Ethnic Studies / American / African American &  
Black Studies

Classification: LCC BF 575. E55 D36 2023 (print)

LCC BF575. E55 (ebook)

DCC 152.4/1—dc23/eng/20230415

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022048185>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022048186>

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.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

## Contents

Preface.	ix
Acknowledgments.	xiii
By way of an introduction.	1
1: The other side of human zoos?	15
2: We have names.	35
3: New media and emerging technology will kill us all, though.	65
Some end thoughts.	93
Notes.	99
Bibliography.	109
Me, myself, and you: A biography.	117
Index.	119



*This page intentionally left blank*

## 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 reflection—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 ARE 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 = DEHUMANIZATION and ALIENATION (first 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." This 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 out 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.

This is a call to a political practice in a time of crisis that is now generations old.

This is a rejection of the postcolonial.

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

STOP TRYING TO COMPRESS TIME SO YOU CAN GET LOST IN YOUR  
FEELINGS.

*This page intentionally left blank*

## Acknowledgments.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Cathy N. Davidson and Ken Hillis for their continuous support, patience, motivation, and enthusiasm as I've sorted through my thoughts over the last decade. I hope to be able to make time, support, and be excited for others who are curious and know only how to think sideways, as they did for me.

I am forever indebted to Nicky Agate for reviewing my translations and helping to ensure I was capturing what was being said in the language of the past as *divertissement* and not work. I would have been lost without you.

I would also like to thank Demetrios Kapatenakos, for always being a phone call away when I had a random thought; Jordan Davis, for coming along for the ride; Patricia Matthew and Melissa Creary, for constant encouragement; Jackie Cahill and Jon Shaw.

I would like to thank and send all my love to Justin M., for creating space and time for me to think; Tristan and Donovan M., for keeping me focused on what's important (it's both of you); and Lucille Howard Brantley Russell, my grandma, for always telling me my job was to do more than she was allowed to do, on my own terms, and for always being interested in what I was up to, even if she never saw the point (though she did love looking at photographs with me).

And to all of those whom I encounter digitally and who inspire me, make me curious, or help me discover new worlds that I will never meet because of the distance of time, place, and circumstance.