

'Powerful and merciful.'

ALI SMITH

'Tempest . . . doesn't just leap off the page,  
but leaps into your throat and demands  
to be shouted all the way out.'

MARLON JAMES

'[Kae's] language hits like lightning.  
It illuminates and it burns.'

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Kae Tempest On Connection

Kae  
Tempest

On  
Connection

**Beneath the surface  
we are connected . . .**

This is a meditation on the power of creative connection. Drawing on twenty years' experience as a writer and performer, Kae Tempest explores how and why creativity – however we choose to practise it – can cultivate greater self-awareness and help us establish a deeper relationship between ourselves and the world.

Honest, tender and written with piercing clarity, *On Connection* is a call to arms that speaks to a universal yet intimate truth.

UK £9.99  
US \$14.95



**KAE TEMPEST** is an award-winning, *Sunday Times*-bestselling author, poet and recording artist. Tempest won the 2013 Ted Hughes Award, was nominated for a Costa Book Award and a BRIT Award, has been shortlisted for the Mercury Prize twice and nominated for two Ivor Novello Awards. They were also named a Next Generation Poet by the Poetry Book Society, a decennial accolade. They released their fourth studio album, *The Book of Traps and Lessons*, in 2019, produced by Rick Rubin. Tempest grew up in South-East London, where they still live.

@kaetempest

Design by Faber  
Author photo © Julian Broad

surrounded by people and I see them and I feel them, and my experience is such that when I leave this theatre, this sweaty club, this backroom bar, this grand arena or this park bench where I read this borrowed book and take the train across town to return to wherever it is I sleep, I will be aware of every engineer that tends the railway track, every station attendant that sweeps the rubbish from the platform and blows the whistle for the closing doors. I will be aware of my own humanity. I will be aware of my own complicity. I will show tenderness and deference to the people that I encounter.



Life as we know it is entirely unreal, entirely inhuman. We have lost each other under this self-system of hyper-competition. Music is the great invigorator. Artists don't make their work to inspire your collusion, your submission or your consumption of their ideals. They serve a purpose that is higher. Bigger. Deeper. Which is why you feel higher, bigger, deeper as you connect with their output. Even as you buy their T-shirts and send them on their tours around the world. Even then, in that moment, the integrity of the intention sustains the inevitable involvement of the band that you love in the capitalist industrialisation of their creative

endeavours. The performance continues to be a deep searching for connection. They partake in the system, but are not engulfed in its numbness. They remain vigorous as long as they remain connected to this search.

Of course, art is as various as experience and not all music wants connection. Not all theatre cares about you. Culture, in the main, is a bourgeois pursuit, a reaffirmation of a mannered existence that cements prejudice and justifies ignorance. And much music is the product of mass manufacture, cynically assembled. It wants nothing but your clicks. It actively seeks your numbness. But that's not the kind of art I am talking about here. So let us say no more about it because it's everywhere and it doesn't need any more of our attention than it already has.

There is great work being made all the time. Find it where you find it. If it moves you, give thanks for being open enough to be moved, give thanks for being able to shake before your favourite band. This is the start. Hold on to it.

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A person cannot function in this world if they are entirely of the other. But a person will not function any better by being completely closed to it. If they are, suffocation is felt. A stifling of the senses. A perplexing lack. Life happens, but nothing has a deeper resonance. Except for the instinctive shock-back-to-feeling of childbirth or death, no action feels profound enough to root the person in an experience of life that feels purposeful. Without purpose, days become mega-bright, vacuous pictures of days. Or an endless procession of duties to serve. Things done because this is what's supposed to be done. Things enjoyed because this is what I'm supposed to enjoy. I like this, because I'm like this. I'll do this because it's what my family have always done and it's what's expected of me. All the while, the spirit of the depths is not consulted. Not engaged with. Not even greeted at all. So, perversely, we can be online, projecting a deeper self out into the world, while neglecting the parts that create deep selfhood. The same can be said of acquiring the trappings of a life well lived. Fancy clothes, fancy car. Status symbols. An attractive partner. Multiple attractive partners. Lots of people knowing your name. The latest clothes. An

impeccably clean house. Ensuring your kids know their times tables by heart. Caring for your mum every day. Being seen as a pillar of the community. Never missing church. Whatever it is that motivates you to satisfaction.

You don't have to be engaged in 'art' to feel empathy or access the depths. The universal depths can be accessed through art, and personally that is how I have come to know them, but it is not always the case that drawing or writing will take you into a deep connection. Art-making, like anything else, can feel disconnected, routine and numbing. So, how to switch focus? Jung conducted his nightly rituals with words and images. Georgie Yeats used trance and séance. Mike Tyson smoked DMT, a substance secreted in the venom of a toad native to the Sonoran desert and found his life entirely changed by what he describes as the death of his ego: 'I realised I was nothing.' He says of the experience, 'I was happy.'

There are many ways to access a more resonant place. It starts by acknowledging that everything is resonating. When an opera singer hits a particular note and shatters glass, they are amplifying the resonant frequency of that object. All objects have a frequency at which they resonate. Including you.

It is not the case that numbness needs to be defeated to activate creativity. Numbness and connection are shades of the same spectrum.

It is the case that I have been learning, my entire life, to place vast value on possessions, on social status, on public approval. I have to retrain myself if I am to learn to value the minute and gradual things. Small exchanges. Genuine intimacies.

But how do I retrain myself?

I could start by paying particular attention to things I don't usually notice. The place where two trees meet at the roots. The bricks in the wall that I walk past. The floral shapes in the cast-iron railings. The colour of things. The feelings in my own body. And then, I could try paying particular attention in times of great stress or crisis. Or when I feel myself drifting off, pulling away into fantasy rather than remaining absorbed in the moment. Facing boredom, rather than succumbing to the impulse to distract myself from it.

It's the pushing back, the pushing of 'our' norms back out into the society at large that creates counter-culture, that presents an opportunity for change.

Don't be too hard on yourself.

You can't be present all the time.  
But the closer we focus on our experience, the greater the awareness of the experience will be, the greater the immersion, the greater the possibility for connection.

So

Put your phone down.  
Listen to the birds.  
Build a fire in a quiet place.  
Pay attention to the details when you kiss your lover.  
When you have a conversation with your neighbour about their health.

When you cross the road or feed the cat or buy tomatoes.

When you cremate a parent.  
When things go fuzzy, switch focus.

But if you can't switch focus. Don't switch focus.  
There's no must. No have to.

Only try to. Choose to.

Walk in the pissing rain without hunching your shoulders.

Pay attention to the details when you're being rushed to hospital, haemorrhaging blood after an abortion.

Breathe in a lungful of air and breathe it out slowly.  
Pay attention to the details when you've been  
kicked out and have to sleep in the park.

When you're trying to get the kids out the door  
but they've hidden their shoes and you're late for  
school and one of them is covered in blue felt-tip.

When your aunty gets sick but you can't visit her  
in hospital because of Covid-19.

Pay attention to the details when you start a  
crowdfunder for top surgery.

When you're going numb, switch focus.

Pay attention to the details when you drive off in  
a huff and reverse straight into a pillar.

When you finally get a pay-rise.

When you are reminded of a dead friend by a  
smell you end up following halfway down the street.

Drive to the coast and stare at the sea.

Walk in the woods in the early morning.

Spend a full day with no distractions.

No one really cares about what you said or how  
you said it. They are all too busy agonising over what  
they said or how they said it. Even if they're online  
ripping the shit out of you for what you said or how  
you said it, it's really themselves they're angry at and  
besides, other people's opinions do not define you.

What defines you? The very moment that you find  
yourself in.

Let go.

Every shouted greeting, every stalling car, every  
siren, every screaming kid, dog, fox, radio. All that  
sound out there is life and people living. Not back-  
ground sound. But close up. Front and centre. See  
all those windows in all those buildings? Look up.  
There's life in there. Put yourself away. Let go of  
yourself. Tune in to other people. To the movement  
in the branches, the sudden coming of rain or the  
patterns in the waves. To how those two lie on the  
grass. To how that one sits on the bench with their  
hands clasped, looking up. To how those three stand  
at the crossing, playing with each other's hair. To  
how that young one shifts the weight of those shop-  
ping bags and tries to keep up with their mother's  
strong legs. This is it. This is the thing. This is the  
beautiful thing.