

how is it possible for someone to understand the embodied experience of another?

for me to understand you? and you me?

even the shared language we rely so much on to communicate is on shifting ground: apparently convergent exclamations of meaning are underlaid by

disparate
forests
of neural connection—

each grown, pruned, and supported by the unique experience of having lived a lifetime.

for the individual subject, what it is to have lived a life is so overwhelmingly full of the grain of time that it is simply impossible to even index one's own lived experience, let alone that of another human being.

have you ever had the feeling that if you spent all your life gazing at a tree,
just one tree,
you would not come close to grasping its every trace and rustle?

if what exists in one slice of time already eludes us,
how can we simultaneously process a whole lifetime with all its nooks and crannies?
for as much as we dream, surely we cannot become extra-temporal beings?

in the face of the frail possibility for self-understanding,
some kind of memory or idea stubbornly persists in thin strands,
at times even finding its way between subjects by
stories,
pictures,
and sounds:

osmosis
through our membranes.

as a perpetual cynic,
i cannot help but fixating on how much the membranes mediate.
in fact, i often worry that nothing is transferred whatsoever.
perhaps, we only make contact with each other through an impermeable yet translucent layer?
(think early pandemic images where elderly couples desperately held each other through plastic quarantine separators)

futility subsequently abounds.

identity requires delineation, meaning that the complete subjective experience held by one cannot be transferred to another (in a trivial, physical way). and, without complete transference, there is no real sense in which you or i can *truly* understand each other.

but somehow amidst all this, there is cause for beauty.
after all, the notion that "you cannot be me and i cannot be you" does not preclude the simple yet solidly real fact that:
even if we don't understand we another, we are inextricably interlinked in shared words, glances, and touches.

we do not need to merge consciousnesses to give each other a hug.

and at times when we feel particularly insecure about our capacity to mutually understand,
shared aesthetic experience offers the promise of respite:
for in that moment, we can be assured
that our attentional spheres

are
perceiving
experiencing
feeling

the
same
wonderous
thing.

and when that thing is really good,
we might enter a mode of experiential trance i always call ecstasy.
then, just maybe, we can transcend our subjectively entrapped noggins to be in some place of understanding, together.