

The Institute for New Feeling (IfNf): *Felt Book*
SPACES, Cleveland, January 30 - March 27, 2015

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How does one feel new? Refreshed. Ready for anything. Relieved of stress and cleared of psychic garbage. This notion of resetting seems ubiquitous in a consumer-oriented, youth obsessed culture, where good feelings are in high demand. But feeling new, specifically, has a powerful and unknowable dimension. Unfamiliar. Different. Rather than simply feeling great, feeling in ways heretofore unfelt. Consciousness expanding.

The Institute for New Feeling (IfNf) is an artist collective formed in 2013 by Scott Andrew, Agnes Bolt, and Nina Sarnelle. The three artists met in Pittsburgh while all pursuing interdisciplinary MFAs from Carnegie Mellon University; they work together in various configurations and capacities, as well as pursuing independent projects and work with other collectives. IfNf defines itself as “a research clinic committed to the development of new ways of feeling, and ways of feeling new,” creating “artwork in the form of treatments, therapies, retreats, research studies and products that play with the corporate manipulation of human desire.” For now, the Institute manifests through a temporary installations, exhibitions, and performances, as well as their comprehensive website, which hosts video content (commercials, guided meditations), documentation, and proposals. Ultimately, IfNf has plans to open a bricks-and-mortar spa in Los Angeles (clearly the natural location for such an endeavor).

For their exhibition at SPACES, IfNf premiered the early stages of FELT BOOK, a collaborative publication including home made “remedies” supplied by over 40 invited artists, inspired by Fluxus scores, YouTube tutorials and eHow articles. Entries are being released via the web in 2015, and those interested can sign up on IfNf’s website to receive a weekly email featuring a wide range of approaches. So far, the therapies have included a “Cure for Loneliness” supplied by Lenka Clayton: a sheet of paper with hundreds of hand written names on it; the instructions say to cut out the names of people you know and put them in your pocket to carry around with you, adding the names of others as you meet them. Sentimental and low-tech, Clayton’s cure is a tactile representation of something intangible: one’s social network. It also speaks to the need to have those connections at one’s fingertips, and a feeling of anxiety and detachment that can come with being disconnected.

Luke Loeffler’s “Treatment for Hyperactive Electronic Response Syndrome” picks up on this apprehension. Characterized by an “instant, habitual response to electronic notifications and an unreasonable need to respond to the stimulus,” which leads to “a loss of productivity and an increasing need for affirmation,” the syndrome is indeed ubiquitous and insidious. The instructions are to text “start” to the provided phone number, turn your device to vibrate, and place it against your body, resisting the urge to look at it. When I visited the gallery, a text to the number led to an indefinite wait for results; the anticipation/restraint was rather excruciating. Kim Laughton’s project, “Siliconscious,” is a topical cream made from finely crushed silicon chips, which contain the build-up of human emotions that flow through digital devices. Advertised as a treatment for those who feel jaded and numb, it could be the ultimate placebo. Upon rubbing a dollop on the back of my hand I felt immediately uneasy about the feelings (other people’s) that were being absorbed by my body.

In the gallery, contributions to FELT BOOK are realized in different ways, as printed text, video, interactive computer programs and actual products. Elina Malkin’s ridiculously long and piercingly deep questionnaire to determine “What Gatorade Flavor Is Your Aura” was particularly engaging. In front of the soft gray-colored title wall that was painted with minimal white text, a simple turn-style brochure holder topped with decorative reeds offered pamphlets on avatar therapy and *Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite carried in cat feces that affects human psychology. The subtle corporate air surrounding this display, combined with the uniform delivery of the information,

made this one of the most successful elements of the show, one that hinted toward the potential for crafting the total environment at the Institute's future home. IfNf's own contributions make up the majority of products on display, including an air-freshener that releases Oxytocin, a hormone related to human bonding and well-being; edible earplugs made from Japanese mochi; insoles that map zones for acupressure; and a neck pillow cast from cement. Here one can guess at the healing properties of silica, aluminum, limestone, shale, and other components and while it's hard to imagine relaxing with such an unwieldy item weighing on your shoulders, the surface is pleasingly cool and incredibly smooth.

IfNf has a knack for hitting a certain aesthetic and tone: calm yet energetic, both personal and vague, with earnest humor. They appeal to a basic, and perhaps increasingly pressing human desire, to understand ourselves more, to be better, and to evolve constantly. The collaborators in FELT BOOK take up the Institutes' directives in myriad ways, but they all speak, in varying degrees of seriousness, silliness, and ambiguity, to the ways in which we attempt to improve our human experience. The disparate voices call for a cohesive aesthetic framework, and at times the exhibition can feel fractured and thin, like wandering booths at a wellness trades fair. As the launching pad for the publication, it definitely introduces IfNf as lively collaborators, ambitious in their scope of platforms. I left the exhibition in a rather buoyant state, feeling not *new* per se, but certainly expectant.

- Rose Bouthillier