

KRISTY (00:00):

Hello, and welcome to Down to Art. I'm your host, Kristy Gordon. And today I'm talking to our returning guest Kate Horowitz about how to manage our energy so that we can have the maximum capacity to do our creative work. So welcome, Kate. It's so good to have you back.

KATE (00:15):

Thank you. I am so excited about this. I've been so excited about this ever since we came up with this idea. So this is a big thrill for me.

KRISTY (00:23):

Me too. Kate's work has appeared in national publications, including The Atlantic and Bitch magazine, as well as on matchboxes and tarot cards and in anthologies about destruction, inanimate objects, and the cult. And as I mentioned, Kate, was a previous guest on this podcast, so if you haven't heard our first episode on the creative process, I highly recommend that. It's the first episode on this podcast. So in our last conversation, you were nearing the end of your writing on your book proposal. And if I remember correctly, you were feeling pretty stuck. Can you give us an update on how it's going and how did you manage to get unstuck?

KATE (01:03):

Yeah, so I don't know if I got unstuck so much as I kept going through the stuckness. Um, and that was something we talked about last time is I realized that, okay, maybe I don't want to do this. Maybe I don't think it's going to succeed. But I made a commitment to myself to finish this proposal, and I'm going to do it. And so that's what I did. I finished it and I decided to set it aside for a little while, while I did some many other obligations, but life intervened. I was not planning to start reaching out to literary agents, but that is exactly what happened. And I ended up interacting with a few and I met one who just seems wonderful. And so I have now signed with an agent, uh, which feels so strange to say out loud. And I don't think it's entirely set in yet. But what this means is that, uh, despite my plans, uh, I am now writing the book. Right, right now I am writing the book and I am very excited and also terrified, which I think is something I say a lot now that I think about it.

KRISTY (02:16):

<laugh> oh, that's so amazing. Congratulations.

KATE (02:21):

Thank you. Thank you so much. It's been amazing to have you here for the entire thing. Um, your support has been really helpful.

KRISTY (02:29):

Oh. And, but it, and it's just so inspiring though, being able to have like, been a part of this process. And for our listeners, too, because like you say, like, if people listen to our last episode, what really always struck me was that you were talking about how like convincing the voices were that we're telling you wasn't good enough. And I hear that from like artists all the time. And, but what, what struck me about what you were saying with that was that you were like, you know, they're very convincing voices, you know, these thoughts in my head, but, but there was like a step of being removed from it that you

weren't just like, I really think I'm not good enough, but I know like when those voices are so loud, it can really feel that way, but just, um, yeah, but then you pushed through it. You finished the proposal.

KRISTY ([03:15](#)):

It's really good. And like you thought it was gonna take like a really long time to get an agent. And that it's like so hard. Like we always hear how hard it is for a writer to get an agent, and you got one like almost right away. So I just think it's like really inspiring to everyone to, to be a part of that process. Um, and like you say, it's, um, it's all about managing our energy. Like there's so much to do, um, you know, as an artist and, and as any sort of creative person, and we have all these big goals and everything, but there's so much to do. And then life like can pull at us. And I, I have the mindset that we're given like enough energy to do all the things that we need to do, like in, you know, for ourselves, like in each day, but really only that amount. And so there does come a point where we have to say no to like a lot of the extraneous stuff that really isn't part of our, our life mission. Um, so yeah. How is your energy, you know, these days? Um, and, and what are you kind of finding is working in terms of managing your energy?

KATE ([04:22](#)):

The honest answer is that my energy today and my energy lately has been extremely chaotic. I am feeling pulled, uh, dramatically in many directions at once. And so many of those directions feel extremely important to me. I've been physically very tired and have been working to try to not push myself beyond what I'm capable of doing, but there are things that I'm working on that are energizing to me. And there are things that I'm working on that are draining to me. And I'm really, it's a constant negotiation to figure out Where to put that energy and also to follow what is energizing, uh, without expending too much of the energy that I need for everything else.

KRISTY ([05:15](#)):

Yeah. It is, it is a real balance, um, for sure, because there, like those things that are draining too, like sometimes they have to get done and like, and if we don't do them, it can kind of like also become a drain on our energy, like just kind of subtly nag at us or whatever. What do you do with the things that are draining to your energy, but do have to get done? Like, do you have any strategies for those particular items? <laugh>

KATE ([05:45](#)):

I have a million. So for me, one of the biggest parts of it that I've been realizing, especially in the last few weeks, and this touches a bit back on our conversation in the last time I was on the show, and that is really taking a hard look at the items that are draining. And that, that I feel like I have to do and asking myself, do I actually have to do this? And if so, do I actually have to do this today?

KATE ([06:13](#)):

As we discussed last time, I'm somebody who lives and dies by to-do lists and every kind of list and schedules and calendars. And these are adaptive tools that help me manage my energy and help me predict how I'm going to use my energy and to budget it wisely. But I think that sometimes I can fall into the trap of thinking, just because I've written it down, I have to do it. And so something that has been really useful for me lately is applying mindfulness to my to-do list and looking at the items and thinking, okay, I wrote this down and I planned to do it. Does this actually need to be done? Or is this just something that I think I should be doing, or something that I wanted to do three weeks ago, that isn't

actually a good use of my time right now? And what I'm finding is that a lot of items can drop off the to-do list without the world falling apart.

KRISTY (07:05):

That's true. That's that is like totally true. Um, <laugh>, it's kind of funny. Like, we feel like it'll all fall apart if we don't do it all, but then we just don't do it all and nothing happens.

KATE (07:19):

<laugh> Nothing bad happens! Yeah. It's, it's wild. I mean, obviously there are, there are some things that are in fact, many things in life that do need to get done that don't spark joy for us. Yeah. But the other part of it is that some of those things, if we can give it focused attention, they're over pretty quickly. They take a lot less time than we think they're going to take. They take a lot less energy than they, we think they're going to take and we actually expend more energy dreading them or anticipating them than actually doing them.

KRISTY (07:55):

Yeah, totally. Like our tax season is just wrapping up. So I'm thinking like of my taxes and, um, yeah, I just totally dread them. I hate doing it. It's so complicated for me. Um, yeah. And like kind of, um, I use the same kind of technique that I use with like a, a lot of things I try and just do like small bits every single day. Like something really manageable, like half an hour of torture on my taxes every single day. And this, this year, it only took a week and every now and then there's like some little extra tidbit that I have to like do or whatever on it. But, um, but when I'm actually doing it, it's not as terrible as it seems like it's gonna be like, I'm just like adding up receipts. Like it's not terrible or whatever. <laugh> I don't know.

KATE (08:40):

Absolutely. I think, I think the dread of the thing can be so much more draining than just getting it done and crossing it off.

KRISTY (08:49):

Yeah. And I do think that that, that's the type of thing that if I don't do it, like, um, it becomes an energy drain too, cuz I'm just, mm-hmm, <affirmative> kind of dreading it in the back of my mind and my whole life is like feeling like I can't deal with it <laugh> so it's like not that bad to just like do it and then not have that dread hanging over me or something. Um, yeah. But, but then, you know, and then there's also, you know, learning to say no to other things that you just like, aren't really that excited about that you definitely don't have to do, but it's still hard to have boundaries sometimes like in life. Um, what have you kind of discovered around boundaries and managing your energy?

KATE (09:31):

That is going to be a lifelong process. It is so difficult. It is so difficult even to say no to things that I thought I wanted or sought out or at one time wanted that don't fit anymore. And again, it's kind of a process of constant reassessment of what I need right now. What serves right now? At the moment I am in a place where I am extremely overcommitted, truthfully, and I need to start paring down. I need to start making some difficult decisions around what I'm doing and where I'm putting my time and energy in order to, as you say—we, I, I agree with you—we probably only have enough energy to do what is what we need to do. What is most important? And sometimes we don't even have that much energy.

Yeah. And it is very easy to get excited and to overcommit or to have ideas about what we'll want to be doing.

KATE ([10:30](#)):

But so often life just kind of cuts in and changes things. Your plans are great and useful to have, but life is gonna intervene. Which is definitely what I've found with my book project. I was not anticipating being in this place with it or needing to expend or, you know, wanting to expend energy on it right now. I thought I would be taking a break, but instead I'm quite focused on it while I'm trying to focus on many other things. And so really assessing, um, kind of, um, what's the word I'm looking for? Uh, gosh, I can't, I can't think of the word I'm looking for, but really taking a very cold look at the number of hours in the day and what I want to be doing, what I need to be doing, what I think I should be doing. These are all different things. Um, and focusing on in this moment, you know, which of these things matters and where, what kind of energy do I have and where can I put it?

KRISTY ([11:39](#)):

Yeah. It actually makes me think of a list, a type of list that I make frequently, which is like the list of everything that's bothering me. <laugh> and I recently made one of these lists and one of the things that was bothering me is that I wasn't actually doing that much work on my personal paintings, like my own personal work. I was doing a lot of work on a lot of things that I'm excited about, but I wasn't like doing that much work on my own personal paintings. And just like having that crystallized along with all the other things that were bothering me, um, made me start to like, just like one by one, kind of see what I could do to kind of remedy all these things that are bothering me. So, you know, like the next day I put like a lot of time in, on one of my personal paintings and of course I have my other to-do list, which is like a mile long, well, not really. It's like very clear. There's like certain, maybe there's five to 10 various things that I could be doing, but they're not like they're not, um, like I don't have to do them today, you know? And, and it was clear from my like things that are bothering me list that what was really important to me, like was to like spend some time working on my own work or whatever. Yeah.

KATE ([12:48](#)):

I, I love that. I, it's funny because I, as you know, I've been making this list pretty much since the start of the year, almost every day, almost every morning, a list of what I want today. And the contents of the list have really evolved at the beginning. The point of the list was to identify for myself what are things that I desire, which is sometimes hard for me to identify, but also what are attainable things that I desire that I can then take action to attain for myself. Yeah. But over time the list has, has changed. There's a lot of flux with it. But one of the things that I've noticed lately is that on workdays, because I have a nine-to-five as well, often one of the things that I will want is to invest a certain amount of energy at work. So I will say, I want to be an A-plus student today at work. I want to be a C-minus student today at work. And what happens is once I identify that I can choose to invest that much energy in my day job, the work always gets done, but it's a really useful way of noticing what feels like the appropriate amount to spend that day.

KRISTY ([14:04](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Intentionality like, you know, behind, like at the beginning of our day about what we like think would be good for the day can really make a big difference. Yeah. And that clarity and then like, um, it's really interesting. You were talking to, I know we talk like pretty much every day, um, you were talking about how like, overwork is like a trauma response, like a fight and flight response, or I guess it's

a flight response. Um, and how so, how hard it can be to just like actually kind of stop doing things. <laugh> Will you talk a bit about that?

KATE ([14:41](#)):

Sure. Yes. This is something that's been very alive for me the last few years. I think it's something that has always been true for me, but not so much something that I've examined. And so overwork, uh, can definitely be a trauma response, a stress response in the sort of fight-flight-freeze-fawn model. There flight, which is a sort of kind of prey response where you feel like you just have to keep running. You have to keep going. If you stop moving, then something will get you. If you stop moving, then you will not be good enough, Or you will not be safe. And this is definitely something that is in me. And it's a reason that I feel so driven, like driven, as I'm impelled forward. And it's very difficult for me to slow down. It's very difficult for me to stop. It often feels quite scary or even unsafe for me to slow down even my breathing. Or if I take a yoga class or on YouTube, for example, I notice I'm looking at the progress bar the entire time, wondering when it's gonna be over <laugh>. Um, so I think that that is a way simultaneously of burning myself out and protecting myself from the stress of slowing down. And it's so it's very challenging because it is more comfortable for me to do too much, but it's not necessarily better for me.

KRISTY ([16:12](#)):

Yeah. I think like that awareness is super interesting. I had never really thought about that, but I think I get, like, I think I'm the same, but I had never really thought about the roots of it and yeah. Just like having, yeah. Having that, um, in my mind, as, you know, as I try to wind down might help me notice, like why <laugh>, why I'm finding it so hard to just actually like wind down and like, um, you and I are both like really productive people and stuff. And, and so it's like, we have to like convince ourselves like that. It's like we have to talk ourselves through it that it's like, okay, to take a break sometimes like sometimes that's like the most productive thing we can do.

KATE ([16:55](#)):

Absolutely. And, and I think part of what is useful for me is noticing that perhaps what's relaxing for other people is not going to be relaxing for me. Maybe I just am not going to have any chill for a while. And so maybe I can find activities that are relaxing to me that allow me to still kind of let off some of this flight energy. Yeah. Cardio is a great example. Cardio exercise makes me feel terrific and it's really, really good for me. And I actually try to do it every day and it still lets me kind of run, run, run, run, run, and wear myself out. But it's just in a really, it's a really much healthier way of channeling it, um, obviously in moderation for sure. Um, but that sort of thing that allows me to, um, not interrupt this energy or not try to change myself or suddenly rewire my nervous system to be a different type. It allows me to even maintain or even replenish my energy without setting me off or challenging me in a way that's gonna just take me down or wear me out.

KATE ([18:10](#)):

The other side of it is that much of my, much of the conflict is that the work that I'm doing is work I'm really excited to be doing, and work that gives me energy. And so I get very invested in something and I wanna put a lot of time in it. Um, and it, it replenishes me and it fills my energy, and there are a lot of other things requiring energy from me as well. And so it's just that constant push and pull and balancing act of figuring out how to refill my cup and keep myself moving and not overstress myself while also not overdoing it.

KRISTY ([18:55](#)):

Yeah, totally. And I think I'm just like you, like yeah. Doing cardio or something is like, um, or, or even just going for a long walk for me, those are like really like, it's like walking meditation or something. And I do try to do real meditation. Well, real meditation, I guess walking meditation is like still real, but, um, you know, where you sit there and you kind of try and be quiet and whatnot, but sometimes that is like extra stressful cause then I'm like, oh, I'm not being quiet in my mind. And it just, you know, sometimes I just sit there with all my stresses and um, and that's okay too, but, but it is nice when my mind gets the actual like relaxation that it like wants so much. So yeah, it's a really good strategy to find something that can be relaxing like cardio, but still keep that kind of running sensation. Like let it sort of play itself out or something.

KATE ([19:47](#)):

Another thing that's been really helpful for me is adapting things that are often considered relaxing so that they're not stressful for me. So for example, I, in the last year, so have started giving myself permission to fidget while I'm meditating, or to move or not to close my eyes or other things that make it less stressful for me, I'm not fighting myself the entire time. Or if I need to lie down, that I'll lie down. So to really look at the, what the, the spirit of the thing is, and to take that and adapt it and not feel shame or guilt or like I'm doing it wrong. Yeah. But to do it in a way that actually supports me and actually has the desired effect, because if I'm focusing on sitting perfectly still keeping my eyes closed, breathing the way that I'm supposed to, which for me as somebody who has both trauma and asthma can be quite, um, it's tough, and so I often adapt meditations so that they're not focused on breathing. I don't choose ones that are focused on breathing, but I like to choose exercises that meet me where I am and don't require me to contort myself into something else just to "relax."

KRISTY ([21:07](#)):

Yep. Actually, that's like so true. And I, and um, I feel like that works for me, like a lot in all areas of my life. Like the more I'm trying to be, what I think I'm supposed to be or something, the more I'm like frustrated that I'm not, but then it, you know, when I can just like accept that I'm whatever, I don't know. It just like eases the whole situation up, like, um, yeah, really in all areas of my life. Yeah. So that that's really cool.

KATE ([21:35](#)):

This is actually making me think of one of our ongoing conversations that we've had about managing energy in work settings and specifically on Zoom, and the ways that because you and I both spend a lot of time on Zoom in meetings or teaching or, uh, all sorts of different avenues, conferences, things like that. And Zoom is draining for everybody, I believe, but it can be more draining for certain people, uh, than others. And I have been working, and I know that you've been working as well, to find ways to adapt my experience on video chat, to not have it suck the entire life out of me.

KRISTY ([22:18](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah,

KATE ([22:19](#)):

Because it, for a while, if I attended a one-hour meeting, I would be done for the entire day after that. Me too. Uh, it's just, it's so incredibly draining the pressure to have your face looking correct. Even when you're, you know, the audio is often cutting in and out. So there's a lot of sort of static or stress or audio

stress there. It's difficult to know where to look, being forced to look at your own face is just terrible, and no human should never have to do that. <laugh> There's a lot of pressure to, uh, have your face look a certain way. Yes. Even when you're not speaking, which is not usually a thing that would happen in real-life conversations, we look at the speaker, but in Zoom, everybody is just staring at you, or could be staring at you, the entire time.

KATE (23:06):

And so I spend a lot of energy to try to make sure my face is correct, and it's an incredibly draining experience, And it just doesn't have to be. And so something that I've been working to do, um, in my workplace and on a lot of my conversations, is just to explicitly say, "I have a sensory processing disorder. I find being on camera overstimulating and exhausting. So whenever I'm not speaking, I'm going to turn off my camera." And often people respond to that by saying, "Great. We can all turn our cameras off if you want or great, no problem, or sure. That sounds good." Nobody has ever, at least to my face or to my little Zoom photo, objected or had any concerns about that. And in fact, people have thanked me for modeling a different way of doing this. And it allows me to be much more present and not completely focused on how tired I'm getting.

KRISTY (24:07):

<laugh> totally. Yeah. Um, yeah. And I know we've also talked about like, just trying to, like, sometimes I notice that my whole body is tight. Like I'm just, yeah. I'm definitely being hypervigilant about what my face looks like and it's exhausting. And then I also have my whole body tight and maybe my hands tight. So even something just like trying to allow myself to breathe, which seems like, so <laugh>, it's like, I can't believe that I'm like sitting there not breathing pretty much and like, relax. I just let my arms fall by my side. I'm doing it right now. And open up my, my hands. Like <laugh> something like that can like really just change my kind of body position and my feeling on zoom and then ideally having my camera off. It's like, but even if I have my camera on, I can suddenly let my arms fall to my side and open up my hands <laugh> and breathe.

KRISTY (25:00):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>. But that all is like not visible on camera. Um, cause yeah, it's, it's like exhausting for me. And I'm so glad that we've talked about all of this stuff and found ways to like manage, manage our energy through all this Zoom stuff c that's like a new thing. Yeah. And then I know we also talked a little bit about, I mean you've kind of like gotten good at sometimes identifying some of the fears behind, like when you're gonna take a break and you like, you know, have noticed it's hard to take a break you're maybe in flight response when you're working so hard and, and then getting in touch with like, what are some of the specific like fears that come up, um, you know, around that, do you wanna talk a bit about some of those specific fears that you've identified?

KATE (25:47):

Sure. Super vulnerable, but I, I think I, I mentioned that that was fair game, so I'm happy to,

KRISTY (25:53):

And I can relate to every of them. I think that being able to pinpoint it, cuz sometimes it's just a niggling fear and we just feel anxiety. But I feel like once we put it into words and crystallize it, then it loses power

KATE (26:06):

So much. So, so much. So one of the fears for me, of course, as I've already discussed is the fear of just stopping period and the feeling of being chased or not safe if I slow down. But beyond that, there is, there are a few different factors and one of them is a fear of being left behind or becoming irrelevant or failing to keep up with my peers. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and I have lived with chronic illness, my entire life and I also have a full-time job. And in addition to the teaching work that I do and the creative writing that I do and now this book project, and I am not able to produce, uh, creative work at the same pace as a lot of my peers who may not have full-time jobs or who may not have disabilities or chronic illnesses. And I am constantly feeling as though they have overtaken me and many of my peers from graduate school, for example, not many of them, but some of my peers from graduate school who are in the same classes as me have published multiple books by now.

KATE (27:16):

And while I know comparison is very much the thief of joy, it is hard not to feel as though I am deficient for not having the same amount of energy or even time as they have to produce this work. And so there's part of me that feels as though I am behind in my career and that I can't possibly slow down until I've caught up, but of course you can't ever catch up. Uh, it's not possible. And also there's no particular place that I'm supposed to be right now. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I am where I am. There is nobody measuring things. There's nobody out there looking at my accomplishments and saying, well, she's 45 accomplishments behind right now. She better pick up the pace. That's not happening. It is entirely in my head. Um, and I, I have perhaps a vain hope that if I complete this book project and when it's done and when it's out in the world, then maybe then <laugh> mm-hmm <affirmative> maybe then I'll feel like I can relax, but I kind of doubt it.

KRISTY (28:28):

<laugh> yeah, yeah. Um, yeah. And then there's the idea. Well, I always love to hear that we're all like exactly where we're supposed to be. I love it. It's I like to remind myself about that. Um, and I'm sure everyone can. I mean, I think so many people at least can definitely relate to yeah. This feeling of like, ah, I should be like further ahead and I'm, you know, that kind of thing. And then I think you also mentioned that there can be a fear underlying stopping, working even just for a day or whatever that like you'll kind of lose momentum and never start again.

KATE (29:06):

Definitely. It is so hard for me to take a break. And the other element of this that I definitely want to name is capitalism and ableism that tells us that we are only valuable while we are producing. Mm. And that is real. And that is very deep inside of us. And it is very hard to shut those voices down or to disregard them. I can't overstate that enough. Yeah. The, the feeling that the only good body is a working body and the only good person is a producing person. And so that I wanted to mention, make sure to mention that too. But yeah, I think that as we discussed in the last episode, there is sometimes a belief that creativity is like this rare butterfly that might pass us once. And if we don't chase it and chase it and chase it and then we're gonna lose it. Right. And so often when I'm in the middle of something, it doesn't feel safe to stop because what if I lose it? But as you have taught me so well, um, if we show up for the work, the work will show up for us.

KRISTY (30:20):

Yeah.



KATE (30:21):

And we can stop and the work will be there when we get back.

KRISTY (30:27):

Yeah. Yeah, totally. Yeah. It's um, it's like so powerful to just be able to like realize that it doesn't take our like constant, like stress and pressure and like forcing or whatever. Like it actually works better if we have like a slightly relaxed atmosphere about the whole situation <laugh> and like take breaks when we need it. And then can kind of like know that we can like circle back and keep working. And, but anyways, I just think that like naming your fears, like this is so powerful cuz I, I really find that it takes the power away from the fear as soon as I name it. Uh, and until I do, sometimes it just like has way more power over me cuz I don't even know what it is. <laugh>

KATE (31:12):

Absolutely. Yeah.

KRISTY (31:15):

Yeah. I

KATE (31:15):

I think another part of it is that it is really useful for me to remind myself that a lot of making art does not happen while you're sitting down at your computer or standing at your easel. No art happens. I know you're, you're really good at this. You go to galleries, you go to museums, you go to events, you look at art books, you replenish yourself and you live, you go dance. And this is, I think more than half of making art is just being alive and living your life and experiencing things. If I don't do anything, I have nothing to write about. If I don't go to the library and fill my arms with art books, I have nothing to really like keep those juices flowing. We need to interact with art and with the world and with nature and with other people to feed ourselves spiritually and socially and all of those things and also to feed our art. And so it sometimes helps me to take a break if I wanna call it that to frame it as I need to do some living now

KRISTY (32:21):

A hundred percent, because this even kind of goes back to like the first conversation we had on in the first episode of this podcast. It's like a lot of the time and I'm sure most people have found this like the sparks of inspiration. Like when we're looking for kind of like an answer to a particular maybe challenge on a piece that we're working on. Like a lot of the time those sparks come to us when we're like in a relaxed state, we've been engaged in the project on a regular basis, but maybe now we're on a walk or we're like in the shower or whatever. And we're, our mind has kind of like slightly let go a little bit, although it's still engaged in it because we have been working on it regularly. It's not like we've put it down for like an entire year or something like that.

KRISTY (33:02):

But um, that's really when like the, the answers seem to come to me. It's like when I go for a walk or I mean, for me, it is a lot of the time when I go for a walk. Um, and I think different people probably can find the different things for you. You know? I know you talked about like cardio and yeah. And just different ways of like relaxing ourselves, but I'm so glad you mentioned that. Like, it's so true that, um, a

lot of the art is done like in the background of my mind <laugh> as I'm living life and then the execution or whatever is like yeah. Done at the easel from me or whatever. Um,

KATE (33:36):

Yeah, a lot of, a lot of my ideas, a lot of my solutions, as you say happen while I'm in the shower and I, I have, I live in an apartment and I imagine my neighbors on the other side of the, who are on the other side of the bathroom wall must think everything is just bizarre in my house. Because when I have an idea in the shower—I keep wanting to get one of those shower notepads so I can take notes while I'm showering—but if I have an idea or a realization, while I'm in the shower, I will just say it out loud. I just start talking about it as much as I can, because I know that if I talk about it, I can hear myself say it, then I won't forget it as easily. Cause I really don't wanna forget it. <laugh> and so there's a lot of just like working through writing questions or solving essay problems or coming up with new lines for poems while I'm, you know, shampooing my hair. <laugh>

KRISTY (34:29):

Totally. Yeah. Um, yeah. I, I think everyone can relate to that. Like I think showers are a place of a lot of inspiration for a lot of people. Um, so do you have anyone that you look to as sort of like a good role model for managing how they manage their energy at, at some energy, sometimes it's useful to kind of have someone who's kind of modeling it. Do you have anything like that?

KATE (34:55):

Uh, one person who I give a lot, a lot of credit to and whose work I really, really admire and am constantly amazed by is Tricia Hershey, um, who goes by The Nap Bisho[ and who has an organization called The Nap Ministry. And her work is a lot about refusing the capitalist instruction to just produce, produce, produce, go, go, go. And she's coming at it from an orientation of, uh, rest as resistance specifically for Black and African American people. But the messages stand for everyone: that rest is not only important, it's revolutionary. And I find all of her work incredibly galvanizing. She does performance art installations, which is probably not the right term for it, but she does installations where people will just gather collectively and nap. And it's really, really, really powerful. Um, and she has a lot of really useful messages about thinking about your energy as precious. Your time is precious. Um, and the pause as both sacred and radical. And yeah, I draw a lot of inspiration from her work.

KRISTY (36:23):

Wow.

KATE (36:24):

How about you?

KRISTY (36:24):

That's well, that's really interesting for me. I was thinking about, uh, you know, this idea of setting boundaries, like in our life. Like I know when I first like stumbled upon the idea about setting boundaries, I was like practically the first time I'd ever thought about it, say like seven years, seven or eight years ago. And I was like, really not very good at it, you know? So it was like really hard to set boundaries. I would sort of have, I would do it, um, poorly, like in the way where I might be like, no, I'm not gonna do that. I don't want to, you can't make me or whatever, just like kind of confrontational and not very actually done. Um, so I guess I'm just thinking about the people in my life who I can look at.

Like, I, I can't say anyone specific, but I know there's like a lot of people around me that like, they manage to set boundaries in really tact, clever ways where you hardly know what's hit you. Like they're, they're just like, yeah, I'm available for this. And then the underlying, like underlying suggestion is like, and I'm not available for that. <laugh>, you know, so just learning like ways that are a little bit more clever to like and tactful and just make ease, you know, to like set boundaries, um, without it becoming like a big, a big production <laugh>

KATE (37:40):

That is so true. I am absolutely in awe of people. And whenever one of those boundaries is set with me, I just feel grateful and appreciative. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I may have, I think I've probably told you this story before, but years ago, a few years ago, I was writing an article about the process of writing about your own chronic illness or disability. And I reached out to some very prominent writers, phenomenal writers to see if I could interview them, to talk about their experience publishing and speaking publicly about their experience being ill or disabled. And I reached out to one writer whose work I really admired, and I asked if I could interview her. And she wrote a very brief but very reasonable email back saying she does not do interviews about her illness anymore, because it just exhausts her and saddens her and drains her. And she's just not going to do that. And I was so grateful.

KRISTY (38:36):

Yep.

KATE (38:37):

I wish we all had the wherewithal and the confidence and just the power to do that. And we do it's, it's accessible to us, but we have to take advantage of it. And I think about that email from her all the time, I wrote back to her and I thanked her and I just said, thank you for modeling this. I think we all need to see it. Yeah. I was really glad that she said no to that interview, even though I would've loved to have talked to her.

KRISTY (39:03):

Yeah. I feel like a lot of like the learning, how to set boundaries work that I've done has been with other people setting good boundaries with me. And, and then also there's like, the people who've like done it really poorly or whatever. And I'm like, wow, <laugh> I hope I never do it that way or whatever <laugh>. Um, but yeah, but, um, but I I'm too. I too am really grateful for like the people who've basically set boundaries with me, like in a really tactful way, cause that's how I learned how it can be done basically. Yeah. And there's like this idea too, while you and I have talked about this, that like, like how to know if, if we want to say yes to something or if we want to say no, and I know for a little while there, when, when we were both kind of feeling maybe lower energy and stuff and maybe it's just a good like practice in life that like, if it's not a resounding yes, then maybe it's a no, like sometimes it's hard to like kind of know, like we're like, oh, maybe I want to, maybe I don't know. But it's like when our heart tells us yes. It's kind of like, yeah, definitely. <laugh>. And so if it's not like saying that then like maybe it's a no <laugh> I don't, I don't know. What do you think about how to figure out what we even want and what our heart is telling us?

KATE (40:22):

Oh, that is so hard. It's so hard. I think enthusiastic consent or none at all is, is a really good model, but it can be really difficult to, to dig deep enough into the core of yourself to identify it. And I think for me,

one of the ways that I'm able to do that is I need to be alone. I need to be completely alone and quiet and I need to have enough time to think and reflect without any pressure or anybody else's input for a while. And then I need to look at all of the factors, uh, toward whether or not I wanna do something and then I need to set those aside. And then there's just the like really like listening for that still small voice that says yes or no. Mm. Yeah. And even then once you hear it, it's sometimes hard to accept it.

KRISTY (41:17):

Mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah, that, that is true. Like not always looking to advice from everyone else about everything, but sort of eventually knowing that like somewhere inside us, we have the answer and like maybe everyone else is telling us something else, but maybe our heart is telling us this one particular, you know, thing. And, and like, we can trust ourselves. We just have to kind of go into ourselves, give us some, that's another reason that we need to manage our energy because so that we have time to sit alone, you know, and listen to like our still small voice in our head about answers to whatever we're kind of seeking answers to. Yeah.

KATE (41:56):

So much. And I do think that that part of it, the information gathering or the support seeking, or just asking people that you respect and trust for their advice, that is an important step. That's definitely important step mm-hmm <affirmative> I love to hear from people who have done the thing that I'm thinking about doing or who have some similar experience or who just really care about me, what they think. Yeah. And then I will also take that in, absorb it, turn it over and set that aside as well. And like, yeah, it's the information, but it's not the only information, the most information, most important information has to come from me.

KRISTY (42:34):

Yeah. But you're right. It is important to like, get other in like get an input, like share it with people, talk to people about it and stuff like that too, to like build information so that you know, that you're looking at it sort of at it really rationally, you know, I feel like that's how I can be sure that I'm like, yeah, looking at it like logically with all factors considered or whatever, and then going into my inner voice or something like that.

KATE (43:02):

I think that it's one thing that I've been working on that I think I will be working on my entire life is teasing out what is gut and intuition and what is programming or stress or trauma or that sort of message that feels primal, but might not be what serves me best right now. And so sometimes what feels instinctive may be more reactive. And I think that I've been focusing a lot lately on responding, not reacting. And that can be quite difficult to tease out. Often my reaction is to say yes to things, to do more things, to take on more work, but if I'm able to say, okay, I, I notice that that is what I feel like I should do, but what do I want and what is right for me, mm-hmm, <affirmative> the answers are often quite different.

KRISTY (44:04):

That's so true. Like actually it reminds me that when we kind of came up with this idea, it's not our idea, but of, you know, like when in doubt, leave it out. Like, and if it's not like a resounding yes, you'll say no, it was really actually almost in the context of like opposite action. Like you were noticing that taking opposite action can be like a really good technique, um, for making big changes in our life. And, and

since you had been noticing that your tendency is to just say yes to everything, you know, we were kind of figuring, well, maybe you should just start saying no to everything, unless like it's a really big yes. Um, cuz I think you're right, like there and I really love that point and I think I'll be teasing it out for the rest of my life too, about trying to figure out what my intuition is telling me versus what is this kind of instinctual primal like reaction that I just like have that's like, yeah, it's like so complicated to figure out the cuz it might feel like intuition cuz it's so it's like so primal or whatever.

KRISTY (45:03):

It's so automatic for me. And um, and so yeah, taking, taking opposite action is sometimes at least eyeopening. Anyways, at least I'm doing something differently. <laugh>

KATE (45:14):

I, I think one of the most important tools that I have that you have taught me a lot about is just the pause button, because yeah, if we don't stop, if we just keep going, then we're gonna keep making the same habitual decisions. And in my case, taking on more work that might not suit me or that may not serve me saying yes to more things that might not serve me. But if I pause then I actually have space to respond and not react. Um, so I think that that's another really useful tool you can pause and be still and be alone and kind of absorb and synthesize and then set all that aside and just listen, um, before acting or reacting.

KRISTY (46:00):

That is so true. And it does totally go back to everything we were talking about. Um, cause yeah, I love the pause button. And when I first started using the pause button, it felt like the world would collapse. And like if I don't do something in this very minute <laugh>, but actually I could normally wait 24 hours and the world wouldn't collapse. Like I could just really put that pause button on and then yeah. And then respond instead of react. That's like so true and actually such a good reminder. I love that one. <laugh>

KATE (46:31):

A very wise person once said to me, "very few things in this life are actually an emergency." Yeah. Very, very few. And I try to keep that in mind and often when something feels most urgent is when I'm just most activated and it can wait, but, and I shouldn't be acting if I'm feeling that urgent and that stress because I'm not coming from the place that is going to be most aligned with managing the energy the way I want it to, or, or setting intentions or moving in the direction that's going to be best for me and for everybody. Yeah.

KRISTY (47:11):

That, that's exactly true. Cause I really kind of like use my intuition in like my art business decisions or whatever, and figuring out how to kind of gracefully navigate any situation that comes up. But it always takes like a little bit of a pause. Um, especially when people are activated or anything like that, to just like figure out the kind of most graceful way of like dealing with something. Um, yeah, so it, yeah, I don't know. It just takes like the pause button and then that intention just like coming back to my intention, like, oh, I won a harmonious relationship between, you know, these, you know, various pieces of moving pieces in some kind of art project or whatever. Um, and there's always an answer, but it doesn't come to me when I'm like all flustered <laugh> mm-hmm <affirmative> mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah.

KATE (47:58):

One thing that's coming to mind is that, um, I think I mentioned this, um, I know I mentioned this to you, but that at the beginning of this year, I, I don't do new year's resolutions, but I sat down, uh, I created a long list of guideposts for myself and I took a few days to reflect on how I could conserve and protect my energy and what kinds of actions I could take and what sort of things I wouldn't do in order to really stay within the amount of energy that I have and to really use it strategically and wisely and in alliance with what I want to be doing and in alignment. And so some of the guideposts were things like unsubscribe from most newsletters so that I don't have that cluttering up my inbox and my mind, or, you know, to check social media less often, look out the window more often or say no to unpaid work mm-hmm <affirmative> uh, for example, yep. And writing this down was really, really useful in the moment. But more than that, now when I'm in a place where I don't know what to do, I can just go back and look at the list, and the answer might already be there. Or it might just put me in the right frame of mind to make a decision that is going to support me better.

KRISTY (49:23):

Yeah. That's why I really love like, like lists or like, um, just getting super clear about like what we want and what we don't want or whatever, because yeah. Then we do find ourselves, even if we almost forget about the list, we sort of find ourselves just like reorienting in such a way that like, it kind of resolves those areas, or moves in that certain direction or whatever. And then maybe we go back to list and we're like, oh wow. I like, I did really. I mean, or you can have the list up all the time and always be kind of going back to it that like, that really works too. But yeah, it takes like a bit of time to write a list, but I just think it's like so useful. It gives us like clear direction, like concrete steps and sort of, like, um, boundaries and concrete boundaries around our life about what we will and will not be doing. Um, yeah.

KATE (50:19):

I'm somebody who is most relaxed and comfortable when there are clear instructions, directions, parameters, and I've figured out that I can provide those for myself. You know, they don't have to come from somebody else. I, in fact, it's great if I can provide them for myself. So if I'm in a moment of mindfulness and presence and I can think about what I need and write it down when I'm frantic later and urgent and overtaxed and overextended. Yeah. I can just check the instructions and that takes a lot less energy than having to create them all over again.

KRISTY (50:59):

Yeah, yeah, totally. Cause actually I remember when you made that list and I think like a little bit after you made the list, some kind of unpaid work opportunity did come up. Actually I remember what your thing on the list was—it was like no unpaid work, unless you're really excited about it.

KATE (51:14):

That was it. Yeah, yeah.

KRISTY (51:16):

Yeah. And so that did come up and you were like, okay, so this is unpaid work, but actually this is a case where I'm really excited about it. And so I am gonna do it, but it was just cool to be able to see you have that like ability to make the decision, like, um, with your list kind of backing you up. Like it gives you a little confidence around the decision, stuff like that.

KATE ([51:37](#)):

It's been hugely helpful. I'm very grateful to my past self!

KRISTY ([51:41](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah, totally. Oh, well this has been such an interesting conversation. It's always so good to talk to you. Um, I know I have kind of like a belief, like in terms of like manifesting things that when I'm really excited about something and I actually do have a project like this on the go right now, my, my, um, process is to actually like, not talk about it for a little bit <laugh> and just like kinda let it work itself out in the ethers. I don't know whether it's like, it gets me more nervous about it if I talk about it. Um, but I've, you know, kind of heard ideas around sort of that sort of thing. I think. Um, you've talked about that a bit too. Do you wanna, um, kind of talk a bit about that and how it's playing into, you know, anything involving your writing at the moment? Mm-hmm

KATE ([52:30](#)):

<affirmative> sure. Yeah. I've always been an oversharer, just like pathological oversharer. People often tell me, oh, you're so brave for putting it out there. No, I just can't shut up. <laugh> and it's something that I've been thinking about more and more is keeping something for myself. Yeah. And holding something close and letting something kind of germinate in the dark. And I think that's the phase I'm in.

KATE ([53:02](#)):

With my book project right now. For quite some time, as you know, I could not shut up about it, and in many ways that is definitely still true, but in other ways, it's feeling very tender to me and very vulnerable and it is actually taking shape and I almost feel protective of it. And so I'm less likely to talk about the details publicly, I think, because it is feeling almost so exciting to me. And it's this thing that is growing that I am feeding and I am tending this little monster, and I love it and I wanna kind of protect it and wait until it's ready to share.

KATE ([53:50](#)):

Um, yeah, but having said that a lot of the, a lot of excerpts from the book are being published right now. And if you follow me on Twitter and if you check my website, you can see some of those pieces and get an idea. Some, some of the flavor of the book. But the, the creature itself, I, I think I'm just gonna kind of keep it quiet for now.

KRISTY ([54:14](#)):

I really believe in that. Like, and I, I think I, I love the way you put it, like let it germinate in the dark and just being protective of it. Um, and yeah, that's exciting that some excerpts are being published. Where can people follow you if they want to read more about you and about your work?

KRISTY ([54:31](#)):

The best place is probably my website, which is [katehorowitz.net](http://katehorowitz.net), Kate Horowitz, one word. Uh, you can also find me on Twitter [@delight\\_monger](#), and then I'm also on Instagram at Kate's writing.

KRISTY ([54:46](#)):

Excellent. And I'll definitely include a link in the description of this podcast to all of those. Um, well, it's been so great to talk to you, Kate. I can't wait to have you back for another episode sometime. I always love talking to you and yeah. Thank you so much for joining us.

KRISTY ([55:01](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. Same to all of that. Big emphatic same to all of it. Um, yeah. Thank you so much. It was so good to be here.

KRISTY ([55:10](#)):

Aw, thanks Kate. Well, I can't wait to talk to you soon.

KRISTY ([55:13](#)):

Okay. Talk to you soon. Bye. Bye.

Speaker 3 ([55:16](#)):

I hope you've enjoyed this episode of down to art. And if you're interested in any of my classes or seeing my paintings, you can check out my work at [kristygordon.com](http://kristygordon.com) or look at the online classes I have at [kristygordoncourses.com](http://kristygordoncourses.com), where you can learn about my online art mentoring program, as well as the different streamed online classes that I have. If you've never taken any of my classes, I would suggest you start with the self-portrait class. So thank you for joining us today.