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(FEAR OF) (an exploration of empathy)

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(FEAR OF)
(an exploration of empathy)

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May 2, 2018

ABSTRACT

How much can you understand what another person is feeling? How much can they understand what you feel? This is the territory that my capstone investigates. Utilizing a mixture of informal and formal language and experimental footnotes, I describe the concepts and process behind my most recent body of work, the *(Fear Of)* series of animations, and its relationship to empathy. I follow this discussion with an explanation of my choice of fears and eyes as vehicles for this project, and end with an appendix featuring a sample of the interview-based monologues and my notes on which the project was based.

PART 1.
Introduction

I animate eyes based on specific fears from personal interviews. I interview anyone and everyone (fellow students, friends of friends, relatives, random people on the street, co-workers, et cetera), transcribe what they say, annotate how I feel about it¹, and create hand-drawn animations featuring a pair of eyes based on how I think they experience their fear.



Fig 1 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Getting Stuff In Eye* (2018), looping animation²

Through this project, I'm interested in exploring the space that exists between the holder of a strong emotion, in this case, a fear or a memory of a fear, and my perception of their experience of this fear. This is inherently an exercise in empathy—it is, after all, my attempt to get as close as possible to another person's emotional experience.

¹ In footnotes! Hence, all the footnotes in this paper. Get ready for lots and lots of
² Sometimes I get fears that were specifically about eyes. Those are fun.

But really, it's more of an admittance that I might not ever be able to really understand anyone because my own biases and feelings color my perceptions of them. Which is scary, terrifying even, to admit, but also deeply interesting. How much can I ever really understand someone else's fear and the reasons behind it?



Fig 2 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Getting Diabetes Because The Cat Has Diabetes* (2018), looping animation³

Is my perception of their fear a million miles away from how they actually experience it? Or maybe, just maybe, is there a chance that we experience it the same?⁴



Fig 3 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Getting Stuff In Eye* (2018), looping animation⁵

³ Seriously. How much can I ever understand a fear as specific as this one?

⁴ I wish I could give you the answer in this paper but the problem is that I don't have it. Nobody does. This body of work is like a science experiment with no specific ending because there's no way to measure the results.

Over the next several pages of writings I will take you through the words of great philosophers and writers, explaining why they led me to deem it basically impossible to know how another person feels, and how I believe this affects my work. I'll examine my series of animations within the context of contemporary art and illustration, and explore the reasoning behind why I'm using the vehicles of fears and eyes to explore the concept of empathy.

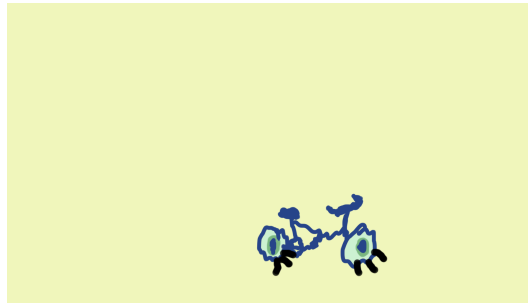


Fig 4 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Bikes* (2018), looping animation⁶

As you can probably tell, I'm not the biggest fan of formal writing (does this make me lose academic street cred?), so we'll keep things pretty casual within the permissive limits of the MLA format.⁷ If this paper⁸ seems weird to you, just know that it's supposed to be. I am, after all, trying to supply the context for a project that's about an inability to communicate.⁹

⁵ I've had my own struggles with body image. Does that mean I can understand this fear better?

⁶ Haha. This is literally a vehicle. Get it? "vehicles of fears and eyes"?

⁷ The MLA format also discourages the usage of excessive footnotes, however, I'm a fan of footnotes and they're an effective way to cheat my 3000 word limit, and "discourage" does not mean the same thing as "prohibit". So yes, like I said before, be expecting footnotes. Sorry, MLA.

⁸ And all it's footnotes.

⁹ Also I'm an art student, and this is my great farewell to the experience of undergraduate paperwriting. It's going to get weird.

Now. Let's get started.

PART 2.

I back up my claims about empathy with quotes from philosophers and famous writers.

According to German philosopher Edith Stein, empathy is the embodied understanding of the lived experience of foreign beings. (Bornemark 135) Empathy is not like perception but rather like imagination in how the substance of a feeling or experience is not presented to the empathizer directly. Like the act of remembering, the substance behind the experience of empathy is unoriginal, with the main difference that the content of the experience is present only to the person that empathy is directed towards. (Svenaeus) Because of this, our experiences of empathy are tainted with our own perceptions and we are left unable to remove ourselves in the equation of understanding other's feelings, as we understand them through our own feelings. Stein therefore warns against over assuming our power to empathize;

The "self" is the individual experiential structure. The great master of those who know recognizes in it the source of deception from which danger threatens us. If we take the self as our standard, we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality. Others become riddles for us, or still worse, we remodel them into our image and so falsify historical truth. (Stein 116)

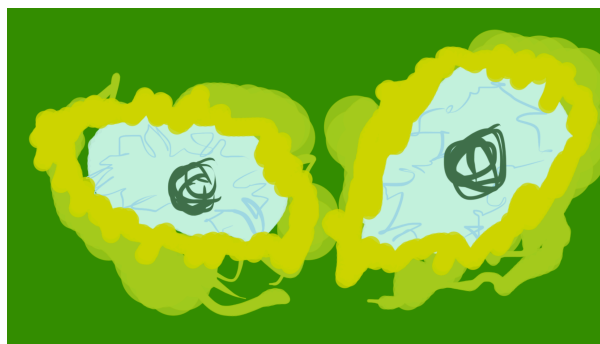


Fig 5 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Greed*(2018), looping animation

Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012 and deliverer of the 2014 Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Harvard University, bases his definition of empathy on Stein's philosophy. In his lecture, Williams paraphrases Stein, building upon her position that the ability to empathize shouldn't be overestimated;

“The empathic position is one in which we know that we *are not* the other... it would be more than a failure to appreciate the intensity of another's experience. It could just as easily be the overeager appropriation of another's experience and the denial of its difference and its contingency... The ethically significant expression of this sort of empathy would be in saying not, ‘I know how you feel,’ but, ‘I have no idea how you feel.’” (Williams)

Williams recognizes the uniqueness of each understanding, and cautions his audience against assuming that they can properly place themselves into another's experience--saying that you know how someone feels belittles their unique situation.

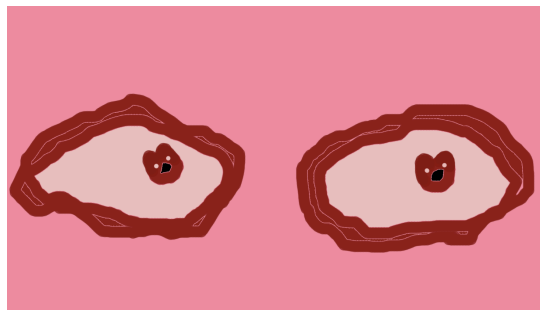


Fig 6 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Small Critters That Hop* (2018), looping animation

Writer Aldous Huxley addresses the uniqueness of every person's situation further, and the sadness that comes with the inability to connect;

By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies — all these are private and, except

through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes. (Huxley 56)

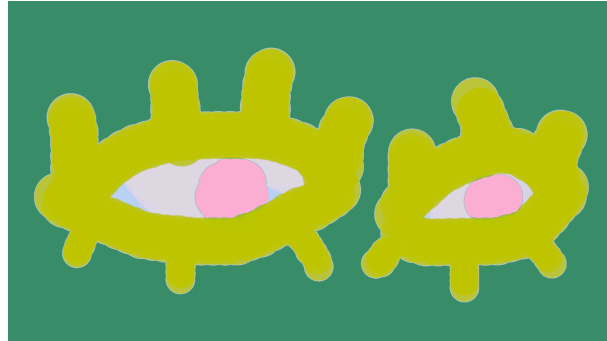


Fig 7 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Aliens* (2018), looping animation¹⁰

Finally, as a fictionalized version of himself in the film *My Dinner With Andre*, Andre Gregory speaks of a desire for a language that would allow humans to truly understand one another through radical, complete empathy;

You see, I keep thinking that what we need is a new language, a language of the heart... And I think that in order to create that language, you're going to have to learn how you can go through a looking glass into another kind of perception, where you have that sense of being united to all things. And suddenly, you understand everything. (Malle & Gregory)

So let's recap¹¹. Stein tells us that if we look at others in the context of ourselves, we'll fail at empathizing and lock ourselves into a mental cell. But if all we have experienced is as living as ourselves, how can we look at anything not in the context of our own selves? Williams follows up on this idea, saying that it's therefore better to

¹⁰ It seemed right to put one of my most sci-fi fears right after the sci-fi author.

¹¹ Because I promise I'm not just throwing block quotes at you for the sake of taking up space.

admit that we can't know exactly how someone feels, that it's better to respect them enough to admit that their differences are outside of our comprehension. Huxley tells us pretty straightforwardly that it doesn't matter how much we try, we'll never be able to directly share our experiences with one another, everything has to be through indirect symbols. And Gregory dreams of the impossible, a language that lacks symbols, one that allows for us to transcend Stein's prison cells to truly speak with and be with one another as a whole. But until that magical, impossible language is invented, the message of all of this is, ironically, fairly clear-- it doesn't matter how much you try, you will never really be able to understand another person's emotion. You can't see the pictures in their heads or feel the particular sensations of each feeling. You can't relive their memories or experience their thought patterns. Try as you might, you'll never know exactly what someone's feeling when they say that they feel scared, or nervous, excited, or strained, or annoyed. No matter how flowery or plain our language is we can't ever completely understand one another's experiences.¹² Your definitions of these feelings are based off of your own experiences and perceptions and biology. And the rest of us have no idea what those are even like.

¹² An extremely present example; How I feel, right now, sitting with my feet up in this chair while my boyfriend cooks dinner, or how I'm feeling right now, sitting in the library, is incomprehensible to you. You don't know how the smells in the kitchen are affecting me, how this other girl sitting across from me is making me feel. I can say words like hungry or curious, but what does that even mean to you? Do we even really think that these words mean the same thing?

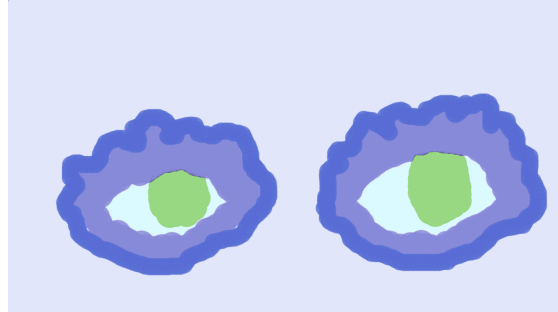


Fig 7 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Being Fake* (2018), looping animation

I'm sorry I'm being such a downer with all of this. I feel like I'm negating what hundreds of artists before me have tried to do, whenever they've tried to make a piece that communicates either their own feelings or another's. For example, take Kathe Kollwitz's sculpture *The Grieving Parents*, a work in which she attempts to represent the grief of her generation as they ask forgiveness for having led their sons into World War I (Prelinger 132). The sentiment behind this piece is beautiful and harrowing and tragic, but if radical empathy is impossible does it mean this piece is meaningless? In an attempt to show the feelings of many, did Kollwitz isolate herself in her grief even more? Or there are pieces like Sophie Calle's *Take Care of Yourself*, in which Calle asks 107 women to interpret a breakup letter in whichever way is most relatable to them (and is therefore nearly the direct inverse of my own project). If this piece is an attempt at a therapeutic connection with other human women who had experienced similar pain, was it all just a colossal waste of time? None of these women can explain to Calle what the writer meant. None of them can even feel exactly what Calle is feeling. So what's the point?



Fig 8 Kathe Kollwitz, *The Grieving Parents* (1932), sculpture. Now located in the Vladslo German war cemetery near Vladslo, Diksmuide, West Flanders, Belgium.



Fig 9 Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself* (2009), installation view, Paula Cooper Gallery

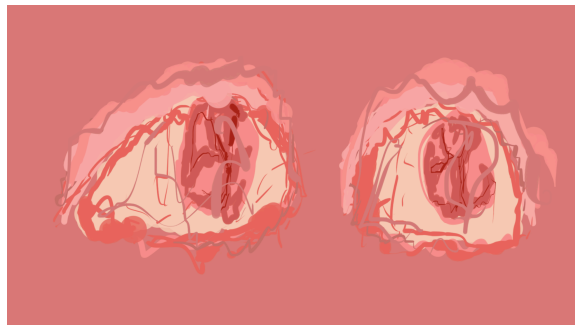


Fig 10 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Raw Meat* (2018), looping animation¹³

Strangely enough¹⁴, it's the fine print of British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstien's logic that saves me from tumbling into contemplative despair:

¹³ Because I feel raw right now. I might not be able to know exactly what they're thinking but these artists can really make you feel something.

“Could someone understand the word ‘pain’, who had never felt pain? – Is experience to teach me whether this is so or not? – And if we say ‘A man could not imagine pain without having sometime felt it’ – how do we know? How can it be decided whether it is true?”¹⁵ (Wittgenstein 315)

Hurray! If things weren’t weird enough before, we’ve now got a paradox on our hands! This is where, in my opinion, things get really interesting and less tragic. While interviewing my subjects¹⁶, I spent most of my time assuming that I had no idea how they really felt about their fears, that their experiences were all different and distant and completely out of my reach. However, this paradox reminds us that this might not be so—maybe all of my interviewees feel the exact same thing when they’re afraid that I do when I hear their stories. Maybe all of our perceptions and associations of fear are the exact same. Language can’t prove it, nothing can prove it until, by some miracle, mindreading becomes possible.

So this is the territory that I occupy—the territory of knowing absolutely nothing.



Fig 11 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Going Insane* (2018), looping animation

¹⁴ At least to me it seems strange. I apparently don’t know how you feel about it (unless you’ve already read the rest of this page, in which case maybe I do know how you feel about it?)

¹⁵ to paraphrase; if you can’t know how I feel, I can’t know how you feel. So I can’t know that you don’t feel exactly how I’m feeling right now—as far as I know, we could be feeling the exact same thing. I have no way of proving that we are not (McNabb).

¹⁶ I hadn’t yet come across this paradox. It was a simpler time.

It's an interesting place to be.

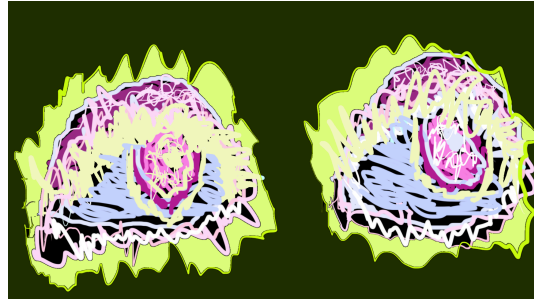


Fig 12 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Electricity* (2018), looping animation

Personally, I believe that everyone feels things differently, that my perception of being afraid of electricity is completely different than the person who told me about it. But maybe, just maybe, someone who sees my illustration of being afraid of electricity will feel the exact same as my original interviewee did, even if while making it I felt completely differently from how that first person did. Maybe this will happen even if I took that original fear and made it into something different, something that I could understand based on my own experiences and my relationship with that original person and a million other factors. My mind might have taken their words and created new images out of them that are uniquely mine, but maybe by some miracle those images would have the ability to invoke that original feeling to someone else. Or maybe this new person will take my version of it and reinterpret it to form their own, one that could be miles away from the original feeling of fear. Maybe they'll feel the exact same as I do. Maybe they'll show it to someone else who will feel the exact same as I do. We don't know, and we never will¹⁷.

¹⁷ Or at least not until Andre Gregory's new language is invented. That will be cool.

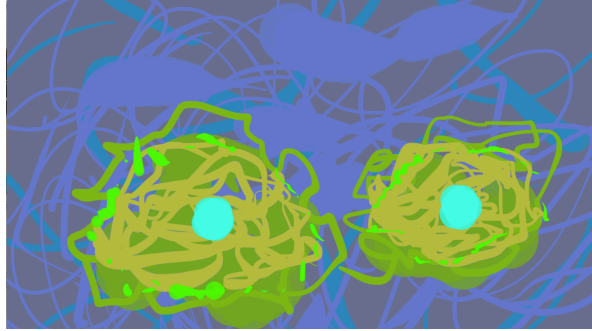


Fig 13 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Losing It In Public* (2018), looping animation¹⁸

¹⁸ Sorry if my paper makes you feel like you're going to lose it

PART 3¹⁹.

Why fears? Why eyes?

I'm interested in fear, mostly because I'm afraid of basically everything ever. I have a car, but I don't drive it because driving is scary. I'm afraid to tell people that I have a car but I don't drive it because driving is scary because they will judge me.²⁰ Fears are interesting, and they're often terribly irrational, which creates ripe subject matter for thinking about how communication and empathy are flawed—we can talk all we want about my irrationality, but you'll never understand how my overall concept of fear is different from yours (unless you do—see the discussion in part 2). I find fear to be something terribly relatable, and this grounds me in a project that is about how I will never be able to understand anything that another person feels. At the very least, I can understand that fears are fears. I have them, you have them. They vary.

¹⁹ Yes, I know this third part seems really short compared to the last one. Sorry, I would write more but I've been cursed with a 3000 word limit. But there's a sort of odd poetry in that, don't you think? That I've been limited in my ability to communicate in my paper that's trying to communicate my research for a project that's about communication?

²⁰ I'm afraid that you're judging me right now for the privilege of being scared of things like people judging me when there are obviously so many bigger things to be afraid of, like how many people die each year in car accidents, or that I could be randomly shot on the street.

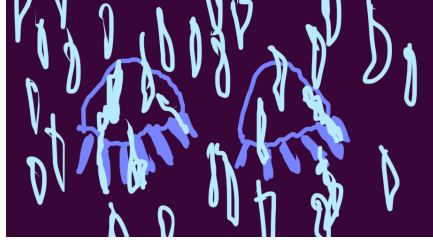


Fig 14 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Carwashes* (2018), looping animation²¹

A few examples of how this is understood between artists; Fran Krause runs a blog called *Deep Dark Fears*, where he illustrates his reader's deepest, darkest fears through a process that's not that different from my own (Gragert). His style of illustration is simple and charming, his characters are helpless victims in an uncaring world where bad things simply happen to them. His drawings say things like, "hahahaha, you tried to stay by your parents so that just in case they ever died you would die too! But what if you stayed by them for all that time and they managed to die without you anyway? Sucks to suck, doesn't it?" His style is humorous and somewhat mocking, perhaps because he never met his interviewees in person.



Fig 15 Fran Krause, *Apologies to Buster Keaton* (2018), digital illustration

²¹ Yes. Fear of carwashes. Not cars. Carwashes.



Fig 16 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Immigrants* (2018), looping animation²²

Yuko Shimizu, meanwhile, consistently presents fear as water. If you look through her work, nearly every time she has to illustrate fear she uses water as a metaphor. She's admitted to severe hydrophobia and blames that for why fear is visualized as water for her, but I can't help but wonder if every time she feels fear she feels a sensation of drowning (Shimizu). Is that how she experiences fear? Can one fear affect how all others are experienced?

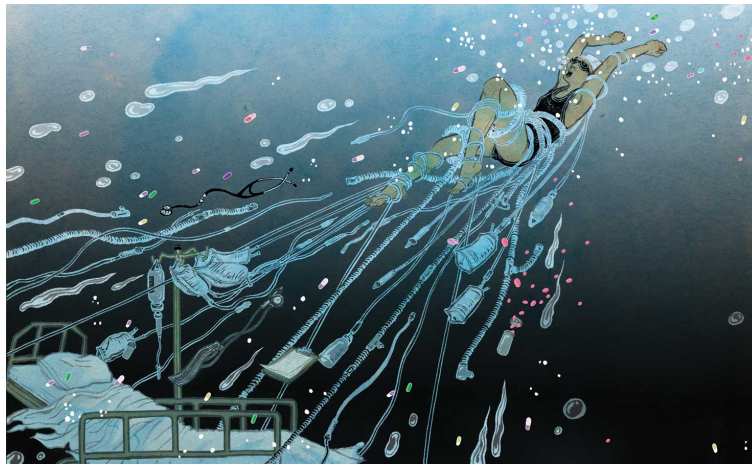


Fig 17 Yuko Shimizu, *Swimming in Fear* (2012), digital illustration

²² Of course, I can't claim that I never mocked any of my interviewee's fears. This one has a blonde eye literally slamming a dark haired eye out of the frame.

So now—why the eyes?

Since we're nearly at the end and you're probably tired of reading, I've switched to a list format. You're welcome.²³

Reason 1- My illustrating another person's fears through a method that I happen to really like reinforces the idea that everything that you tell me will be reinterpreted through what I know (and after years and years of being obsessed with drawing eyes on everything, I know how to draw eyes very well)²⁴. What I know becomes how I comprehend what you feel. It's like how when I read a book about people in a kitchen I always automatically picture a kitchen that I know, usually either my mother's or my aunt's. I'm the consistent interpreter, so of course I'm letting the fact that I'm biased show through my choice of motif. Of course my past, my experiences, my weird obsessions will bias how I illustrate how you feel.²⁵

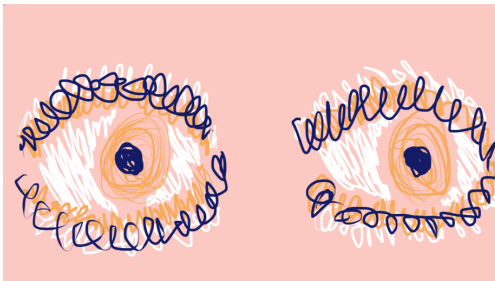


Fig 18 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Being Addicted To Running* (2018), looping animation²⁶

²³ If you're really tired of reading, I've included short answers in the footnotes. You're still welcome.

²⁴ I drew eyes on all of my school notebooks starting around age 7. Coincidentally, everyone started thinking of me as a weird girl at around age 7. My obsession with eyes could be the topic of a paper all its own.

²⁵ Short answer: I like eyes and this is my project so if I want to draw them in my project then I can, ha ha!

²⁶ Speaking of weird obsessions... this is not relatable to me.

Reason 2- The eyes are a sort of portrait of what I believe each interviewee's inner-eyes would manifest themselves as while they regard, reconsider, and/or relive their experiences of fear. When you look at my animations, you're playing the role of me, looking at my interviewee's inner eyes.²⁷



Fig 19 Caroline Schmidt, *Fear Of Wolves* (2018), looping animation

Reason 3- Tony Tasset is a sculptor who really framed my way of thinking while developing this piece. When asked about his *Eye* sculptures, he tells interviewers that they're just eyeballs, nothing more. However, people tend to extrapolate all sorts of meanings, much like how I want people to extrapolate all sorts of different meanings about my eyes (Small). Furthermore, eyeballs are pretty universal. If you're a human being, you probably have at least one eyeball. They're easy for people to project emotions onto, and to connect to. I like this a lot.²⁸

²⁷ Short answer: Because I think the whole trope of the inner eye is interesting.

²⁸ Short answer: I saw Tony Tasset's *Eye* sculpture at Laumier Sculpture Park when I was little and thought that it was super duper cool.



Fig 20 Tony Tasset, *Eye* (2007), fiberglass, resin, oil paint, steel. Laumier Sculpture Park, St. Louis

PART 4.

Conclusion

Not including captions and footnotes²⁹, we're now at about 2,700 words. Which means it's time to say goodbye. After having spent the majority of this paper speaking on the difficulty of understanding one another, I think it would be odd to act like I can now wrap things up with a neat little bow. That might sound pretentious and weird, but oh well. I'm about to graduate. This is my last chance to do something academically risky.

Empathy is weird and it makes communication really, really hard.

Also fears and eyes are interesting and relevant to empathy.

That's it! Read the appendix, please and thank you!

²⁹ Thank God. Otherwise I would have shot past the word limit long ago.

APPENDIX

A Sample Of Interview Monologues and My Footnotes

Fear of Robots

“I am extremely scared of robots³⁰. I was then and I am now. I don’t trust Alexa, that bitch is fake³¹. I don’t trust Siri. There have been court cases where people have subpoenaed Alexa because she’s listening at all times³². Alexa is being built by these corporations that want your data, so part of it is rational. But part of it is irrational, because I think that the robots are going to rise up and kill us³³. In high school I read a bunch of robot stories³⁴ and they scared me so much that I became nocturnal, because I was convinced that if I went to sleep in the dark the robots would get me³⁵. So I waited until light came into the room, even though I don’t know how the light would save me³⁶. I just like, like you can’t trust them. Even though we created them, robots are smarter than us³⁷. I think it’s the idea of your own creation being your downfall³⁸. I just don’t trust them. At all. We don’t know what their intentions are. AIs are so smart now that they can be programmed for one thing but do you know if they’re just doing that one thing³⁹? I don’t know, I just read enough robot stories that I believe that they’re plotting against us and that they’re planning. It’s not gonna happen yet but it will happen in our lifetime.”

³⁰ I want to laugh.

³¹ I do laugh. I feel a little bad.

³² I stop laughing.

³³ I wonder if it really is irrational.

³⁴ I think of what I read in high school and if it left an effect on me.

³⁵ There are still times when I’m afraid someone will come take me, too.

³⁶ I mean, it’s classic. Light=good. Dark=bad.

³⁷ It makes me anxious that a tiny calculator can do math better than I can

³⁸ I don’t think I want kids because I feel like they’d just betray me

³⁹ I mean, yeah you can. Through code and stuff. I don’t know, I’m not in tech.

Fear Of The Sky Burning

“One night when I was seven I woke up from a nightmare. I looked out the window and I remember the sky was bright red-- it was every night that the sky would be bright red⁴⁰, but I didn't usually wake up in the middle of the night and usually my curtains were closed. But it really looked like the sky was on fire. I was terrified because I was in my room by myself and I had never seen the sky so red before, it looked like a scene from hell. But I didn't want to wake up my parents so I kind of forced myself back to sleep. This wasn't the only time it happened, I kept waking up. But the next few times I think I realized it was more of a pattern than an individual instance⁴¹. I would wake myself up at night to peak out of the curtains⁴²; I realized the sky was always red. It scared me so much⁴³. I didn't realize it was because of the urban light pollution, I think I asked my mom, but she told me to figure it out myself⁴⁴. So I decided not to tell anymore. I think as a child because of your limited knowledge, my limited knowledge, it was just the unknown that really bothered me and the universe in space. I'd been reading all these books about the universe but I'd never really observed it myself⁴⁵ because of all the pollution. I was told about the night sky and how it was supposed to have stars but I didn't see it.”

⁴⁰ I feel like it's brighter than you remember but I don't know, maybe it really was that bright?

⁴¹ You as a little kid seem so logical thinking about fear

⁴² I see you as a child, looking out between two giant curtains at a sky from hell, wonder and curiosity and fear in your eyes

⁴³ I'm not thinking about you being scared of it, I'm thinking about you waking yourself up just to look at it with curiosity

⁴⁴ I can't imagine that. My parents loved it when I asked questions, they always encouraged me to ask more.

⁴⁵ I feel so much for you as a child in this moment

Fear Of Being Big

“I read this article online about how you could, I know this sounds crazy, hit your muscles away. I remember one night my mom heard some noises from my room. She came in and she thought I was slapping myself. I wasn’t, but I was hitting my legs. I was a runner⁴⁶ in high school, and I played soccer⁴⁷ and I had those muscles. Strong thighs⁴⁸. And I tried to stop eating but I couldn’t. I just couldn’t. There was this fear of always being judged, and always being compared, and that was just added on to my other high school anxieties. But I just remember hitting myself again and again and again. It was supposed to be a massage but it was just like hitting your muscles. I would lie on my bed and I would just be hitting. Because it’s easier to lose fat than to lose muscles. You have to have muscles turn back into fat⁴⁹ to lose them. But I have like no muscles now⁵⁰. And at that time I didn’t talk about this with anyone. It was all just me and my laptop and my head. And I trusted the internet to give me answers⁵¹, and I didn’t really have friends who I trusted with these issues. We were all just going through the same problems so it would just make it worse⁵².”

⁴⁶ repetition, one foot after another, concentration, sweat

⁴⁷ I can’t imagine you as an athlete.

⁴⁸ Now I’m picturing your thighs not as they are but as they were, and it feels too intimate

⁴⁹ I want to fact check this but I feel like that’s not relevant

⁵⁰ You laugh when you say this, but I wonder.

⁵¹ Never a good idea

⁵² that’s the thing about young female friendships—at that age, you’re sure that if they find out that you’re a flawed person they’ll all leave you to be alone

Fear Of Wolves

“When I was very little I was very scared of wolves for about a year. I would have nightmares about them all the time. Now I blame the children’s books that always had wolves as villains⁵³, they were bad. And scary. So I blame them⁵⁴. During the day it didn’t really impact me that much but at night I would get sleep paralysis⁵⁵, I was so scared that I would know that I was sleeping but I wouldn’t be able to wake up from the dream, I was that scared. It was like when you’re asleep and you can’t not believe your fears, they just become so real. Some dreams I honestly believed them when I woke up⁵⁶. There’s one where I believed that I saved my family from wolves⁵⁷, I honestly believed that that happened in real life, that they came into our house and I saved my whole family from them. I was very proud of myself for that. I was just so scared of them, all the time. I don’t think I really thought about what they would do, I guess I just thought that they would harm me or my family.

When I think of it now I feel kind of indifferent, honestly. I now realize that I was being irrational but at the time I just didn’t get that. If I saw one now in a zoo it wouldn’t scare me at all. If I saw one in person I guess my fight or flight instinct would kick in but it wouldn’t be like all my fears would come back. It’s just kind of funny to think of something you were scared of when you were little⁵⁸.”

⁵³ huh? What books were your parents reading you?

⁵⁴ You gotta blame something

⁵⁵ Oh my god, I can’t imagine having that again and again as a little kid. And you wouldn’t have known what it was either, that’s so scary.

⁵⁶ I’ve had that

⁵⁷ That reminds me of that scene from A Christmas Story, where it’s like an old western and Ralphie saves everyone

⁵⁸ I feel like I would be affected by that sleep paralysis. I wonder if you secretly are too.

Fear Of Having Diabetes Because The Cat Has Diabetes

“When I was three my cat was diagnosed with diabetes, and that made me think that I had diabetes⁵⁹. I loved my cat and I had no exposure to chronic illness before that, and now something in my life was affected by it. So I started to associate all of my similarities I had with my cat, like peeing a lot⁶⁰, with having diabetes. For a really long time I was absolutely terrified and that triggered a fear of me getting every single illness. I didn’t think anything would happen, I just told my mom that she had to take me to the doctor because I had diabetes; we had to get me on insulin⁶¹ or whatever. It was at first pretty much a fear of being sick with the same thing⁶², but then with very specific symptoms that meant specific illnesses⁶³. It’s definitely kind of since then stuck with me in my paranoia about me just vaguely being symptomatic of something, not just physically but in all ways. I have this thought, that must mean that I have this, et cetera. That’s kind of pervaded throughout my life. It’s mostly a funny story at this point, but the kind of funny story that leads to something bigger of hypochondria. It’s only slight hypochondria, like the way that everyone has⁶⁴, like, oh I have a headache, I must have cancer⁶⁵. I think it’s something that’s pretty common that’s maybe a little bit more pronounced in me. I think it’s innate, but that was the first example, the first instance.”

⁵⁹ What? Also how do you remember what age you were when you were three?

⁶⁰ I feel weird making art about this. I hate it when people use this word.

⁶¹ I picture you as a little kid just throwing around buzzwords like insulin and blood sugar

⁶² so you didn’t think you would get it from your cat? You just decided you had it?

⁶³ besides diabetes? Like was this a whole side thing?

⁶⁴ assumptions!

⁶⁵ Yeah I don’t do that

Fear Of Becoming A Rock

“I read this book when I was in 8th grade. In it, this person has a cut and they get gravel in the cut and it starts spreading throughout their whole body⁶⁶. I also don’t like skin things, they kind of freak me out, but it’s like a step above that, where it’s this fear of getting a weird skin disease and then becoming a rock⁶⁷. It just terrifies me that my skin could become gravelly and I can only now talk about it, six years later! I don’t know, the idea of becoming a stone and having my skin be infected with gravel and spreading, I just can’t! I guess I don’t see it as a thing that can actually happen but if I get a cut or something I get really nervous that I’m going to get an infection or something and that there’s going to be dirt in it or something or it’s going to look like that, the texture of gravel. It just freaks me out and I don’t want that texture on me. I guess I don’t really think that it’s going to happen, I’m just very specific about how I like clean cuts⁶⁸ and stuff like that. I tried telling my sister about it but I couldn’t talk about it, I couldn’t verbalize why it freaked me out so much. It just freaked me out so much. I made her read the passage in the book and was like, isn’t this the most horrifying thing you’ve ever heard? I was really freaked out about it for a week. My family kind of thought it was funny⁶⁹. But I was so freaked out by it. But now I can talk about it. But for a long time I couldn’t talk about it without squirming. Just talking about it, I feel really flustered⁷⁰. Yeah, it makes me nervous.”

⁶⁶ I know exactly what book you’re talking about, I read it when I was in middle school and googled it like two weeks ago

⁶⁷ apparently this is actually a thing, where your body starts healing itself with bone instead of skin, and I am definitely not telling you this

⁶⁸ I can’t help it, I’m thinking about self harm and the idea of a clean cut.

⁶⁹ Oh my family thinks that my fears are hilarious

⁷⁰ you’re very jittery talking about it, your words are fast

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