

in no particular order: PARANOIA (a diary of sorts)

Day 1: Apparently we have to go out and talk to strangers. Boo to that. Now I have to come up with a plan. List some approach strategies and practice smiling in the bathroom mirror. Imagine all the things that could possibly go horribly wrong and then find all solutions to all hypothetical social dilemmas. I'm gonna be like one of those survey people I always ignore and speed away from in the mall when they call out to me. Can't I just peacefully shop without anyone trying to make eye contact with me.

You are a confident person.

You are a confident person.

You are a confident person.

You can talk to people.

You can talk to people.

You can talk to people.

operation: reject all discouraging thoughts.

Walmart Survey Mission Guidelines:

1. Approach at least one man. Why I find men more intimidating to approach I'm not entirely sure but today is not the day to do a psychoanalysis of of arbitrary gender prejudices I only just now find myself vaguely aware of.

2. It seems I'm not able to approach groups of people.

3. It's easier to approach people when they aren't looking at you.

4. I must look hella weird predatorily perusing this Walmart right now

5. I think we just passed that one dude for third time. He's looking at us weird. He's onto us. Onto what in particular, I'm not sure but I'm starting to feel as suspicious of a person as he seems to believe I am.

6. Smile

7. Don't smile too much.

9. Act like mom. She loves talking to strangers in grocery stores..

8. When a target is acquired simply ask questions on the sheet.

Mission Debrief: I talked to two random people in Walmart today and it wasn't absolutely horrible. I don't feel too bad about it. Though, that is partially due to the fact that I'm forcing myself not to think about it. If I let myself think about it, I'm certain I will find something trivial to obsess over.

The one lady my partner and I interviewed said the the farms are doing bad and she's worried about them. To be honest I've never thought much about farms. What was grown here in Iowa before there were miles of corn? It reminds me of that time when I visited my uncle in Kenya and we drove past miles and miles of mangoes and my father old me they all belonged to Dole. They had apparently bought up land through the government which undermined and displaced all the local farmers. Even entire undocumented villages lost their land. The situation for previous private owners became so desperate they now had to work for wages on land that used to be theirs.

He told me that this sort of large scale farming is what brings us lots of food at very low prices, that all of our conveniences come at a real cost, but we love the luxury anyway.

I didn't live in a world where people talked often about the plight of farmers and yet it's consumers like me who create the market demand that leads to these sorts of issues. Ethical business practices often cost more than twice as much as unethical business practices.

One of my friends believes ardently in the free market. She believes government involvement always screws things up for everyone involved. I don't know enough to say whether I believe that's true or not, but I wonder how ethics plays out on a market that answers to few laws beyond supply and demand.

I wonder why they don't talk about small towns on the news. My friends from high school can be so well versed on the economics of this urban area or the politics of that urban area. It almost seems as if to us city kids the rest of the country just doesn't exist. I get the feeling that when city people think of what America is they only think of cities. I'm starting to realize how dangerous of an oversight it is.

What do the people out here in rural Iowa see when they think of what America is?

What do tech people think of when they think about what America is?

We all live in the same country and yet I'd bet we all see a different country. What might these differences in perception mean for the future of our nation? Is it safe for each one of us to simply go about our own lives without paying any mind to the other side? Is it healthy for a country to be so ignorant of itself?

Day 2: I have a theory that because I've grown up with tech I must have somewhere along the way lost a sense of wonder about the world. Whenever the speakers come up on the big screen and interact with us, on an intellectual level I understand that this whole virtual classroom business is a pretty amazing thing but yet I can't for the life of me be impressed.

The world seems so small when a single text message can eat up thousands of miles in a single second you'd think we'd all be gung-ho and "one world" and stuff but in reality despite all this one can actually feel more isolated than before.

New values eclipse old ones and people end up getting lost in the modern translation of the world. The speaker on the screen said that any business that doesn't adapt will end up dying. If I was a social darwinist I might say that it's the natural way of things. I don't believe I'm of the adapt-or-die school of thought, but I can't help but feel that the world seems to work that way. Although, one could say there are a multitudes of ways in which one could adapt. Maybe adaptation doesn't always have to come in a new-eats-old manner, but perhaps also in an old-integrates-new manner as well. A total denial of new circumstances however does often seem to result into a failure to keep up. Kind of like how one might change clothes with the changing seasons but the core of our style doesn't necessarily have to be compromised. Whatever that might mean.

However, all of this tech sometimes seems less like the gradual change seasons and more like an unexpected blizzard in Texas on the first of September, and all this laughter around old dogs and new tricks turns out to be a light hearted allusion to more sinister realities.

Or maybe I'm just dramatic and preservationist by nature.

My father tried to tell me it was female sentimentalism.

I think it's a fear of death.

Most people have some sort of electronic device connected to the web and it makes us all feel like we're just as much a part of this new tech world. Hearing these people on the screen talk just a bit about what's going on behind the scenes in terms of innovation, acquisition and money moves makes me feel disoriented. How much do I really know about the direction in which this world is moving? I never thought I knew much but I'm staring to get a taste of the vastness of a world I'm not sure I like very much. Nevertheless, I enjoy the treasures they often drop into the general public so who am I to criticize.

I guess all luxuries and conveniences we enjoy as a society must be built upon some level of ruthless competition. With all this talk of dog-eat-dog and killing off your rivals I guess this is what one might call a modern battleground. Perhaps human nature hasn't changed much since the old days. Perhaps it's just our methods that have.

I've been able to keep up with the modern world in so much as I've grown up with it, but I wonder what will happen when I become an old dog, when things push so far so fast that even I become afraid and get lost in the new world translation. Maybe in the future I'll be the old lady who can't quite figure out what's going around me enough to keep a grasp on my own livelihood.

Day 3: I watched a video with some guy talking about Artificial Intelligences that can create art and it made me upset. First of all, the art wasn't even that good. Second of all, I am now officially onto the agenda of engineers to innovate the world into human obsolescence. I'm onto your plans and I don't like them. I mean what's the point. Are we just innovating for the sake of itself? I know we make living conditions better and lifespans longer, but sometimes in the throes of an existential crisis I wonder "for what"? Live better why? Live longer why? To what purpose? What will there be left to live longer to do once the machines do it all?

If one day we're able to get almost anywhere on earth without much trouble, will there even be a sense of adventure? Maybe the reason people nowadays are attracted to roller coasters is because we don't live everyday with a sense of danger the way the people of the old world did. So now we have these replacements to satisfy some primitive desire for the thrill that comes from tasting the edge of death. Will total convenience make us happier or make us bored?

Sometimes all this talk of the future makes me feel like I'm looking forward to a flashier, yet more empty world.

I see I'm starting to get real sensitive about all this automation business. I might have been one of those people who went around destroying machines in the middle of the night during the Industrial Revolution in a past life. However, I know such antics are futile, the world will progress despite my feelings, I just have to rise to the task of finding my place within whatever it becomes.