

MS1 RESEARCH: ask / interview

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## the question

The research question that I am considering is: how can I create artificial things – objects, scenarios, sensations, etc. – that are scary or uncomfortable in the same way that natural things are?

## IDEO methods

Using the IDEO method cards as a prompt I chose to approach this research question through asking five whys and conducting an extreme user interview.

### five whys

Why are natural things scary?

*Because we cannot control them, they are unpredictable, and sometimes they can hurt us.*

Why can't we control them?

*Because human beings cannot immediately influence the behavior of natural phenomena or living creatures with whom we do not know how to communicate.*

Why can't we communicate with non-human creatures?

*Our brains have evolved past using the communication techniques that most non-humans employ. We have evolved to communicate using our brains more than our bodies.*

Why is this useful from an evolutionary perspective?

*This allows us to transfer or save important knowledge across time and it allows us to build larger knowledge structures.*

Why is it important to transfer knowledge between humans over time?

*Knowledge allows us to protect ourselves from and dominate natural phenomena that otherwise makes survival difficult.*

This is a really cyclic result! I did not quite expect this line of whys to progress in the way it did.

### extreme user interview

I interviewed one potential user whom I would consider to be very at ease in the natural world. They sleep outside most of the time and rarely wear shoes, generally preferring to have as few man-made constructs – whether material or social – between themselves and the world around them as possible.

The question I asked the subject was, “what natural things do you find uncomfortable or creepy” taking the example of a spider to start. The subject replied that when they encounter an creature such as spider or snake, which moves in a unique way, they don't feel a knee-jerk sense of fear or revulsion, but rather a deep curiosity and sense of awe about how the creature achieves that motion.

After addressing how motion causes more curiosity than revulsion, we talked about the scale of natural events. This was harder to discuss and pin down. Taking the example of how a rainstorm

can be a drizzle or a flood we talked about the uncertainty of scale that accompanies natural phenomena. We concluded that the huge variation in scale of the natural world is difficult to conceptualize and can lead to fear in some situations. Some things can feel frighteningly small, like a tick or bacteria, or frighteningly large like the grand canyon or an avalanche. This aspect of fear or discomfort never really goes away, but we agreed that the more direct experience you have in the natural world, the more at home you can feel with scale of different magnitudes.

Overall, I found that my subjects conscious choice to live with fewer man-made constructs heightened their empathy for the natural world around them and led to more curiosity than fear in unknown situations. This result wasn't particularly surprising, however it was interesting to hear it articulated in such a plain way. The role of observation also felt important in their response; instead of feeling scared and turning away, their response in most situations is to observe and ask. As we observe and ask questions of the world around us we build a better sense of understanding and fear becomes less instinctive.

## expert interview

I interviewed kinetic sculptor Ed Andrews. He would say his most defining work is site specific kinetic installations. Andrews and I have worked together in the past - starting when I was 19 (we have known each other for nearly 10 years) - and I recently saw his work in Boston (like this past Friday). Two years ago he was diagnosed with Leukemia and had a brain tumor. We haven't spoken much since the beginning of the pandemic. It was really nice to catch up. He is probably the most important mentor figure in my life.

I had some questions prepared, but let conversation stray as needed. These notes have not yet been edited. The interview was conducted this morning.

### *Why is creating movement appealing to you?*

difference between life and death

a static object is not alive

even in static work there's still a kinetic element as you move around the work seems to life

I like wind power since it has the randomness, and unpredictability

sense of time comes as things move

### *Do you consider movement to be a medium?*

### *What is the difference between natural movement and artificial movement?*

natural movement has a certain unpredictability

randomness can be generated to create movement artificially, that's a grey area

important that the work is responding to something else, not just the viewer

whether the weather, movement of people

instead of building an object that you look at externally that contain everything you're supposed to perceive, you're creating a responsive system which changes depending on where it's at in time and space

20th century sculptors were looking for reality, didn't like illusion art should be about reality

machines, people talking about robots, technology

mechanical quality to the work which reflects our current reality

too many artists know what they want to do but are limited by lack of technical knowledge

### *collaboration*

collaboration is becoming more and more necessary

difficult for one person to contain the breadth of knowledge to pull off the work

creative marriages are really interesting...force multiplier

derek and jennifer were at the opening game developers...maybe on the FBI watch list

it's hard to separate yourself sometimes

a lot less stressful when you can control everything yourself

don't like being so dependent on others in collaboration

can sometimes compromise too many times and it changes the quality

works best if you know the person you're collaborating with really well

very hard to do it 'cold'

(in my own work i find it's hard to move forward before you establish a shared vocabulary about a work)

*Why would you want one over the other?*

*What is the relationship between the natural and artificial in your work?*

*What role does scale play when you're using movement?*

never thought about it in terms of scale and movement

but more about scale and context

come from a land of vastness, with a dominant horizon mind

anything in an environment like that must be oversized or even register or be noticed

from a very early stage I was working large in order to be noticeable

large 30 foot sculpture

some people think working large is silly and vain

if you're working outdoors it's incredibly necessary

indoors you just need to plan around a contained space

site specific subjectivity defines scale

go into a space and see what it's like - especially if you're creating a responsive system - you need to understand the space and what you feel needs to be responded to

a gallery is often a space which tries to cut out all outside influences, but in fact if you go there and spend time you'll find that's not the case - the Boston Ballet is behind that wall

do you go with what the gallery is trying to do, or create a system that brings those things to life

**BOOK for me to read - Robert Irwin: seeing is forgetting the name of what you're looking at**

he had a big influence on Ed,

new show makes Ed a bit uncomfortable because it's as traditional as he can get things that go on a wall

the most recent work is very therapeutic, kept my mind very occupied

*why is landscape so important to you?*

***Are there any types of movement that make you uncomfortable?***

not a type of movement that i'm attracted to

most of the movement i try to create is attempting to be beautiful

field painting is a really good exampl - a single element that moves in unison within a field

not sure about teh cocoons, wasn't the movment that was uncomfortable, but the form moving that was uncomfortable

anytime that there's a living organizm inside something that you can't see but you know is in there is a bit creepy

don't know if when it gets out would be trheating

that squirmy movement is

underwater video of a nest of eels

a bunch of crocodiles...it's just kind of creepy

it's menacing when you habe numbers

nests can be creepy since you don't know how many there are, an infestation in a sense

if movement is seemingly random then whatever it is looks more alive

suddenly something that habs't moved moves is startling

then you start getting into spookhouse territory and that cheapens the response

as soon as you have someone who things, oh you're just trying ot scare me

it has ot be something more than just to scare...attempting something beautiful

***sound and movement are stuck together***

original kinetic artist

ben ritchey kinetic sculptor

his work was almost silent

***outdoor vs indoor***

kinetic outdoor work doesn't really translate to the gallery

how do you translate that into indoors

***about talking***

good to talk about this stuff, because it resets the clock in a way

kinetics have always been central and i just produced the most static work ever

...it's always cyclic

just put together a 3d printer and it makes the lightest little objects you've ever seen

going to be great for making kinetic work

looking forward ot mixing 3D and arduino

*some advice*

strengthening connections is important no matter where you are  
asking if someone needs any help is always

the same people who are going to reccomend me for a job

can build a lot of respect and appreciation through my own work

*What things in the natural world scare you?*