Pandemic of Society

Today the world is consumed by an overwhelming dread; every new threat, danger, and dis-ease is seen and portrayed with the utmost fever and intensity throughout every media venue. Media outlets seem to be no longer simply willing to simply portray the severity of the dangers that are confronting society, but insist on expounding upon the excitement and spectacle of the obstacles that are threatening us[1]. No, instead there is this delight in displaying images from such an uncompromising standpoint that they verge on the hysteric, these images must somehow try to justify their existence through the tenuous thread of the public's desire for mass consumption. Yet is it this reactionary proliferation of images that has lead to the destruction, and reclassification, of cultural identification. Constantly scanning the airwaves media outlets bombard their viewers with a series of ever faster, ever more up- spectacular visions of what is happening out there; creating the need, the desire, and the evermore-present institution of fearful reaction to the *event*. An event that, however seemingly innocent, might, in the end, actually create a sensation, or provoke a movement. Thus the more spectacular the reaction, the more distorted and corrupted the 'enemy' can (dis-ease, or otherwise) become.[2] Exemplary of this condition of media hysteria is the constant bombardment of the coverage of new forms of 'influenza' - complete with coded scientific names most people will not understand[3] - and production of sensational news articles that proclaim that these drug resistant viruses are as dangerous as terrorism[4]. Endlessly feeding on the fears of the unknown, of silent and deadly killers that lurk somewhere in the dark. With such proclamations, it is little wonder when people start searching for ways to disassociate themselves from the very fabric of the society. Suddenly nothing seems safe; there is nothing and nowhere that is left to claim as a safe-haven; constantly searching, hoping to find a place that might be safe, might be good enough to call home.[5] No, instead of searching for new solutions to ease this dis-ease, instead of commanding a platform to reunite the network of scattered individuals attentively clinging to the words being

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[1] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p56 "*The news value is, in short, not determined by the seriousness of the danger it is more important for the danger to be 'exciting'.*"

[2] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p 47 "*Today, when thinking moves too quickly, when it is fearful and reactionary, it declares that the most commonly recognized forms of identification are indispensable and claim that the destinies proper to them are used up or perverted, whether it be: "people", "nation", "church", or "culture", not to mention the confused "ethnicity" or the tortuous "roots". There is a whole panorama of membership and property, here, whose political and philosophical history has yet to be written: it is the history of the representation-of-self as the determining element of the originary concept of self.*"

[3] Gallagher, J. 2014. Q&A: H7N9 bird flu. [online] 23 Jan 2014. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22107104 [Accessed: 6 Mar 2014].

Gallagher, J. 2013. "Unpredictable pandemics' warning. [online] 14 Nov 2013. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-24926835 [Accessed: 6 Mar 2014].

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These articles all depict the outbreak of bird flu, at various stages, over the past year.

[4] Walsh, F. 2013. Antibiotics resistance 'as big as terrorism' - medical chief. [online] 11 March 2013. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-21737844 [Accessed: 6 Mar 2014].

This article highlights the affects that misuse of antibiotics has the effectiveness combating the viruses and the dangers of continued misappropriations.

[5] Virilio, P. and Richard, B. 2012. *The administration of fear*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). p10-11 "*The administration of fear is politics without a polis; the administration of people who are no longer at home anywhere, constantly squeezed and dreaming of a somewhere else that does not exist. The administration of fear is a world discovering that there are things to be afraid of but still convinced that more speed and ubiquity are the answer.*"

flung out across the airwave; this too becomes a storyline where people are have disintegrated behind sterile masks[6], paralyzed by a fear of things, these microscopic organisms that can neither be seen nor felt nor controlled. However, is this really the *thing* that we fear, or is this fear of dis-ease a ruse for a much larger *epidemic* that has swept through our cities?

In truth, our lives today are far more secure from pressures of survival than at almost any other time in history; our technological breakthroughs have granted us a level of security, too much perhaps, that frees us from the everyday burden of risk. Vast majorities of people no longer struggle to maintain the simple necessities of life; we have options, or at least are presented with an idea that makes us think that we have do. And, this security has driven us mad, allowing constant speculation on these perpetual hidden dangers of historically minor proportions[7], yet we refuse to believe that this next one will not be the next 'big one'.[8] In fact, as is often the case,

> "Fear tells us very little indeed about the object of that fear. The fact that a person or a society does certain things to protect itself against a danger says little about the nature of that danger. Our fear probably says more about us than about what we fear. That we fear something does not necessarily mean that we *ought* to fear it."[9]

That something is to be feared is not always the question that needs to be asked, but how and what the response to that object is, those are the more important questions. Yes, there will always be new dis-eases, or old dis-eases that find a new way to come back, and society will have to combat those dangers. Continuing to look for and fight against these *foreign bodies* however, often is not the question that we are supposed to be asking. The question of what these *foreign bodies* really are, and how this affects our perception tend to be far more important questions, yet these are questions that we tend to willfully neglect to ask. Whether these real questions are not asked because it is easier to ignore the actual social problems they imply or because they are harder (more precarious) to answer is not the problem. No, the dilemma lies in that,

> "The fight against the causes of fear itself causes fear. A crucial part of our political freedom consists precisely in living our lives without too much fear."[10]

Although a harsh term, perhaps, propaganda, is the best and possibly the only, way to describe the way in which the media utilizes the images associated with new outbreaks or events, for a story (even from the most *objective* source) is told from a certain point of view, and these images are plastered over and over again across every source possible until it becomes questionable where we stand. Media intentionally overloads and saturates the senses to the point of either panic or

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[6] Graham, J. 2013. In Flu Season, Use a Mask. But Which One?. [online] 16 Jan 2013. Available at:
  http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/16/in-flu-seasonuse-a-mask-but-which-one/?ref=swineinfluenza
  [Accessed: 12 Mar 2014].
The premise of this article is who, when and why people need to wear facemask during flu season. Largely the article tries
  to point out how influenza spreads, and what actually would protect against the transference of any disease.

[7] CDC Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2014. *Deaths from Selected Causes, by 10-year groups, race, and sex: Death-registration states, 1900-1932, and United States 1933-1939*. [online] Available at:
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/hist290a_0039.pdf [Accessed: 17 Mar 2014].
This report outlines the number of people and diseases that killed individuals within the US in the early part of the 20th century. Statistically, influenza outbreaks in the early 20th century were far deadlier than today.

[8] Svendsen, L. F. H. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p20 *" We live lives that are so protected that we can focus our attention on a series of potential dangers that, as far as can be ascertained, will never be realized in our lives. Our fear is a by-product of luxury. But that does not make it any less real."*

[9] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p124

[10] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p123

desensitization, the choice between knowing what is real and comprehending what is happening becomes blurred among these ever-changing images.

With this ever-changing media barrage, our perception of how to view and envision life has changed; this saturation of images has affected everything, from the way in which we see each other to the way we view city life, therefore it has altered the way in which we design within it. Coupled with the infiltration of media, animation and technology into general culture this change in perception has forced a new method of design and design culture.[11] There is a constant need to move, or present the notion of movement within every aspect of life. This phenomenon of restlessness is constantly driving design to look to ways of creating, of envisioning a static medium within a dynamic, elastic world. Yet, with this perpetual motion of imagery, we have been left wondering if,

> "... we who are supposed to say *we* as if we know what we are saying and *who* we are talking about."[12]

No, this judgment is not one that we are willing to give easily, or possibly, is not even one that we seek to find. The is question where in this system we should try to stand, or if indeed, there is a place to stand. Are *we* in this together or are *we* alone? How do *we* look at each other across this divide when we are unsure of how to interact or react to a threat? Where does our humanity really lie? Traditionally, the architectural image was static, fixed, unrelated to either time or the actual space. The image of a building could be created before, during, or after its creation, it was not necessarily related to the process, to the idea of what the building was to become or could be. Now, culture demands that the image moves, that it is something that can be manipulated, definitive, yet transient. The image has become one of motion; technology has allowed it to become alive, to show duration and progression. No longer is the architectural image one of pure representation, but one of process; it is unstable and uncertain.[13] The image must reveal itself, to simply show itself as it is, is no longer its purpose, because nothing is stable anymore, nothing is that certain. The object is as flexible as the events that surround it, constantly in flux, constantly variable, constantly changing.

> "The architectural image now operates in a dynamic space; it is endless, never finished. The architectural image can always be altered, translated, expanded into other forms of digital media. This method is active and dynamic rather than static."[14]

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[11] Tierney, T. 2007. *Abstract space*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis. p14 *" Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) and animation disseminated through mass media, film, music videos, videos games, and advertising inevitably infiltrated architectural modes of seeing and designing."*

[12] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p xiii *"This is the "earth" we are supposed to "inhabit" today, the earth for which the name Sarajevo will become the martyr-name, the testimonial-name: this is us, we who are supposed to say we as if we know what we are saying and who we are talking about. This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, a lacking in the meaning of world."*

[13] Tierney, T. 2007. *Abstract space*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis. p14-17 *" The traditional definition of the architectural image excluded any relatively between time and space; that is to say, a static image was an immobile, temporally fixed image. In actuality, all forms that exist in space also unfolded in time, and conversely, forms that develop in time will simultaneously revel themselves in space. Moreover, with animation software, time was relative, as it could now be manipulated in both its sequencing and its duration. As a result of these ontological differences, the architectural image is being destabilized; and along with it, its metaphysics. If the analogue image was a representation of something that already existed or could have but now is considered part of a conceptual process or an investigation, that we are left with contingency, instability, and uncertainty."*

[14] Tierney, T. 2007. *Abstract space*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis. p153

To remain still, motionless is to be incomplete. The question then becomes how these architectural images affect the interaction and identification of individuals within a city. An image, in and of itself creates distance; distance, both physical and perceived, becomes the filter through which images of culture are to then to be interpreted.

With distance, conflicts start to arise between dis-ease, and communication. For on the one hand, we possess the inability to articulate our discomfort in the world despite the fact that the terrain is permeated with images, while on the other hand that discomfort is virtually bellowed from isolated locations. We, in essence, lack the ability to vocalize our understanding of events; lack the ability to convey information in such a manner as to make these events comprehensible to the vast majority of people outside of our isolated communities, social groups, or locations.[15] For distance is no longer a simple matter of physical space, the instantaneous nature of media brings the images of the conflicts to the forefront, but *we* are still separated from *them* by a screen. We have allowed ourselves to become accustom to the this idea that images, ideas, and locations are mere things that can be flipped through at random, that we can choose what and how long to stay captured under their spell. We have broken the plane between contacts, we no longer understand the notion that,

> "All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. *Contact* is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection."[16]

Our perception is thus gravely altered, filtered, and distorted through this lens, by the banal fact that we have removed ourselves from the situation; paradoxically people have come to represent everyone, except myself. These *people* are a generic, dispersed group somewhere out there, somewhere *I* am not; they represent another *thing*, they have an identity that is somehow quite different from mine, and somehow we revel in this difference even though it well... it is a contradiction.[17] Thus the idea that this is not happening here, how can this happen here, lies at the

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[15] Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2001. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. p 54 *"This is certainly one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication,* **struggles have become all but incommunicable.**

*This paradox of incommunicability makes it extremely difficult to grasp and express the power posed by the struggles that have emerged. We ought to be able to recognize that what the struggles have lost in extension, duration, and communicability they have gained in intensity.***"**

This section lists several isolated revolts, riots, etc. of the 20th century that never, or at least do not appear, to have lead to a large global or national change. The events themselves were spectacles, but they did not lead to lasting change. So, were they effective?

[16] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p5 *" From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other.* **Contact** *is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If "to come into contact" is to begin to make sense of one another, then this "coming" penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating "milieu"."*

There is no longer a concept of connection, or of meaningful interaction between people, places, and events. Images have replaced the static ideas, and more than that, there is a fear that these images are always subject to deceitful manipulations.

[17] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p7 *""People" clearly designates the mode of "one" by which "I" remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of "people". In any case, this setting apart [**mise à l'ecart**] does not occur without recognition of identity. "People" clearly states that we are all precisely* **people**, *that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common "kind", but of a kind that has its existence only as numerous, dispersed, and indeterminate in its generality. This existence can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those "people(s)", or "a guy", "a girl", "a kid")."*

very heart of the argument that there is a difference between places, between people and that somehow *those* people are very much different that *these* people. That the images on the screen that can be flipped past with wanton disregard are somewhere much farther removed than they really are; there is no need to have to feel any connection, because the click of a button or the turning of a page can lose this connection. Therefore, the question becomes one of choice, after all,

> "Identity is by definition not an absolute distinction, removed from everything and, therefore, distinct from nothing: it is always the other of another identity...Difference *as such* is indiscernible."[18]

This question of identity is precisely the question of image that architecture must try to confront, yet this problem is, perhaps, the most challenging. The fact that architectural image is now, with the use of technology, so variable, and unstable, makes the definition of identity at once easy and complex. The possibility of becoming created by the media cultural has redefined the architectural project, instead of originating from the notion of predictability the architectural project is now one of chance and change. Adaptation and differentiation have become the defining characteristics, the notion of monumentality and a single static form can no longer exist in the realm of architectural design. Architecture defines a city's identity through perceived movement, by becoming the project highlights a process, instead of defining a static form.[19] However, this instability is an asset, it must be, otherwise architecture, and the image it creates will not define, cannot define anything. An image creates the perception of an idea; it tries to answer a question, whether or not the image was formed with that question in mind. That is as true with a building, or an image of a building, as it is with a media image. Therefore, the question not just where do *we* stand but are there any differences between *us*, and if that is the case, how can that difference be justified, is as pertinent to ask about the stories the media portrays as it is about a building. So, if these images of dis-ease, which is, in and of itself, an entity that does not care who or what or how it *infects,* are allowed to filter carelessly past our vision, then we must begin to allow ourselves the opportunity to reflect on how we should react. How can our reaction to this infection (of our bodies, our minds and the media) be better? How have these reactions affected the way in which we perceive the world in which we reside? Without such reflection there is little left but fear. Fear that,

> "...prevents precisely that which could cause it to diminish: human contact. Fear and mistrust became self-perpetuating."[20]

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[18] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p149 " *By definition, the **mélange** is not a simple substance to which place and nature could be assigned, to which one could lay claim as such, and which, as a result, one could plainly eulogize. Identity is by definition not an absolute distinction, removed from everything and, therefore, distinct from nothing: it is always the other of another identity "He is different - like everyone" (Bertolucci's **Last Tango in Paris**).Difference **as such** is indiscernible. Neither **mélange** nor identity can be pinned down. They have always already taken place already gone, or always already still to come. And they are **in common**, shared by all, ,between all, through one another."*

[19] Tierney, T. 2007. *Abstract space*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis. p19 " *If architecture is now contingent, uncertain, unstable, it is because the image, which was once conceived as fixed, now exhibits differentiation or change. Media theorist Pierre Levy also suggests that the virtual distinguishes itself from the possible through a movement of becoming-other or heterogenesis. If an entity becomes-other, it then must be outside the realm of predictability. This is important, because it challenges our logical assumptions of causality. Can an ordered structure incorporate unpredictable change, differentiation or becoming-other? I suggest that through movement, through differentiation, an ordered structure can alter itself. Therefore, a static or fixed description will no longer suffice. This also precludes the definition of the virtual as an entity, much less as an illusion. If the virtual becomes the virtual through movement, it is more accurately a process.*"

[20] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p 98 "*Fear prevents precisely that which could cause it to diminish: human contact. Fear and mistrust became self-perpetuating.*"

Continuing to allow these fears, misconceptions, and mistrusts of people and dis-eases only causes farther isolation and prejudice. Society must learn to accept that there are differences, and that these differences do not make it weaker, that they can be accounted for, and that they can be included.[21]

  An event, be that event a tragedy, a triumph, a pandemic, etc., equalizes a society, it creates a story, an image for people to grasp at or run from. The reduction of people to numbers, to mere statistics in stories and reports, might on the surface appear to disassociate the dis-ease from *us*, but then are we not all simply statistics? Calculations, and facts spread across the page with a splattering of images do not remove us from the chaos, but merely highlight the fact that we are one of many, that that is a but a version of what this dis-ease can do. Yet, such cynicism and fearfulness do not allow an individual or a society the chance to move forward;
  "Without trust you would not be able to do anything at all."[22]
Nor will blind faith, not that blind faith is the same as trust, yet there is a time, and a degree to which everyone must agree to let go of something and have a measure of trust in each other. That is not to assert that there is a way to know, or predict the future. Everyday some mishap, however banal, occurs in the most ordinary of places. Nevertheless, the rational way for society to function is to agree to act based on a predictable future, to trust in a network of others, to risk something for others as they take the same risks for you. These actions do not have to be, in and of them, rational, it is the simple act of agreeing to take the risk that is rational. Then it becomes possible to work together as a unit, to strive towards a common goal,[23] to finally include the notion *I* within the notion of *people* and integrate ourselves within the larger network of the populace. [24] That is perhaps the aspect that we find to be the most difficult, the one of letting go of *our* control, allowing the dis-ease of society to penetrate our lives and become part of who we are so that *we* might exist together. However, that is what it means to live in a society, to live in a city. To let go of control and to allow oneself the dis-ease of relating with others, to establish boundaries of trust that must be broken and punctuated, to contend with *foreign bodies* seen and unseen. Dissolving behind masks,

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[21] Gallagher, J. 2011. Gay men blood donor ban to be lifted. [online] 8 September 2011. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-14824310 [Accessed: 18 Mar 2014].
This article is discussing the decision to lift the ban on homosexual men's ability to donate blood that was established in the 1980s due to the fear that AIDS was a homosexual disease. The article highlights some of the irrational arguments against the banning of homosexual men from donating blood, as well as highlighting the notion of a fear of a group of people based on a disease that people, even today do not fully want to understand.

[22] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p93

[23] Svendsen, L. F. H. and Irons, J. 2008. *A philosophy of fear*. London: Reaktion Books. p97 "*To act on the basis of trust is to act as if a given rationally predictable future will come about, but without being carried out predictions on a completely rational basis. It can, however, prove most rational to choose this less 'rational' procedure, because making reliable risk calculations can be a highly resource-demanding activity. People who trust each other can interact with fewer hindrances than those to be found in a climate of mistrust, where a considerable apparatus of formal regulations and contracts has to be in place.*"

[24] Nancy, J. and Richardson, R. D. 2000. *Being singular plural*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press. p7 "*"People" clearly designates the mode of "one" by which "I" remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of "people". In any case, this setting apart [**mise à l'ecart**] does not occur without recognition of identity. "People" clearly states that we are all precisely **people**, that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common "kind", but of a kind that has its existence only as numerous, dispersed, and indeterminate in its generality. This existence can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those "people(s)", or "a guy", "a girl", "a kid").*"

or hiding behind walls does not change the fact that in the end there will always be a *we* that *I* must interact with. So in the end the question is really is, where shall *we* stand?

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