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Sustainable Systems

Response to “Building For The Next Big Storm” & “The Quality of Fear”

“Building For The Next Big Storm” by Alan Feuer dissects New York’s history of “centuries of misguided development policy”, and explains the damaging effects of building against nature instead of in harmony with it. The article points in the direction of a future of better architectural and investment choices in relation to the Bjarke Ingel Group’s “Big U” project for New York City.

Before reading this article I had no idea that the city and Consolidated Edison had reached an agreement for the company to flood-proof their equipment without raising costs. I also had never hear of the devastating hurricanes and flooding that hit the city during the 60’s nor that there are 90,000 buildings at risk. Although there is still a very long way to go, I think that the Rebuild by Design projects will make a difference. As it is said, “The problem is that the next disaster maybe nothing like Hurricane Sandy. It could be an awful heat wave, for example…” It is difficult, if not impossible, to prepare for something without know what it is going to be. However, the fact that we have begun to realize that building barriers is not the way to go, we must build ecosystems and “invite the water in”. The Bjarke Ingel Group’s approach to this is visionary and extremely progressive because they are working in base of exactly this principle, they are creating something that will be functional and flexible, and will evolve along side nature instead of attempting to prevent the inevitable.

In regards to my final project, I want to demonstrate that expansion can only go as far as nature’s growth. It is self-righteous and idiotic to keep developing at the expense of the things that gave us life and sustain that same life. As advanced and dominant as we think we are, in this time of crisis we are living in, it is essential to take a step back and see ourselves and this planet for what they are, instead of what we think them to be. I am thinking of doing this by taking my audience into a physical journey of realization of the depth and interconnectedness of an object that is considered mundane. By having them engage in a mindful experience with the object and showing them the implications of it’s production, as well as its end when it is thrown “away”, I wish to create appreciation and value for something that would normally be considered “easily replaceable” or even “insignificant”.

Moreover. “The Quality of Fear” which David Brooks illustrates so well, is one of the main obstacles that we must over come in the journey towards becoming pro-active and acceptant of Climate Change and other similar complicated realities. Although the article focuses on irrational fear concentrated around Ebola, there is definitely a lesson to be learned. The fact that people are so fearful of something that is so unlikely to affect them yet disregard something as present as Climate Change is dumbfounding. It talks about the cultural and social barriers that we must undo in order for people to understand issues of a much grander scale. People are terrified of globalization because it alters and radically modifies the comfort of the local realities they have created for themselves. It is much easier to think on an immediate scale, to focus on what is physically tangible and present. Social media and instant news have made this almost impossible today, and people are forced to face things, cultures, people, diseases, wars and conflicts that they do not fully comprehend. However, this can still be ignored until, like Ebola, the foreign component infiltrates their local reality, ending up with “ an emotional spiral that develops its own momentum”. That is the problem with global warming, that as long as it does not directly an immediately disturb people’s circle of comfort they can still chose to block it out, to live in denial of what is according to them, “far away”.

As previously explained above, I will attempt to deal with the issues of fear by being completely realistic. I want people to confront a single object, immediately, directly, but through it, to become aware of the greater realities that surround it. I do not want to provoke fear, but consciousness, and with that consciousness comes the acceptance of fear, but a fear that hopefully motivates and activates as opposed to one that paralyzes and prevents.