

The paradoxes raised by Australia's geographical location, its cultural attachment to the West, and the composition of its population also contributed to the development of my ideas. The Greek, Macedonian, Serbian, and Italian families in our street all considered 'home' to be their country of origin. These continental emigres were deliberately targeted by the Australian government for their suitability to work in the Victorian climate. Non-Indigenous Australians were people who moved, got out or were displaced for some reason or another. Perhaps they eloped from Ireland in an illegitimate affair, were refugees from World War II trying to find a new life, were attracted by new opportunities such as the gold rush or were incarcerated when Australia was a prison. Until more recently, most migrants to Australia were people who wanted or needed to move away from their roots for economic, social or political reasons. Currently, the population of Melbourne is purported to be 50% Asian.

The successful containment of public health risks depends on the laboratory capacities and epidemiological surveillance systems of the affected country. It also depends on the ability to contain the virus geographically. Today's efficient air travel means that a virus that can be carried by humans can spread to all parts of the globe within days. If we removed the ability to travel out of Australia - perhaps as a result of a breakdown in electronic systems - then Australia, as an island continent, would be easily quarantine-able.

The two pandemics that have affected the 'First World' countries recently are SARS and human variant avian flu (bird flu). Both of these have been evidenced as having originated in Asia. The epidemiological studies undertaken in response to the 2002 outbreak of SARS showed that there were three schools of thought on how the virus had spread: through the air, through water transportation, and by vermin. The visualisation of a theory of airborne infection provided scientists, and those generally interested, with the tools to understand very complex data patterns. As an artist I had experimented with graphic interfaces that aestheticize scientific concepts in the previous works *Silvers Alters* and *Infected*, both of which consider the contexts in which images are presented and how they are further authenticated by practice and institution. Epidemiologists tracing patterns of infection necessarily also investigate human behavior, human movement, individual, mass, and swarm behaviors.. They look at a broad and complex set of interrelationships among disease, food supply, human densities, habit patterns, number and distribution of hosts, the life-cycle of the virus, immunity, susceptibility, evolution and mutation of viral strains. We attempted to translate these considerations for the programming of *Contagion* in terms of biological spread.

The scientists I worked with agreed that the fear of pandemic is greater than the pandemic itself. Human fear through the mediation of information causes mass hysteria and panic. What may have been effective quarantine measures in the 1918 outbreak - isolation until the virus has no more hosts and subsequently dies out - now pose a different problem. Questions of border control could not be overlooked, especially in Australia, where passengers on civil planes are traditionally sprayed with insecticide and where citizenship testing was first tested. How do you isolate communities such as Australia? What are the ethical complications surrounding border control, the denial of visas and electronic funds to travel? Would isolation in a totally electronically dependent migration system be simple? Who would be vaccinated (with a vaccine already out of date due to the speed of mutation of the virus)? Who would be permitted to travel out? Or would the virus spread before awareness grew sufficiently to prevent international travel? If we don't know about the pandemic, we cannot react, and mass behavior cannot be controlled. We are controlled by the mediation of information. Discrete systems of production, each with its own aesthetic and mode of delivery, signify 'truth' and 'authenticity', and the main players quickly adopt the methods of communication thought to be the most 'authentic' - as for instance in viral marketing, or the use of

an ostensible women's rights agenda to support the invasion of Afghanistan, perhaps. We collude in all of this.

I met a Gulf War engineer on a train from Loughborough. He said, 'Yes, I kill people, but they are little green dots on the screen and I go zap- zap -zap...' Imaging technology is being developed to see more and more and increasingly used as evidence and 'proof' in surveillance and biomedicine. But let's not forget that it is also developed to provide smokescreens to disguise realities. Complex graphic visualizations are simultaneously part of the process of abstraction and rendering the world in new ways. We accept and decode, based on our predisposition and knowledge, the images that live in the grey area between.

I looked at the wallpaper of images on ten monitors spread across the wall of the gym, watching people biking nowhere and running on the spot. Porn on MTV, images from Guantanamo, newsreaders. I first saw the live footage of 9/11 on a TV in Toys 'R'Us, in Dundee, amongst a group of 11-year-old boys playing video games.

I saw the report of the death of Princess Diana in Dens Road Market, a flea market in a dark, damp basement, on a early 1980s' telly. It didn't seem real. Seven years old, I visited Majdanek death camp and saw piles of bones, ovens and a list of how many and what sized human beings made how many bars of soap.

The imagery for Contagion could not be used as a surface seduction. I wanted it to trigger meaning, for the audience to travel outwards from the visual signifiers. The process of montage and our physiology and innate predispositions would determine what we saw, how we experienced the journeys through images that exist only on the borders of perception. Ambiguity and getting the viewer to work at reading images was important: was this still image of a mass orgy, a dance or a pile of dead bodies? One becomes seamlessly the other depending on our perspective and the temporality of images. One reading finally contaminates the other just as the participants, drawn into the game of mixing pure colour, infect one another. A database of imagery: the face of a woman near death, terror in her eyes, night-vision gunsights target Iraqis on the run, hand-held camera running from the Twin Towers crash, Saddam Hussein in a noose, Saddam dead, Guantanamo Bay. All we are fed on daytime TV, or on the web, at a time when the aesthetic of web imagery was becoming the aesthetic of the real, the 'authentic' mixed into a crisp high-resolution smoke palette. Images spreading the pandemic of fear, existing on the edges of perception. If we aren't aware we are seeing, then how can we choose not to look or to look away? We developed an interface intended to bypass the conscious mind and encourage random mutations - a technological interface, but one that had more in common with kids mixing colours in large round palettes. A game of easy rules, and with unknown consequences for an audience that would be encouraged to move away from passive viewership to a more active participation.

This journey had started within my own body, under attack from an undiagnosed, life-threatening viral invasion that I survived and recovered from fully. This process of massive change, physiological and cultural, led to a fundamental shift in thinking and a sustained period of learning. Changes to our environment, and the experience of threat, often accelerate evolution and lead to surprising outcomes.