The concept of quarantines can be traced throughout history; it shaped the contours of buildings, layout of our cities and borders of whole nations. As our cities continue to grow so does the need to negotiate effectively the complex interchanges between the built and our natural and socio/cultural environment.

This year we will focus and question the practice of quarantine as a strategic spatial tool. In medical terms quarantine is described as a state of isolation imposed to prevent the spread of disease. But at which point do become those lines of separation porous and leaky? What is their interface with the outside? The boundaries of quarantine are sometimes barely perceptible. They silently undermine our environment and can lead to large and unexpected consequences.

As a unit we won’t limit our exploration to disease control and will explore quarantine in a much broader sense: as a strategy of isolation, containment, encapsulation or preservation; a spatial separation for the purpose of protecting one thing from exposure to the other; A self-contained cosmos that sustains a delicate balance with their surroundings, a tense equilibrium easily disturbed with a minimum change of their boundary conditions.

The triumph of industrial production, global travel and international trade confront the ancient concept of quarantine with new challenges. Our rapidly growing relationship with technology is creating altered environments that are at once exciting and unsettling. What architectures can we propose for the uncertain and fragile relationship between the pure and polluted, foreign and local, the healthy and sick or the safe and dangerous?

Our investigations will reach from hermetically sealed green houses to smog, dust and pollution control, from underground walls of frozen earth as a barrier to contain nuclear waste to the isolated Santa’ Clause production villages in China, from mobile airstream trailers for returning astronauts to the fragile methods of preservation, from the food we eat, to the pets we keep. The territories and landscapes of quarantine are often unexpected, surprising and in flux.
PROJECT 1 (OCT- NOV)

The practice of quarantine, as we know it, began during the 14th century in an effort to protect coastal cities from plague epidemics. Ships arriving from infected ports were required to sit at anchor for 40 days before landing. The term 'quarantine' derived from the Italian words quaranta giorni, ‘the space of 40 days’.

This short project will be research based and propositional at the same time. In anticipation of the field trip you will be asked to study China and Shanghai from afar. The project will be an experimental study of your own understanding of 'quarantine' in an area of your choosing in Shanghai / China.

To begin the year you will be asked to identify an existing condition that suggests a strategy of separation, isolation or containment. This could be a strange island suspended within the familiar spaces of the everyday, a legal loophole, or a physical, environmental or socio/cultural condition. What are the juxtaposed realities of your quarantine? What is the agent to be contained? At which point does the seemingly self-enclosed system of this island condition become permeable? Where does it interface with the outside? Which is the influencing and which the influenced component? What is its state of temporality?

Your investigation will culminate in the design of a critical architectural response to your findings and will interrogate the temporal and dual relationships inherent to China or Shanghai's urban fabric. It might be an object, artefact or architectural fragment that surprises, alters, accelerates or manipulates the former reading of the 'quarantine' you identified.

PROJECT 2 (NOV- MAY)

Your main project will start with the field trip, where we will choose our sites. Your knowledge gained from project one will be instrumental to develop your main building project. Whilst the first term was concerned with the investigation and manipulation of an existing quarantined space, you are now asked to design a building that tests your findings on a real site and on larger scale. Your propositions might be ironic yet critical, affirmative yet progressive, fictional yet possible.

The site will be of your own choosing and the programme will evolve out of your initial investigations. The existing ground condition and geographic position of your building might become a helpful driver for your technical investigations.

FIELD TRIP (JAN)

In January we will travel to Shanghai. Denison describes Shanghai as a place that rapaciously consumes everything that comes its way. Shanghai has navigated highs and lows and lured millions of migrants who came to make their fortune or steal others. It now has become greater then its parts – a peculiar urban form, a mega-metropolis, an irrepressible and abstract entity. Known as the New York of the East, Paris of the Orient and Paradise of Adventurers, it is trade that provides the stimulus of this dynamic mercantile city. With over 4000 high rise buildings sprouting out of its ground since the mid 1980’s, the skyline of China’s largest city has become a strangely exuberant version of the ‘Blade runner’ aesthetic with simple geometries and sharp lines cutting into the sky. It’s architecture holding a permanent duel between the past and the future and blatantly evading the present. On our trip we will conquer the territories where East meets West, study ancient traditions and its architecture, visit the former world expo site and see buildings by Wang Shu, Morphosis and many more.

In our search of local quarantines, we will embark on the world’s fastest commercial high-speed train and visit the ancient capital of Hangzhou. We will stroll through the Venice of the East: the water towns of Tongli and Nanxun; visit Taihu Lake and its ninety islands and explore behind layers of security cameras, guards and gates the surreal suburban city replicas of Thames Town and Little Paris within Shanghai's industrial hinterlands.

DESIGN METHODS

Unit 5 is a testing ground and laboratory for imaginative thinking, research and speculation. We look into the history and culture of a place to be able to imagine futures that we can’t fully foresee. We learn by doing! The first term will be experimental and is there to test, take risks and forms your approach to the main building project. Your tests might have uncertain outcomes but they always have results. They are important to find a creative, original and intellectual working method that prepares you for future projects. In the second and third term we will take our pleasures very seriously and encourage you to develop a unique method of visualising your architecture. We will hybridise different medias, scale and digital and handcrafted techniques. Models, dense drawings and spatial testing will form part in developing your final building proposal. We are interested that you critically position your design in its context and through it develop your own design language.