

ARCH UN3312 Special Topics: Embodying Vulnerability: Architecture & Epidemics

Prof. Ivan L. Munuera
Spring 2022
Time: T/R 6:10-7:25PM
Location: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will explore how climate crisis, extractive industries, and the destruction of both human and non-human habitats announce a growing acceleration of pandemic outbreaks around the world. It will investigate the medicalization of knowledge and the relational aspects of epidemics through their spatialization in the contemporary period and on a global stage. The course will bring a special focus on cultural practices and the way they unpack questions related to disputes over territory, the condition of migration and making of refugeeness, geometries of colonialism old and new, urban infrastructures, public spaces, borders, and environmental violence.

Studies of epidemics tend to focus on the metaphor of a healthy body being attacked by an external agent. But the interconnection of bodies, other bodies, viruses, bacteria, microbes, architectures, cultural practices, technologies, and environments are intrinsically founded in their contagiousness. Ultimately, heterogenous corporality composes a type of architectural entanglement, one that exceeds its understanding as the unfolding of infrastructures, land uses, and buildings. Instead, it becomes a form of collective embodiment that challenges the exceptionality of human flesh as much as its individuality, to understand flesh as both infiltrating and something being infiltrated by viruses, buildings, media, regulations, and policies. In sum, studying epidemics and architecture is studying their vulnerable condition.

A weekly series of readings and discussions will introduce the history of pandemics and how architecture is shaped by them, but also how architecture shapes pandemics in return. In parallel with discussions on the topic, the course will provide a platform for the development of a curatorial project in which students will work on a series of selected case studies through different elements: from maps to interviews, from films to drawings, from historic documents to recreations. We will learn how to make a research navigating archives, situating debates, compiling information, conceptualizing materials, and considering diverse methodologies, discussing their potentials and limitations.