

beyond the walls

This studio encourages conversation and shared ideas, in a spirit of mutual respect. Our ethos recognises that all studio colleagues bring as much to the discussions as the tutor. You are asked to engage and participate, not to worry about speaking-up or somehow 'getting it wrong'. We will test ideas together and exploit our studio's 'hive mind'. We try to remain open to where ideas want to lead us, however curious or unexpected their directions might seem.



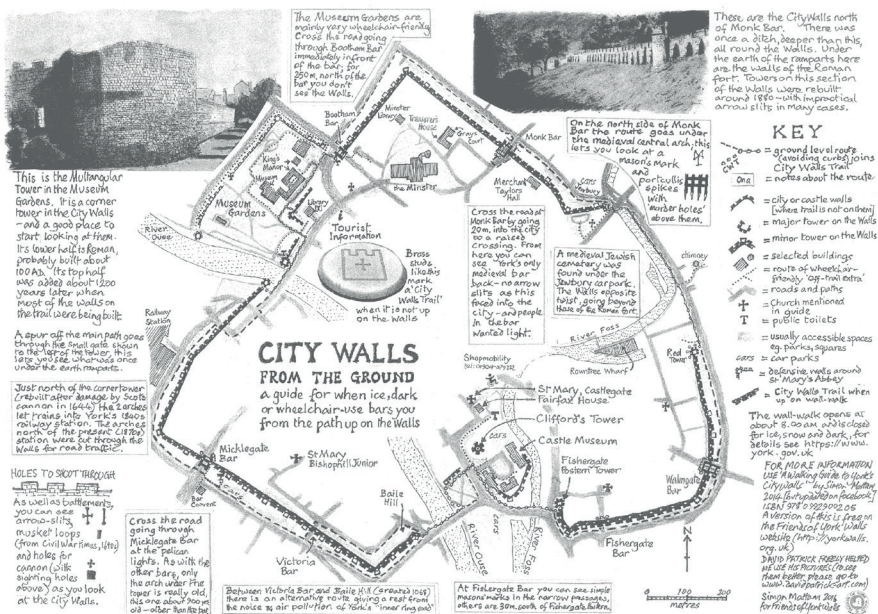
'With a line on the ground, a wall begins.'

Alan Balfour, *Berlin: The Politics of Order* (London: Rizzoli, 1990).

This seemingly innocuous image, from a heavily bomb-damaged Berlin, 1945, shows someone painting a line on a road. The line marks a boundary between districts, now to be administered by different occupying powers. The line follows the somewhat arbitrary division between postal districts, as marked on a map. A few years later, this line became the line of the Berlin Wall, separating the city first with a fence and then with a double wall with 'no mans land' in-between. It came to symbolise the antagonism between Cold War powers. Why are walls built where they are? What are their effects?

As architects, we spend most of our time organising walls to enclose space, and composing openings in walls. The modern architect Louis I. Kahn argued that we should understand buildings as 'societies of rooms'. He coined that phrase to highlight how architecture uses walls to bring people together – and also to keep them apart – structuring human interactions, and mirroring wider structures in society. Kahn understood how the walls of buildings change social relations, and how they configure the social contract between people. Walls manipulate human relations through enclosure, openness, transparency, privacy, view, sound, silence, light, and materiality.

This studio doesn't begin with walls at building scale, however, but instead with urban and landscape walls that operate at a much larger scale than the individual building. Famous examples from



Tourist map of York's city walls (left, top); Gertrud Jekyll's walled garden at Holy Island (left).



What is it about enclosing walls that seems to strike a chord with so many people? Do they offer, perhaps, some idea of psychological security or certainty? Is there something about the idea of a world whose edges are knowable? Does it stand for an idea of completeness, or finality, in people's minds? Why are tourists so often drawn to city walls and walled spaces?

between Kenya and Somalia, Ecuador and Peru, and – infamously, as promoted by Donald Trump – between the USA and Mexico. Recent walls like these are highly political. They enforce power. They seem designed to encourage the characterisation of people 'over there' as 'other'. Such walls pit people against one another. By doing so, they aid politicians to promote troubling ideas about the supposed authenticity of the nation state, or even imagined ethnic distinctions.

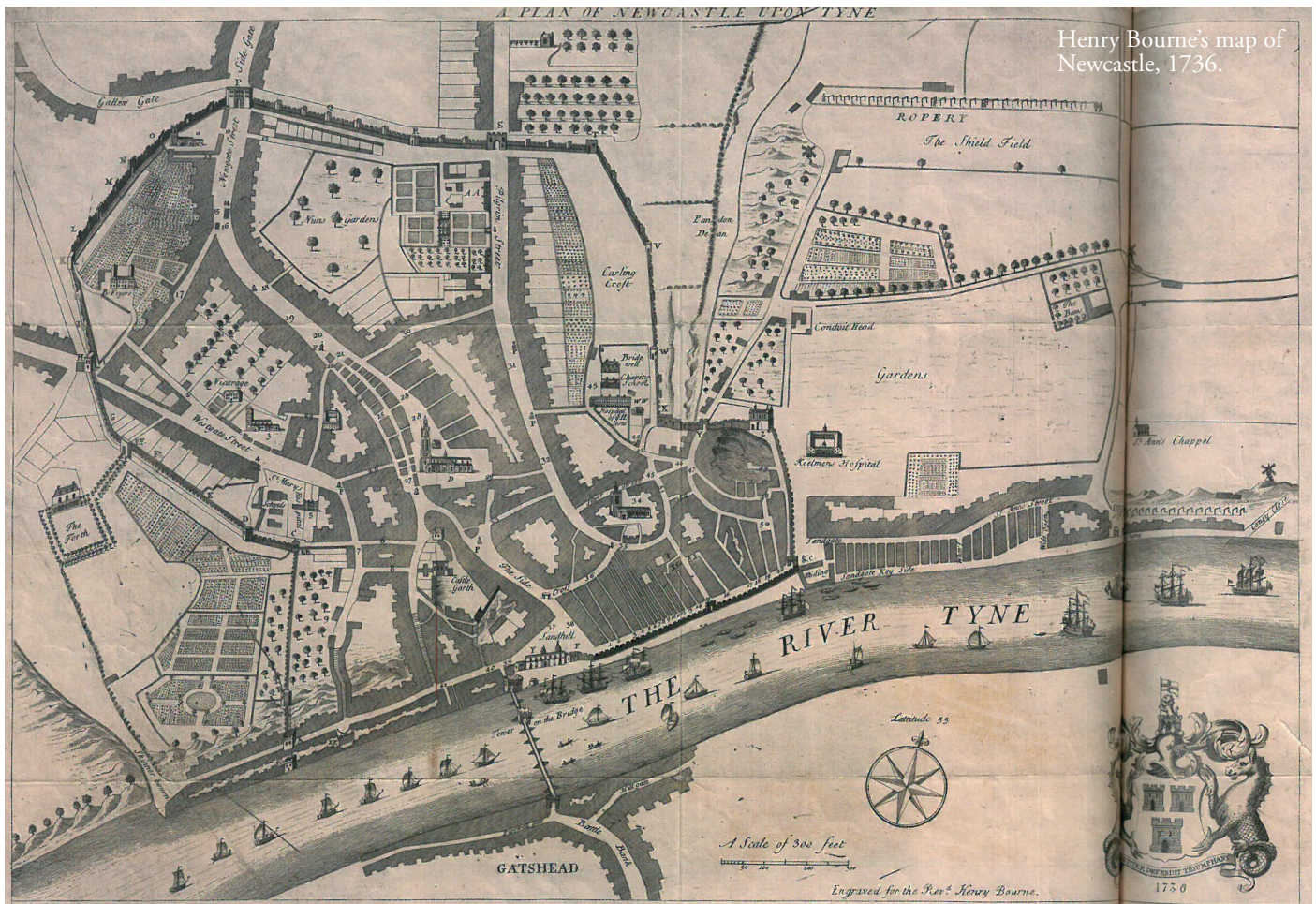
The urban or landscape wall – as an idea – can thus be difficult and divisive. But historic walls remain objects of fascination. Tourists are drawn in large numbers to The Great Wall of China, to York, to Hadrian's Wall, to walled gardens, even where such structures stand as fragmentary ruins. Why are they so popular? Perhaps because of some psychological security or enclosure that the walls seem to offer? Or maybe some deep-rooted sense of demarcating a place in the world, or of completeness, of finitude, of knowability?

In the context of such questions, how should we imagine the complexities of urban and landscape walls? If – like Kahn implied – walls make societies of rooms, then how can we imagine (or re-imagine) urban or landscape walls in ways that bring people together rather than divide them; which help make better societies rather than worse ones?

semester one : part one

stages 5 & 6

review: 02/03.11.23



Henry Bourne's map of Newcastle, 1736.

We will start the year with Newcastle's city walls.

Fragments of mediaeval Newcastle's lost encircling walls still remain, near Chinatown, and also near Stephenson's Works behind Central Station. The medieval walls crossed the line of Hadrian's Wall which was already, by then, a ruin from generations beforehand, and whose archaeology still bisects our contemporary city. Then, in the inner east end of Newcastle, near Manors, the line of the city wall is traced, imprecisely, by parts of the 1960s modern highwalk network. The histories of these varied city walks and walls, and their respective archaeologies, are fascinating.

Referring to these historical fragments, we begin with a specific proposal: What if we were to reinstate Newcastle's city walls? How could making, or re-making, an elevated route, roughly following the historic walls, serve to shift the gravity of the city in interesting ways? What could it change? How could it make opportunities for social connections, for example, or economic regeneration, or for a wider reimagining of the city?

We will spend the first five weeks working together on a group design which proposes the replacement of

Newcastle's city walls in contemporary form. Central to the presentation will be a large model. This will be designed to be exhibited in the urban room spaces of the Farrell Centre.

While we produce a group design for Newcastle's city walls, each of you – as individuals – are simultaneously asked to engage with, and to interpret, aspects of the wider idea of the urban or landscape (or indeed architectural) wall, to begin staking-out an architectural position in relation to its ideas, in ways which can underpin your design investigations later in the year.

During this phase of the project, you are asked to research, measure, record, think, draw and make.

Take things you want to find out - maybe things you already think you know - and explore them, isolate them, unlock them. Develop methods and representational techniques.

You should establish contexts, methods and habits which will inform your work throughout the year.

Explore | Take risks | Find out | Make sense!

semester one : part two

semester 1 portfolio submission
review: 14/15.12.23

stage 5: urban design

In the second part of the semester, you are asked to:

- * identify a theme or themes that interest you, arising from your design studies so far, related to the wider studio topic of urban or landscape walls, and to;
- * choose one part of the group design completed in the first part of the semester to work-up in greater detail.

First, you should describe the part of the wider design that you choose in a series of drawings, models, sketches, etc... These should not be merely descriptive. They should also demonstrate the qualities, exchanges, and human and material relationships at work in the place. The ways you describe the place will have implications for how you design there.

Second, you should produce a series of studies, in a range of media - e.g. orthographic drawing, sketch, model, film - drawing out qualities of that place which can inform design: inhabitation, structure, environmental qualities, future human relationships, sites for intervention, detail, light, air, sound.

Third, you should develop an attitude to the idea of the urban or landscape wall in the place that you choose. What do you want to say, here, about openness, enclosure, transparency, privacy, view, sound, silence, light, materiality, etc.

Fourth, you should design an urban intervention in your chosen place, further developing part of the group design. Where, within the place you've chosen, will you work? What should your intervention be like? What should its qualities be? The trick is to represent what you know about your intervention clearly and effectively, based on your studies this semester, without having to design everything about it, and without inviting unwelcome questions that you won't have developed the answers to yet.

stage 6: stick or twist?

Having contributed to the group design examining Newcastle's city walls in the first part of the semester, you are asked to develop your work thus far towards a design thesis beginning in semester two.

This will most likely be an individual piece of work, but it could be in a pair or even a small group.

You are asked to identify a theme or themes arising from your design studies so far, within the wider studio topic of urban or landscape walls. This could be a theme which is directly related to previous work, or it could be more tangentially related. Artist Paul Klee wrote about the idea of 'taking a line for a walk'. He meant thinking hard about where a creative practice could take you. In this spirit, in the second part of first semester, you are asked 'to take an idea for a walk'. Where might the theme, or themes, that you've identified from your earlier work take you next? Could it be to another part of the world – in the UK, or globally – where urban or landscape walls produce different conditions, or do you want to stay-put in Newcastle? (Stick, or twist?). Are there particular architectural ideas – about form, climate, material, etc. – which you want to make central to your architectural inquiries? Are there particular social relations or exchanges that seem important, and which you want to explore?

Might these preoccupations that you identify lead you towards a building design proposal in semester two, or should they lead to other kinds of architectural inquiry: artistic practices; imaginary worlds; diagramming; representations; digital spaces; texts,...? If towards a building proposal, then where in the world might that proposal be sited, who will use it, what exchanges might take place there, what will it seek to achieve, how will it be materialised, how could it work productively with limited means? If instead the ideas lead you towards another kind of architectural inquiry, what processes and practices could you begin with, leading you towards a fruitful outcome?

All ideas – however straightforward or strange, however coherent or contradictory – can be entertained, and we'll work together to see where they lead.

semester two : thesis

semester 2 portfolio submission: 17.05.23 (tbc)

all studio reviews: 07/08.05.23 | 21/22.05.23 | 09/10.06.23

A design thesis is a reasoned argument, presented through drawings, sketches, models and/or other visual media. You are asked to produce a research-led architectural proposal which sets out a cogent argument. Your thesis should demonstrate clear reasoning, and evidence which supports it. It should show coherence of purpose. Your presentation should be well structured. You should aim for persuasive conclusions which can withstand rigorous testing.

stage 5

You are asked to develop your ideas and themes from semester one further into a building design, with an appropriate architectural programme of your devising. This could be a refinement of your proposal on the site that you identified in the second part of semester one. Or it could be elsewhere within the group design for Newcastle, or indeed elsewhere in the city. Alternatively, coherently argued, it could be on another site altogether in the UK or the world. Your design should be resolved as a comprehensive proposal that extends your work from first semester into (probably) a medium-sized building, which is suitable for demonstrating your appropriate understanding of structure, environment, materials, construction, lighting, acoustics, fire escape, etc. Your chosen themes and ideas should appropriately inform your decision making at all scales of the project.

You are also asked to develop an architectural detail which encapsulates the project as a whole. This detail should be a microcosm of the proposal, which binds together: your critical response to the place; your interpretation to site and programme; the resulting strategy; your choice of materials; the structural strategy; the choice of appropriate technology; environmental and climatic response; energy choices; and the necessities of contemporary regulations.

Key drawings to develop your ideas will include a detail drawn for presentation at 1:25, and a detailed section at 1:50.

The outcome should be a rich, critical architecture with an idea or ideas which pervade the design from strategy through to detail.

stage 6

The final design thesis has a long history in architectural education, having figured in institutions as diverse as the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the Bauhaus, as well as under the old British system of pupillage. It remains a strong tradition in architectural education, not least in Newcastle. It has been historically, and remains, a last opportunity for students in school to develop their ideas and demonstrate their abilities before beginning a life in architectural practice.

Your final design stakes your intellectual position. Its architecture can 'say' whatever you want it to – but it must be responsive to work that has gone before, accepting or rejecting it knowledgeably. While it should be evidently yours, this is not to say that your design thesis should be mired in craven self-indulgence. Architecture has moral and ethical responsibilities. Your design thesis, emerging from the themes and ideas that you developed in semester one, should be rooted in a meaningful question or questions.

Architecture is a research activity and your work should encompass its various aspects: cultural, environmental, social, formal, political, technological, contextual, tectonic, historical, and economic. In synthesising an approach to these facets of architectural production, your work will display your particular architectural ethos. This is a cause for celebration (and not concern!).

The completed thesis work should connect together your ideas from across the year, demonstrating the critical logic of your architectural argument, testing the methodological and representational ideas you first developed.

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