'Imagination, the real and eternal world, of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow.'

William Blake

In the works of poet William Blake (1757-1827) the city of Golgonooza is both a cypher for London's social breakdown and a source of hope for justice. His 'eternal, ever building, ever falling' romantic vision was the site for political and social critique - a place for atonement and renewal where the imagined is more significant than the real.

London's history is marked by moments when social ideals have been pursued and manifest through architecture, most recently with postwar social housing. But with the advent of 'right to buy' in the 1980s and the withdrawal of local government from housing provision, the social has been replaced by the entrepreneurial and commercial.

The unit believes that a successful city requires the presence of the 'other' through art, the ineffable and the imagined. These cultural notions are embedded within the accumulated language of architecture and form the basis of a counterpoint to market-oriented housing developments in the city.

Our site of enquiry is Thamesmead. Conceived and built during the optimism of the 1960s building boom, the housing estate suffered from poor infrastructure, problematic construction and societal breakdown, all of which led to its rapid decline into violence and despair - a demise further ingrained into popular culture by films such as A Clockwork Orange.

However, today owned and managed by Peabody Trust, the respected housing association, Thamesmead is part of a major regenerative effort. As a critical challenge to this work we will develop speculative readings of the site allowing for the possibility of entirely new propositions for Thamesmead's future. Peabody will act as consultant to the unit covering the real: the economic and practical challenges of mass-housing provision. Art and literature set in London will stimulate the unit's exploration of the imagined: the poetic and visionary in relation to city-building.

*Film poster, A Clockwork Orange, Stanley Kubrick*
Golgonooza

Here on the banks of the Thames, Los builded Golgonooza.
Outside of the Gates of the Human Heart, beneath Beulah
In the midst of the rocks of the Altars of Albion. In fears
He builded it, in rage & in fury. It is the Spiritual Fourfold.
London: continually building & continually decaying desolate!

*Jerusalem, The Emanation of The Giant Albion*
*William Blake*
Year overview: studio

**Term 1** focuses on developing an understanding of Thamesmead, theoretical readings on Blake, mythology and London, architectural precedents and research and development of concepts for the main design project.

In the **first phase**, we will explore and analyse the Thamesmead area. Students will through a series of site visits develop a personal interest in a particular aspect of the area. This may be housing-related, or concerned with other supporting program, or with infrastructural issues.

This selection of a particular interest will inform the **second phase**. Students will work with existing or newly conceived myths as a basis for thinking about communities and spatial forms.

The **last phase** of the first term will focus on the transformation of an existing building precedent. The precedent will be an unbuilt project that incorporates aspects of the mythological.

**Term 2** will lead to architectural proposals. Hypotheses developed in the first term will be developed further through technical studies to form a defined brief. Students will develop ideas from Term 1 through physical and technical experimentation that will form the basis of the TS document to be completed by the end of the second term. Experimentation through drawing, material testing and model making will be paramount.

**Term 3** will consist of two phases focusing on final project consolidation and final documentation / representation. As well as the final portfolio sheets, models, and other forms of representation, each student will also develop a folio book that will be a designed document and artefact in itself.

All terms will include seminars and workshops that will open up discussion and a backdrop to experimentation and design. At the end of every phase of work there will be a pin-up. There will also be interim juries with invited guests at the end of each term.
Year overview: seminars and coursework

History & Theory

Students joining Dip 1 should have an interest in art and cultural theory and have a desire to translate this into design. Students are encouraged to combine HTS with their project research and conceptual grounding.

Technical Studies

Structure, environment and material construction are essential and integral to the design process. Technical research should be documented and collated as an ongoing process in order to support concepts and build a viable technical study that underpins the main design project – based on experimentation and research.

We will follow TS Option 1 that entails submission in the second term. Students should be aware that TS should not be seen as a separate study – it is very much a part of the design process.

Workshops and Seminars

Term 1 will include a series of seminars and talks that will cover the ideas of artists such as Blake, as well as introductions to Peabody and Thamesmead, and discussions of urban planning and social housing. In each term there will be workshops on representational techniques both 2d and 3d.

Study Visits

Visits to Thamesmead will be arranged for the first term and then on as-needed basis through the year. There will also be other visits to Peabody properties to better understand current and past initiatives in the area of social housing.

The unit trip will be to the City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto.

James Casabere, model photograph
Term 1: Imaginary solutions

Phase 1 — Thamesmead Site Investigation

Weeks 2 – 4
06.10.14 – 24.10.14

‘Go where we may, rest where we will,
Eternal London haunts us still’

Thomas Moore

After the second world war a series of New Towns were designed and built in southern England. Thamesmead was conceived in the 1960s at the end of this phase of construction but was different in that it was within the Green Belt. It was a new town for 60,000 inhabitants within London. The masterplan and associated architecture was developed by the architecture department of the Greater London Council (GLC) and was widely praised at the time. It featured a network of canals and lakes conceived as a civilising and calming influence on the area.

In the first phase of work students will take a series of site visits to Thamesmead and develop a personal interest in a particular topic and area. As well as documenting and recording impressions of the site using a wide range of media (drawings, found objects, materials, photographs, edited videos, written narratives etc) this phase will emphasise the production and atmospheric documentation of a physical model.
Term 1 (contd)

Phase 2 — Mythological Imagination

Weeks 5 – 8  
28.10.13 – 22.11.13

In the second phase we will look at notions of the imagination and of mythology. An important part of the thinking of leading modernists, elements of the mythical and sacred underpin apparently functional and rational architecture of the twentieth century.

With a personal interest in an aspect of Thamesmead as a point of departure students will select or invent a myth. The myth can be considered as a tool to detach oneself from quotidian existence and to approach the transcendentical.

The primary goal of this phase of work is to materialise some aspect of the myth in 3D and to build a physical model.

As part of this phase of work we will consider aspects of contemporary literature and film (especially concerning London) the work of eminent writers and thinkers such as Blake; and the work of architects who have looked to mythology for inspiration.

This phase and the preceding phased will conclude with a pin-up.

Phase 3 — Precedent Transformation

Weeks 9-12  
25.11.13 – 20.12.13

The third phase takes the unit into precedent study. Through this study students will discover the organisational systems that come together to create a building and its atmosphere.

In addition to the study of buildings we will also examine wider implications of urban design, through issues such as ‘difference’ within the contemporary city and how these notions are reconciled with what is shared and common.

Our aim in this phase is to study the ideas of architecture through particular buildings and to use the processes and operations of the imagination and the myth to subvert them. Alternative ideas and forms of representation will be generated in relation to Thamesmead leading to the formulation of a thesis for the main project.

The final part of the term will be to bring together the three strands of work — site analysis, mythological invention, and precedent transformation — to create a strategic approach to the site.

There will be an end of term jury with invited critics.
Unit Trip: Vicenza and the Veneto

Unit Trip

05.01.14 – 10.01.14

The unit trip will be during the winter vacation to the World Heritage site of the city of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto.

The trip will be in the spirit of the Grand Tour. Reaching its apotheosis in the late eighteenth century the Grand Tour was on the one hand an educational rite of passage for Northern European aristocracy and on the other hand an excuse for debauchery and excess.

We will take a driving tour through the Veneto to visit a series of Palladian villas. Our theoretical interest will be in the typological transformation of the classical temple into grand estate buildings and villas.

Villa Capra ‘La Rotonda’, Andrea Palladio
Term 2: Materialising the Vision

Phase 1 — Technical Design

Weeks 1 - 4
02.01.15 – 06.02.15

Technical research and design

The second term begins with the intense research into the performative qualities of the designed spaces and interpretations of related phenomena. For fifth years this work feeds directly into the TS and thesis project. There will be a pin up at the end of the phase.

A) Site and brief:

Each student should identify and formulate their brief and site precisely in relation to Thamesmead; the nature of the building / space being proposed, what it does, its relation to context and the aims of its performance. Representation of site, brief and concepts will be through drawings and models.

B) Experimentation:

The work here is methodical and physical — through drawings, material testing and model making. Possible topics include structure, material and environmental behaviours. Students should explore concepts that will be both atmospheric and poetic; silence, darkness, light, density, porosity, sacredness, formlessness, transgression which all have a relation the imagination.

Lutyens, The Queen’s Dollshouse
Phase 2 — a New Vision

**Weeks 5 to 8**
09.02.15 – 06.03.15

**Design Proposition Development**

The design propositions for the thesis project are essentially polemical in nature. The intention is that each design should allow an idea to be tested. The program will be developed in relation to the existing and planned condition at Thamesmead — extending existing or creating new. The propositions will have the potential for experimental occupation. At this stage the TS research and conclusions should inform a design proposition. There will be a series of design workshops during this phase to accelerate the detail design process.

**Detail Design / Technical Studies**

The second phase of the term is the heart of the design phase of work. Here we start with developing greater precision regarding program and circulation before the key design moves regarding spatial disposition and qualities. The design must both reflect the potentialities of the site and the thesis position developed in the first term. The physical experimentation initiated in Phase two of the term will be continued and appraised. All work will be documented through drawings, text, photography, video and models. At this point the TS document will be organised and compiled.

Phase 3 — Building and Dwelling

**Dates: Weeks 9 to 11**
09.03.15 – 27.03.15

**Dolls Houses**

Model making is an integral part of design and as such is an ongoing process whereby models are made and remade, enabling an understanding of space that drawings cannot fulfil.

**Physical Model**

The end of the second term is dedicated to a detailed architectural model. This will involve detailed rhino modelling and setting out and the use of various digital techniques including laser cutting and sintering. We also envisage the continued use of CNC, casting and a range of other material techniques appropriate to the design. All models will include site information as modelled during the first term, and aspects of materiality as researched at the beginning of the second term. TS work should be finalised and submitted at the end of this phase.
Thamesmead: Phase 1 housing
Term 3: Imaginings

Phase 1 — Documenting the new vision

Weeks 1 to 2
28.03.15 – 08.05.15

Compilation of the portfolio and completion of drawing set

All outstanding orthographic drawings need to be completed by the end of this phase. Folios are to be formatted and printed at A2 or larger. Each student will also complete and bind book as extension to folio.

Phase 2 — Speculative London

Weeks 3 to 6
11.05.15 – 05.06.15

Series of speculative collages and drawings at city scale

As in previous years we will be experimenting with collage techniques using photoshop and perspective drawing. The idea of this work is both to better represent the ideas of the design itself and to speculate at a bigger scale. In other words, this phase asks the question: what is the agency of imagination at the scale of the city?

Week 7 - Fourth year final tables are on June 09-10
Week 8 - Diploma Committee presentations June 17-18
Week 9 - ARB/RIBA Part 2 External Examiners June 24
Week 11 – Friday June 26 – End of year exhibition

Le Corbusier, The Bull
Reading list

Golgonooza, City of The Imagination – Kathleen Raine
Blake – Peter Ackroyd
Concretopia; A Journey Around Rebuilding Post War Britain – John Grinrod
London, The Unique City – Steen Eiler Rasmussen
London: The Biography – Peter Ackroyd
Architecture Mysticism and Myth – Willam Lethaby
Architecture and The City – Aldo Rossi
Poetics of space – Gaston Bachelard
Void in Art – Mark Levy
Voids: a Retrospective – Mathieu Copeland
Formless: A Users Guide - Rosalind Krauss,Yves Alain Bois
Heterotopia and the City - Public Space in Postcivil Society - Michiel Dehaene, Lieven De Caute
The Poetry of Architecture – John Ruskin
The Architectural Uncanny – Anthony Vidler
Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture - Robert Venturi
Collage City – Colin Rowe, Fred Koetter
Beyond architecture: imaginative buildings and fictional cities
Architecture and disjunction – Bernard Tschumi
Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays – Colin Rowe
Surrealism and architecture – Tomas Mical