

In the category of “*Craft, Fabrication and Technology*” of the “*Open Jury*” for the current year 2010/2011 five units presented the projects developed so far. The first one, the MA Program *Design and Make with Diploma 19*, is currently working on a project for a working space in Hook Park. Living and working there the team is developing a design proposal based on timber technology (material available on the spot). The object of design is a workspace to be located under a big shed, but the team is also dealing with the design of other three spaces: a yard, a workshop and a studio space. The shed consists of a reticular structure covered by a cladding envelope. The concept of design is to emulate the environment of the “forest” and is concerned with the “adaptability” of the building (on the east side it can be opened to assume different configurations for different solar conditions and to invite the visitors to enter). The work, mainly based on site, implies the experimentation of different technical solutions for nodes and connections within the timber structure. However, the “low tech” nature of the experiment seems to be more useful to the development of light temporary structures (quick execution, easy transportation of material) rather than offering any contribution in terms of product and process development; moreover, the notion of execution as “planning by doing” has been questioned in regards to the applicability of this research to a wider system of circumstances as well as its usefulness in the current construction scenario.

The second unit was *Intermediate 6*. The unit, focused on innovative digital design and construction processes, is organized in two phases; during the first one the students are focused on the design of a “highly adaptive” dwelling unit through a series of experiment/prototypes which combine the casting process with digital parametric design. These prototypes are based on the development of components structures, such as tripod aggregations, realized through computed-generated patterns. The second phase sees these experiments applied on a mass-housing project located in Hong Kong. Here, a level of variability of form is obtained through the deployment of a parametric system of design which is supposed to respond to the problem of diversity or spatial “identity”. Such issues, sorted by a mechanical procedure, are (so far) one of the missed opportunities of the projects. The overall work, though aimed at revealing a purposeful relationship between design and fabrication, seems to be concerned with the questionable attempt to reconcile traditional techniques and contemporary fabrication processes.

*Diploma 3* is currently working on a design proposal for the completion of the Beauvais Cathedral in Normandy. Reconverting the cathedral in a civic centre, the question of the “old, the lost and the present” is tackled in different ways; but despite the fact that the concept of design is taking into account the existing fabric and context, the results so far deal with it either in a too conceptual or too formal terms, apparently ignoring the new role of the cathedral. *Diploma 13* instead, is dealing with the design of a residential/exhibition space for the Wildenstein Collection throughout the use of decoration. The ornament becomes the main theme at the basis of the project from the detail to the main plan. The work presented, although quite attracting, remains too formal and detached from the residential-collection’s program.

The last unit to present was the *First Year* which is currently working on a design project in different areas in the east London; inspired by the activities of the area itself they produced a video followed by a design proposal. The collaborative spirit is encouraged through the involvement of each student in the design of the other students’ projects. Nevertheless questions emerged about whether they are being equipped of the basic knowledge and whether such knowledge is actually up-to-date.

In general terms, but especially in regards of the work of *Dip19/Design and Make*, *Dip 13* and *Intermediate 6*, the question of craft, technology and fabrication seems very open; the three categories are often bound up in the process of design (either they are prototypes, experiments one to one, or proper building components like the nodes details of *Design and Make*'s big shed). Yet, despite the efforts to integrate traditional modes of construction alongside the most recent technological development (like in the case of *Diploma13* or *Intermediate 6*), is not clear whether and how the first ones can assume a really useful and powerful role for the current construction industry. Moreover, the research, being often detached from function, social questions and even practical issues such as costs reduction, etc., assumes a self-referential role. For instance, in the case of the unit *Intermediate 6*, the experiments with the process of casting do not provide any actual answer either to the question of dwelling (new living lifestyles, sociological implication of mass-housing, etc.), or to the processes of construction (would the casting on site be a right solution for a more cost - efficient process?). As a result, because in many cases the technological aspect *per se* remains the main focus for the development of the proposals, some of the most challenging questions to address regarding the fabrication processes - such as the new role of designer, decoration, traditional techniques and existing context - are left unrevealed.