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The viewer immersed in multiple modes of representation

Following the drawing on the ground

Expanding surfaces

Claudia Carbone

The experience of the exhibition *On the Surface* – a retrospective of the work of Metis, the Edinburgh-based atelier of Mark Dorrian and Adrian Hawker, presented in the exhibition space of The Aarhus School of Architecture – is choreographed as a walk over superimposed fragments of architectural representations. This action of walking, of following the drawing on the ground, enables the erasure of the specific time/place chronotopes of the seven exhibited projects, allowing new itineraries to be drawn through the crossing of this complex context.

Metis is an atelier for art, architecture, and urbanism founded in 1997 with the aim of connecting architectural teaching, research, and practice. Their work focuses on the city and the complex ways in which it is imagined, inhabited, and representationally encoded. They seek to produce rich, multi-layered works that resist immediate consumption and that are instead gradually unfurled over time through interaction with them. Their approach is concerned with establishing a poetic but critical approach to the city that is sensitive to its cultural memory but is also articulated in relation to its possible futures. The exhibition was curated by Karen Kjærgaard, and Richard Collins and Aikaterini Antonopoulou assisted Metis with its development.

Metis organise the documentation of the exhibited projects as an installation within a printed carpet surface measuring 16m x 10.5m, produced in collaboration with Jan Magdal Poulsen and Karen Lund Hansen from the Danish carpet manufacturer, ege. The carpet is furnished with seven trestles that support the representations of the individual projects. Each of these trestles defines a room, a space of exploration. Upon each trestle, two sheets of glass contain and frame one of seven exhibited projects. Each project is described through three panels of drawings, which are suspended within the double layer of glass. The upper glass surface also serves as a kind of horizon line upon which a model representation of the project sits.

The spatial configuration of the



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trestles relates in content to – and designates a specific relation within – the drawing on the floor surface. When carefully walked upon and perceived, the drawing underneath your feet attracts you in the same way that cartographies of the sky often do. This inverted celling draws the viewer from one place to another through a force field of multiple projections, each of them with their unique vanishing points and horizons. The projections do not seem to interlock; they are possible arrangements or assemblages that aim at achieving the sensation of being situated in a frozen moment of the dynamic constellation – stargazing. Other actions could be to look in, to zoom in, to explore details, or else to follow structures in this rich surface, like a bird's-eye view of the earth, observing moments from an empowered vantage point.

Approaching each table, you locate yourself in the designated position that the orientation of the trestles facilitates. This then refers to an order where the experience of each project, or table, can be associated with the system of display cabinets that furnish a library or museum. This orientation of the body delimits a space for examination of the delicate drawings, and also defines spatial relations between the distant planes in the floor drawing and the proximity of the detail in the dense information that each representation positions close to the viewer's eyes. This particular position then offers an examination and questioning of the limits of the projects. They re-emerge, amongst others, in the distance, disturbed and distorted by the overlay of the models and the viewer's own image, which is doubled through the reflective effects of the glass surfaces.

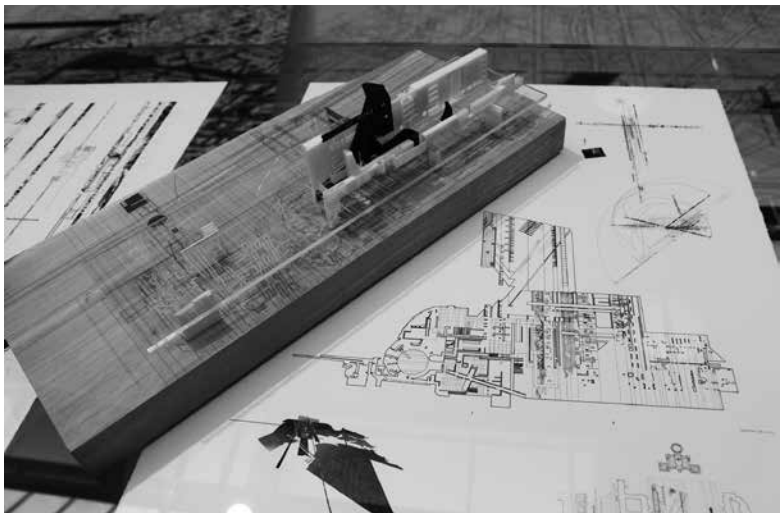
The focused reading of the drawings and the position of the model is an experience equivalent to that of witnessing an architect's working table or studying a cabinet displaying samples of fossils or stones in a museum of natural history.

Here, close-up, the models are the most powerful means of representation. Their placement upon the tables engages in such a way that the eagerness to touch them is nearly impossible to resist. This overwhelming desire is only made possible by the inviting display in which, because the models are not restricted within vitrines, haptic experience is unhindered. The models are pieces that exude and evoke a sense of

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materiality, fragility, and detail. They become objects that you want to possess.

Taken together, the seven projects exhibited display a complex inter-relation between architectural speculation, site, and brief. In scale, the projects range from landscape, through cityscape, to the dimensions of the body. Six of the seven projects both question and respond to competition briefs. They include projects for the Great Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt (2003), the Nam June Paik Gallery, Seoul, South Korea (2003), and for a Bath House and Spa Hotel, Liepaja, Latvia (2014). These are site specific and articulated in accordance with their environment. The only exception is the installation piece, Laputa, which was developed in relation to the 1726 text of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift.

One project, Micro-Urbanism, can be seen as an epitome of both the strategy behind the whole exhibition and the particular character of Metis's approach and creative practice. In this, the spectator is presented with an overload of architectural references distributed through multiple means of representation. The project operates on both introverted and extroverted levels, enriched by its own trajectories, out of and within bounds, theories, histories, narratives, anecdotes and quotes that engage the viewer in a never-ending architectural endeavour. This project is also the one that interweaves the exhibition, becoming an interconnecting and almost tectonic tool. It appropriates and covers the entire background of the floor drawing.

On The Surface: Metis: Mark Dorrian + Adrian Hawker *ran at Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark from 10 October to 14 November 2014.*

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