EXPLORING AND ILLUSTRATING

Ranulph Glanville
School of Architecture
University of Portsmouth
King Henry 1 St
Portsmouth, Hants
PO1 2DY, UK
Telephone +44 705 842083: (direct +44 705 842098): fax +44 705 842087
e-mail GLANVILLER@UK.AC.PORTSMOUTH.CSOVAX

Abstract

CAD, in its usually available forms, is wonderful at illustrating proposed architectural objects. But, as I argued last year at the Barcelona meeting, it is not so good at helping us extend the richness and development of architectural ideas-at the "back of envelope" and other developmental levels-indeed, it is (for pragmatic reasons-and others) actually restrictive of change, what-if, suck-it-and-see, etc.

I shall describe a work environment, which we have been developing since last year in Portsmouth, in which computing is used by students to assist the generation, testing and extension of ideas: in which exploring takes precedence over illustrating.

The central notion of this environment involves the extension and manipulation, through co-operative sharing of a joint "resource base" of computer stored images (recognising origination rather than ownership), and (parts of) which may be copied and transformed by group members as they seek to develop, enrich and extend their ideas. Transformations may be intentional, but some occur through the limits of our computational medium such as compression losses, file formats, colour depth and resolution and are welcomed as a contribution made by the computing medium used. Images are located through a developing, shared filing system, picture search and history trace.

The environment relies on a small suite of computers with a powerful machine acting as a fileserver and undertaking central, computationally-intensive tasks. For this environment, we have chosen software carefully, and the choice will be described. We have also developed a small, but crucial program that traces developments in the shared resource base-in what is, in effect, our own, operational CyberSpace (as distinct from a Virtual Reality).

Through these mechanisms, we believe we are able to evade the limitation set by Ross Ashby's "Law of Requisite Variety", thus expanding the creativity-base of participating designers (students).

There are no "scientific results", but we believe the reasoning behind, and the actuality and exploration of our environment is valuable in itself, and may be of interest to colleagues.