

Not only computing — also art

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Learning to look

I have mentioned in these pages on previous occasions that designers spend a fair amount of their time studying the artefacts of the recent and long gone past in order to understand what gives these things their special qualities. Architects, in particular, always look critically at the works of other architects either in real life or reproduced in magazines.

Until the widespread use of photography, most architects and students of architecture, visiting buildings they admired, would sketch them and learn a great deal about designing in the process. In my days as an architectural student, too, it was not considered sufficient just to make freehand sketches of buildings: accurately measured drawings derived from detailed surveys were also required. I remember spending the whole of one summer with tape, rod and clipboard scrambling over an 11th century church in the South Wales marshes, measuring and later drawing each cornice, finial and stone of the crumbling edifice.

When you sketch something and, particularly, when you have to measure it and draw it to scale, you begin to know

something about it — more than you learn just by looking at it and very much more than you learn by photographing it. But the habit of sketching and measuring is now confined to a few of us diehards and I believe that the measured drawing is no longer a required element of architectural education.

However, students are beginning to examine the high tech equivalent of measured drawings. More and more of them are creating computer models of buildings they admire and animating the results. Last year, on one of my regular visits to the Department of Architectural Science at Sydney University, I ran a short course on such animation using a program devised by David Cornell and Richard Coyne. Some pictures of buildings resulting from this work are shown in Figs 1, 2 and 3.

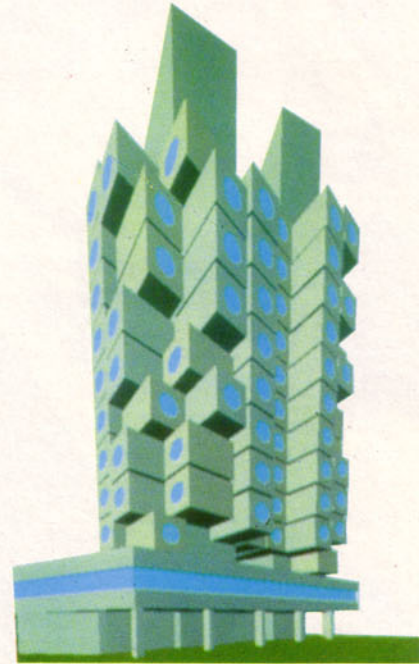


Fig 1

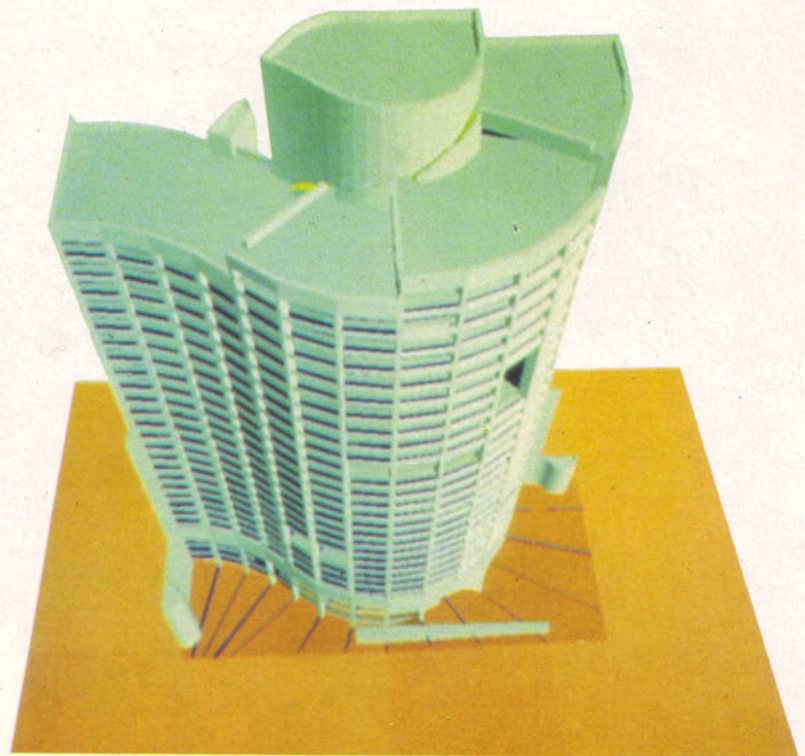


Fig 2

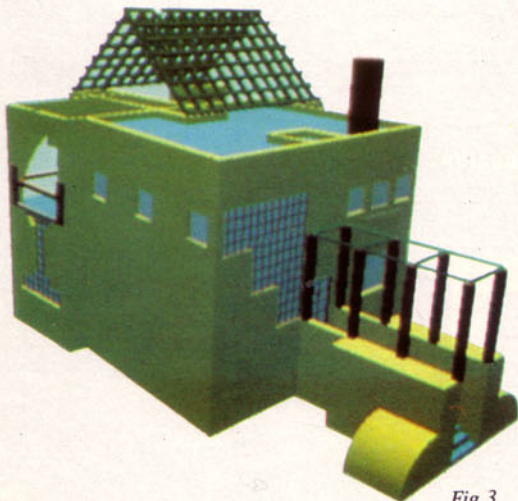


Fig 3

Wit in computer graphics

Whatever the merits of much of computer graphics, humour or wit is a fairly rare attribute. Only a few genuinely funny pieces of computer graphics readily come to mind: the 1968 animation by Tony Pritchett called *Flexipede* is one of them. In it, a strange mechanical insect rather like a centipede performs some simple manoeuvres to the accompaniment of a clanking, wheezing soundtrack.

Another very funny animation — by an artist whose name I am sorry to say I cannot remember — is *Nook the Dook* (or is it *Nuke the Duke?*). In it, John Wayne recites the American Oath of Allegiance as a background to some highly inappropriate but extremely relevant images. I gave up acting as judge

of an international computer animation conference when it was not given the prize which I think it deserved! More recently, John Lassiter's *Luxo Jr* showed the gentle (but rather too cute for my liking) humour that an ex-Disney animator can bring to bear on computer graphics.

Some of the fashion students at Middlesex Polytechnic have been using the paint systems there to grab images of well-known and not so well-known paintings and to use the human forms in these as lay figures for their fabric and fashion designs. The results are excellent images of the designs and also witty comments on the paintings themselves. Fig 4 is by Sean Sirrs, Fig 5 is by Jane Golan, and Fig 6 is by Neil Thomson, all first year Textile and Fashion students.



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6