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## Lecturer discusses use of virtual reality in architecture design

*New technology will enable architects to design structures with computer programs*

**By Teri Meeuwsen**  
Higher Education Reporter

With the wave of a hand, architectural designers can manipulate architectural forms and images in a virtual world. Using specially designed headgear and gloves, designers now have the ability to create life-size images in real three-dimensional space from a custom virtual reality platform.

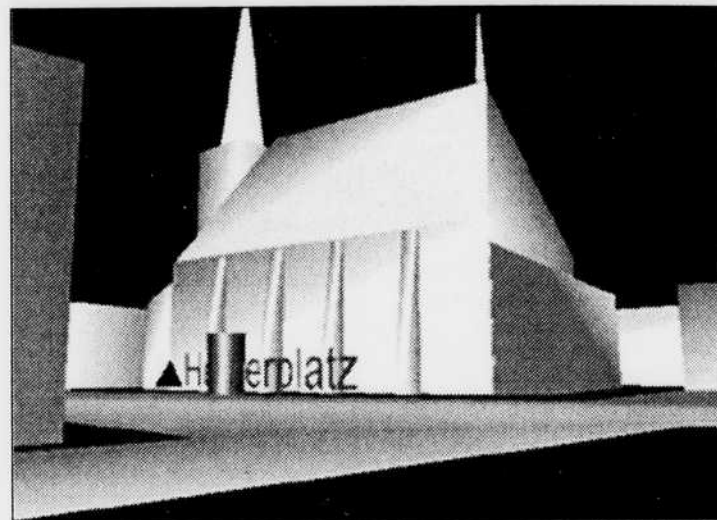
Dirk Donath, head of the Computers in Architecture and Town Planning Department at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany, is a pioneer in the use of virtual reality-aided design. University architecture professor Nancy Cheng said. Donath's research group has developed a sketching and space definition program that can translate hand gestures into computer data.

"The use of virtual reality will help bridge the gap between computers and humans in a virtual world," Donath said.

Donath visited the University Monday night for a lecture in which he explained how his research is making it possible for designers to work with computers in a more natural way.

"Keyboards and monitors are not natural for drawing," Cheng said. "[Donath] is trying to make using computers as natural as possible."

An interdisciplinary group from computer science, architecture, product design and psychol-



COURTESY PHOTO

*Using new computer technology, architects can design three-dimensional structures in a virtual world.*

ogy helped to develop the software.

"I think it's very important to bring together such a diverse group on such a project like this," Donath said.

Two different programs were created to use in the virtual world. The first, voxDesign, was developed to give architects a simple tool to create the early stages of the design process, such as sketching. This program is also used for transferring a virtual reality design from the laboratory to real usage, such as public presentations. The second program, planeDesign, is more simple and aids the architect with the early stages of the design process in the virtual world.

The use of virtual reality at the

University, however, is not in the budget, Cheng said.

"It's really, really expensive," she said. "One of the most expensive things to do is buy a virtual reality set."

Architecture major Ken Hutchinson said he sees Donath's Monday night lecture as the University's way of looking beyond today's architecture program.

"We have a pretty positive program here," he said. "The architecture department focuses on computer-aided design and has been strong the past few years. Bringing [Donath] in shows that our people in control are looking towards the future and not wanting the program to stagnate."

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