



Left
Charles & Ray Eames,
unpadded wire mesh side
chairs with 'Eiffel Tower'
base; the black bird is a
piece of early American
folk art

Architectural thought is primarily non-verbal thought; a fact of very considerable significance since so much of our everyday thinking is verbal. We are accustomed, in particular when communicating consciously, to use words; at a less conscious level, body language is ubiquitous. Education reinforces that pattern. What is more, it is virtually impossible to conduct a non-violent argument except verbally; I could not communicate the ideas in this book by non-verbal means, say through drawings.

Yet architects are of necessity involved in drawing by some means or other and continually think non-verbally as part of their normal architectural activity. Visual thinking is particularly relevant at the design stage which is also the stage in which an architect makes the most significant impact. To imagine and record spatial organisation would generally be recognised as the activity which distinguishes an architect from others involved in the creation of buildings. This is not to suggest that architects have a monopoly in non-verbal thought. Clearly musicians, painters, sculptors, engineers, product designers, graphic designers, different craftsmen, film makers, some scientists and many others equally and routinely pursue visual thinking. Yet it is possible to modify Descartes dictum and say 'I think non-verbally therefore I am an architect'.

What is surprising, however, is that verbal thinking has been a subject of argument for philosophers and others for centuries yet non-verbal thinking has been greatly neglected. It is as if the use of words to discuss an activity that discards words is in some way an impossibility or at least illogical. It is undeniably difficult but not therefore to be dismissed. Nor must it be assumed that a definitive statement is probable. Linguistic philosophers have, after all, not produced unchallenged answers either.

Charles Eames – architect, furniture designer, film maker, exhibition designer – on being asked 'What is your definition of "design"?' answered 'A plan for arranging