Design can be seen as a very special kind of activity practised by a curious breed of highly creative individuals. In the cinema and theatre, designers are often portrayed in a similar way to artists. These dramatic characters are temperamental and difficult to get on with, and seem consumed and driven by some inner passion which separates them from the rest of society. Sadly many designers seem to want to widen rather than bridge the gap between themselves and others. Their dress, demeanour and behaviour may be unusual and eccentric. In a way this is understandable since it offers a way of claiming authority. What else is a designer selling if it is not his or her creativity? We have come, rather falsely, to associate creativity with originality, so it follows that designers selling their skills want to seem original in as many ways as possible. Design magazines, newspaper reviews and television programmes all tend to reinforce this cult of the individual. As much as anything this probably demonstrates a journalistic response to our need for heroes. The media have recently used the term 'designer' to imply exclusiveness and out of the ordinary, as in 'designer-jeans'. Probably so far, this book has implicitly suggested that design is an entirely personal and individual process. However this need not be so and actually rarely is!

The reality that lies behind the dramatist's simple image and the advertiser's hype is much more prosaic. Designers are not actually special people at all, since we are all designers to a greater or lesser extent. We all design our appearance every morning as we dress. We all design the insides of our own homes, and personalise our places of work. Even planning and organising our time can be seen as a kind of design activity. Professional designers who actually earn their living by designing for others, often work in teams, hammering out, rather than easily conceiving their ideas. It is the team activity which is so often characteristic of the design process which we will study in this chapter. A very important member of that team is the client, and the relationship between client and designer will also come under scrutiny here.

Design as a natural activity

We all develop design skills, but for most of us this is a relatively unconscious process in which we are heavily influenced by those around us. We select, buy and then combine clothes and

furniture and in this sense cannot avoid being fashion designers and interior designers. We work in our gardens and become amateur landscape architects. In all these activities we are not only satisfying ourselves but also communicating with others and sending out signals about ourselves. Over the years I have acquired a substantial collection of photographs of the way people modify and decorate their houses to express not only individual but also group identities (Lawson 2001). Often this 'customising' has clearly been expensive and may have involved many hours of work. The non-functioning, decorative shutters which can sometimes spread through a housing estate like some kind of infectious disease are an obvious example. Here both time and money have been spent without gaining any strictly functional benefit, but purely to identify and individualise. This action can be seen as part of the process of taking possession of the house, and in many ways distinguishes the 'house' from 'home', by creating a sense of belonging. Too often our creative, professional designers feel such humble efforts to be an insult to their designs.

Of all the designers we have considered in this book, perhaps none understands and accommodates this so well as Herman Hertzberger. The involvement of users in the design process is a dominating feature of Hertzberger's whole attitude towards design. One might therefore expect him to consider this very deeply in the design of houses. Certainly this is true, but Hertzberger reminds us that this process of involvement in place extends from individuals to families and then out into larger communities. Hertzberger (1971) does not, however, see the designer's role as purely passive but as an active facilitator of the process:

> Just as a carcass house can be finished by its occupants and made their personal familiar environment, so also the street can be taken over by its residents. The opportunity to complete one's own house is of importance for self realisation as an introvert process: outside it, the other component manifests itself in the individual's belonging to others. For this reason, a prime concern in the street is to offer provocation and at the same time the tools to stimulate communal decisions. The street becomes the possession of its residents, who, through their concern and the marks they make on it, turn it into their own communal territory – after the privacy of the house, the second prerequisite for self realisation.

Cedric Green has suggested that it is important to recognise the natural way in which we pick up an ability to design (Green 1971).