> happens. You get an idea, but that idea is not really of a very philosophical or conceptual thought. It is really something which is an expression on the level of your experience which is initiated by the question.
>
> (Lawson 1994b)

This echoes something that I have often found to be the case when investigating the process of well-known designers. Critics have written explaining how we should interpret their work and often this has become received wisdom. However, the designers themselves claim not to have intended such an interpretation. In Eva Jiricna's case this has amusingly even extended to the symbolic intentions behind her clothes which are almost invariably black. In fact Eva herself explains this as practical rather than symbolic, allowing her to her to 'go to the office in the morning, to site in the afternoon, and to the theatre in the evening, so it's extremely practical'.

Critics, then, may infer what the designer has not implied and we must be very wary of reaching conclusions about the process which created the object that is being criticised!

Decomposition versus integration

Designers vary in the extent to which they portray their work as driven by a limited portfolio of considerations and in the extent to which they wish to make this explicit. We have seen earlier in this book how good design is often an integrated response to a whole series of issues. The cartwheels made in George Sturt's wheelwright's shop were dished for a whole range of reasons. However it is also possible to view the designed object as a deconstruction of the problem. Even before the idea of deconstruction as a philosophical game became popular some designers had a preference for articulating their work in a technical sense. Richard Rogers prefers to 'clarify the performance of the parts' and thus he separates functions so that each part is an optimum solution to a particular problem and plays what he calls 'a single role'. Such a design process was very much implied by Christopher Alexander's famous method reviewed in an earlier chapter which depended on breaking the problem down into its constituent parts. By contrast Herman Hertzberger (1971) actually advocates the more integrated approach where ambiguity and multiplicity of function are deliberately designed into objects. He shows, for example, in a housing scheme, a simple concrete form outside each dwelling can carry a house number, serve to house a light fitting, act as a stand for milk bottles, offer a place to sit, or even act as a table for an outdoor meal. In this case

Hertzberger is far from trying to optimise this object to any one particular function but rather seeing it as a sort of compromise.

As time passes different issues are inclined to come into the spotlight and assume a foreground role in design. In some cases this may simply be a matter of fashion and style, but in other cases this may result from the wider social, economic or political agenda of the time. One such issue in recent years is undoubtedly the question of 'green' design. Some designers have written books and even designed almost as a form of propaganda in order to promote a change of attitude more widely. For example, Robert and Brenda Vale have written many papers and books following on from their famous 'autonomous house' (Vale and Vale 1975) and they have constructed a number of houses for themselves and others demonstrating these principles. By contrast Richard Burton (1979), who established the first ever energy policy for the RIBA was careful to issue a caveat:

> Energy in building has had something of a fanfare lately and maybe it will have to continue for some time, but soon I hope the subject will take its correct place among the twenty other major issues a designer of buildings has to consider.
>
> (Burton 1979)

Perhaps, in the context of this book, Richard Burton is warning us that we must look carefully indeed at a process which from the outset seeks to demonstrate the importance of a limited range of problems. In general the design process needs to be more balanced and almost by definition less focused than some polemical work might require.

The future

We have already seen how design is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Any piece of design contains, to some extent, an assertion about the future. As Cedric Price puts it in relation to architecture:

> In designing for building every architect is involved in foretelling what is going to happen.
>
> (Price 1976)

Designers then are guided in their work by both their own vision of the future and their level of confidence in this vision. The strongest visions can easily become rather frightening, especially when in the minds of designers such architects can have such a significant impact on peoples' lives. The futurist movement in art in the early part of the twentieth century became confused with architecture in