8 Space and time

We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.
                        Winston Churchill, Parliamentary speech 1943

All buildings are predictions. All predictions are wrong.
                        Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn*

Predictions
Any good and useful language enables its users to communicate about what is happening now, what has happened in the past, and what will or might happen in the future. So languages usually have past, present and future tenses. We do not always know exactly what actually happened in the past, as we have uncertain and incomplete knowledge of it, and this keeps historians busy. However, our knowledge of the future is uncertain in a much more profound way. We sometimes think we know what is going to happen and turn out to be very wrong indeed. This happens perhaps more often than we care to admit. We are particularly poor at predicting the future when people are involved and, although we know a great deal about ourselves, we are also very unpredictable. This problem besets architecture, since, as Stewart Brand tells us, 'all buildings are predictions'. His claim that 'all predictions are wrong' might be a slight exaggeration, but his point is well made nonetheless.

Design strategies for uncertainty
I have suggested elsewhere that designers seem to have adopted three main ways of dealing with this uncertainty about the future in the design process (Lawson 1997). I have called these three strategies 'procrastination', 'non-committal design' and 'throw-away design', and it seems that each of these strategies has its exponents in different design fields. Procrastination is based on the idea that somehow the future may become more certain if only we wait a little. I regularly meet people who are paralysed by this approach when buying a computer. If I buy now, goes the argument, they might bring out a