

new machine and I will be left with an out-of-date model. I try to point out that this will also be true next week, next month and next year, so it is no reason to delay. This strategy is also popular with very long time-scale decision-makers such as politicians and town planners. Design decisions taken by governments, whether regional, national or local, that can later be criticized are potential electoral millstones around the necks of the politicians. Far better then to be detached and free of all blame! But procrastination rarely leaves a situation unaffected. Once an inner-city area has been identified as in need of some planning action, that area is likely to become 'blighted' and run down even more rapidly until decisions are taken about its future.

By contrast, some architects have tended to design bland, anonymous and neutral buildings, which are non-specific in terms of either their functions or their locations. Not surprisingly there has been a reaction against such architecture, which has been accused of failing to provide places of character. The notion of flexible and adaptable environments was popular for a while in schools of architecture. Habraken and his followers were highly influential for a time, and went so far as to suggest that architects should design support structures that would provide only shelter, support and services, leaving future users free to create their own homes and express their own identity by arranging the kits of parts that fit within these 'supports' (Habraken 1972).

The third response to uncertainty is to design for the present only. Thus obsolescence is built in, and the designed object is intended to be thrown away and replaced with a more up-to-date design. This strategy has been increasingly adopted by the designers of mass-produced goods. Everything from clothes to motorcars may be discarded in favour of new styles and images. Such an approach is particularly favoured by fashion designers, with the very word 'fashion' confirming its transient nature. However, such ideas have already begun to invade more traditionally stable fields such as interior design. We are expected not only to wear this year's clothes, but also to prepare this year's food in this year's kitchens. I recently saw an advertisement for office furniture systems that exhorted us to buy a new office, not because we needed it but simply because our existing one was old. 'You change your car every three years', went the text, 'when did you last change your office?' Unfortunately this consumerist approach is not only wasteful of resources but also leads to short-lived goods of continually reduced quality, and thus the need to replace things becomes not just an option but a necessity.

### **The span of time in space**

Perhaps the real problem here is the way in which we have come to view time in our current age. The twentieth century will eventually be