

We rely upon the clues given by architecture not only to read buildings as formal objects but also as behavioural settings. We have already introduced the notion of the behavioural setting and we shall soon return to it in more detail, but for now it is important to recognize that there are different social rules applying in different settings – what is acceptable behaviour in a nightclub is not so in a library, and so on. Unless architecture can communicate these settings, we simply cannot lead our lives in a reasonably secure way. To a certain extent, then, we find it necessary for a library to look like a library and not a nightclub! But what makes a library different from a nightclub is not purely its visual appearance. That appearance has a certain structure order and style which we can recognize and read, but it comes from the much deeper characteristics of architecture as a human and social phenomenon, which we shall begin to discuss in the next chapter. If architects understand and learn to speak this human language of space their work can become externally meaningful whatever visual style is applied to it in order to help make it internally readable. Of course our experience is generally integrative rather than analytical, and we are not normally conscious of identifying the extent to which formal and symbolic modes of perception comprise that experience. Only when we review architecture in a self-consciously critical light do the materials of internal structure and external reference reveal their individual contributions. Seamlessly integrating these two is perhaps one of the most sophisticated and advanced of the skills of the good architect.

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