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# 1 Space as language

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The physical environment that we construct is as much a social phenomenon as it is a physical one.

Harold Proshansky

Architecture is the art of how to waste space.

Philip Johnson, *New York Times*

## **Why a language?**

It is well known that communicating by telephone is different to communicating 'face to face'. More recently we have had to learn to communicate by fax and by e-mail. It is now well recognized that all the new artificial and technologically supported media of communication have their strengths and weaknesses. All are useful when we are not co-located, and some are useful when we want to communicate asynchronously. I use e-mail extensively every day of my life, and could now hardly do my job without it. However, if we have to tell someone difficult, unpleasant or perhaps even tragic news, you and I know that e-mail is not ideal! What distinguishes all the other methods of communication from live conversation is that the latter takes place in space. The very phrase 'face to face' is implicitly makes reference to space. It tells us how people are arranged in space. They are not 'back to back', because they actually want to see each other's faces! This is very basic stuff. Unfortunately, it is so fundamental that we often forget about it when designing spaces. At the moment I am sitting in front of my computer writing this book. Well actually no, from your point of view, that was some time ago, because you are now sitting I know not where, reading it many months if not years later! I can assure you that although the text on your page looks continuous, the writing was not. I have re-ordered it, re-phrased it, and re-worked it many times. But more importantly I am forced to use a style of language I would never use 'face to face'. At times I also lecture about this subject to large groups. On such occasions I use yet another style and begin to interact with my audience a little, albeit in a rather formal way. I assure