

The Architect's Problems

In 1969 the psychologist David Canter (Canter, 1969) suggested that architects needed to know more about psychology². Initially in the UK the term for a 'new approach to' the way buildings affect people was 'Architectural Psychology' (Canter, 1969, p.11) whilst in the USA it was Environmental Psychology (Ittelson, 1976). Architects claim to be trained to embody the skills required to configure buildings and hence make claims to control the shape of any built environment. Spatial knowledge and skills in the workplace can acquire epicenters of cost, time and/or quality of the building or some concept of architectural service (Duffy, 1998). However critics of the architectural claim deny that architects have any kind of acceptable theory of the built environment in a way that links sentient people together as part of a life-world experience (Lefebvre, 1994; Anderson, 1998).

Architects do sometimes encourage questions about the use of buildings by people (Zimring, 1987; Kernohan, 1992); and about the design of buildings for people (Zeisel, 1984). Those making claims that they do, after all, pay attention to the quality of life provided by the building imply, but do not describe, the inclusion of some kind of link between one and/or a number of mentalities and physicality. The theoretical position of J. J. Gibson (Gibson, 1974) is often called upon to justify claims linking thought to things. Gibson hypothesizes links between surroundings and 'mental contents' that could be thought of as being shared: this has a century long tradition in psychology (Heft, 2001). Such claims as are made demand some way of understanding how we might put buildings into the heads as much as we seem to have mastered our ability to put heads into the buildings (Mace, 1977).