

to get away from the flag, and were caused much public embarrassment by the famous incident when the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, covered the tail plane of a model of the new design with a borrowed handkerchief to signify her disgust! Almost inevitably after that they eventually had to return to the flag!

However, their 1970s version was a brilliant piece of design. It worked both symbolically and formally. Just enough of the Union Jack was used to be recognizable and for the planes to be seen as British at any international airport. The geometrical redundancy of the flag was also exploited in order to disguise the quite different shapes of the many tails in the fleet. You would see the design on the tail of a Boeing 747 or a Tri-Star or a small domestic aircraft. In reality these are all very different shapes and have quite different relationships with the fuselage, and yet the design makes them all look the same. At yet another level, the design used a portion of the flag, which is dart-like, pointing forward and suggesting flight. This was brilliant design exploiting our parallel use of both formal and symbolic perception.

### **Back to architecture!**

Buildings are much more complex objects than aircraft tailplanes, but we might expect the same principles still to apply. No building can ever be entirely free of symbolic content. Some years ago my university opened a new building for its psychology department (Fig. 4.11). It is situated between a major arterial road and the sports fields, which are at a lower level. The building commissioned by the university immediately prior to this was just a little way further down the same road and had suffered badly from traffic noise problems, so this was emphasized in the brief. The architects quite skilfully manipulated the accommodation so that nearly all the spaces facing the road had few if any windows, which largely meant locating spaces such as lecture theatres, laboratories and stores there. They also folded the building in plan to offer the maximum façade towards the sports fields, which was then heavily glazed in a fairly conventional manner. The resultant roadside elevation by contrast had small windows occasionally punched into the reconstructed stone walls. The architects were rather pleased with the composition of this façade, assessing it purely as a formal abstract composition. However, when we asked passers-by and visitors about the building they revealed a very different perspective. Almost uniformly they viewed it as 'fortress-like', 'secretive' and sometimes 'sinister'. Those who also knew the purpose of the building associated the secretive appearance with a need to conceal its interior, and saw it as 'malevolent' and 'threatening' (Lawson and Spencer 1978). This contrast of perception illustrated a rather commonly found lack of communication and understanding between architects of the late twentieth century and their clients. While the architects tended to