

in university library reading rooms (Sommer 1969). Various personal belongings were used to spread around the tables to defend seats, and in some cases the experimenter would depart the table altogether, leaving behind a pile of books, a jacket or other such belongings. In general, it was found that the more valuable the defensive place marker, the longer it would defend the seat from invasion. In another experiment the researcher would ask a neighbour to save his chair while he was gone. Here less valuable markers would still enable the willing neighbour to defend the seat, although this tailed off with the length of absence. It is also interesting to note that the neighbour's willingness to defend the seat was increased if the researcher had first struck up some inconsequential conversation, such as asking the time.

All too often the provision in spaces such as library reading rooms is unimaginatively of four- or six-seater tables, which appear full to the co-existing readers when only one or two people are sitting at them. In such a reading room studied by one of my students, only just before the semester examinations did these tables actually get fully occupied – in spite of planning data books recommending such layouts to architects as yielding the highest density arrangement. This is another example of space considered in the abstract with no acknowledgement of spatial behaviour. If only people were machines, planning would be so much simpler!

Sommer's now famous study of all this also involved action research by Nancy Russo. To do this work, she must have spent many hours sitting either too close to people or in inappropriate spatial configurations to them. It is a very odd way to earn a living! The experiments took a standard form of observing individuals in a university library reading room. They had already observed the patterns of behaviour described above – that is to say, new occupants of the room would seek to space themselves out as evenly as possible, keeping maximum distances between themselves and other occupants. Typically readers would each occupy their own separate table, sitting at a chair at the end of one side. Avoiding any cross-gender behavioural implications, Nancy Russo would choose to occupy another chair at a table already occupied by a single female reader. Sometimes she sat alongside the victim, sometimes directly opposite, and so on. These invasions of space were then shown to drive the poor victim away more quickly than expected. Hardly surprisingly, sitting next to the victim and moving her chair even closer was the most effective invasion of all!

By comparison, the great Charles Rennie Mackintosh showed how it could be done in the library of the Glasgow School of Art. Mackintosh is sometimes mistakenly thought to be a decorator, whereas in fact he was a brilliant place maker. Study tables are always located in relation to other building elements. The great windows that rise so dramatically up the great west façade have heavily splayed and