

trating on its formal properties. The plans of many buildings in the Far East often have quite symbolic significance. I remember an Indian student in my year at Oxford who was failed for designing a cricket pavilion that had a moon-like crescent-shaped plan. This outline resulted in many awkward spaces and gave him many problems in organizing the activities inside. His tutors could not understand why he persisted with this problematic geometry, but to him it was perfectly logical since it was the symbol that appeared on the shirt of his local cricket team in India. He remained puzzled and angry that his tutors had not appreciated the efforts he had made to work with this difficult but, for him, right shape.

Movable and fixed furniture

Many of the situations we have considered in this chapter involve the use of furniture to help locate people in space, thus either inhibiting or facilitating their desired relationships by creating appropriate or inappropriate behavioural settings. Before leaving this subject, it is worth noting that such furniture can be fixed or movable. We have seen that willingness to move furniture can vary with culture and setting. Sommer notes that large groups arriving in a café are likely to move a seat from an adjacent table in order to establish their whole group in one location (Sommer 1969). By comparison, he could record no instance of this happening in his much-researched library reading rooms. The social norms, it seems, tell us that behaviour that is acceptable in the café setting may not be suitable in the library setting. The nature of my work as an academic means that almost every day many people will come to see me in my office. They may range from students discussing their work to staff planning a course, visitors collaborating in a research project or my secretary updating my diary. Their willingness to move the seats around is very variable. Of course it depends on many factors. When several people come in together they are much more likely to feel able to move a chair than a single person seems to. Obviously this is influenced by the nature of the activity, but it is often related to what seems to be a perceived position in the hierarchy of the institution. Those who would be thought of as more senior or with whom I have a more personal relationship seem much more likely to adjust the furniture. Such variation does not occur in neutral spaces such as meeting and seminar rooms. Here all furniture is deemed to be movable by all the occupants.

However, the locators of movable furniture in reality often turn out not to be the normal users of a space but rather those who service it. In a series of studies of English pubs I found the furniture arrangement was repeated with extraordinary regularity. One could enter a bar at opening time and find the furniture in exactly the position it had been at opening time on the day before, and indeed as far back as