

of worship. The choir, the congregation and the clergy each have their place, and a Christian visiting a strange church will have little difficulty in knowing where to go and how to behave. As Duncan Joiner has pointed out, the legal courtroom similarly places all the participants in space in such a way as to express their roles (Joiner 1971). The judge sits higher up; the accused is in a slightly lower and very exposed position for all to see; the jury is to one side, indicating their role as observers; and the two sets of legal representatives are on either side of an axis through the judge, demonstrating their opposition and his neutrality. The ritual of space, dress and procession is not only intended to aggrandize the legal process, but also to give us a sense of security in it. Imagine the effect on proceedings if the courtroom were simply a large square room with a few freestanding tables and chairs, all of which could be moved. The undignified scramble for a place and the difficulty of knowing who was who would totally disrupt the trial.

When at the end of every academic year my students graduate, they receive their degrees at an academic congregation. Not only is this whole ceremony highly artificial, it is not even legally necessary – it is quite possible to use your degree title without attending the ceremony! But the ceremony is there to celebrate an important event in a lifetime. It enables students and their parents, relatives and friends to feel some sense of occasion and climax. It also promotes a sense of moving on to the next phase, and the students may take leave of many of their close university peers for the last time at such an event. For all these reasons my university, like most others, conducts a grand and formal ceremony. I am not allowed simply to read out the students' names; I must also wear my academic robes and process slowly round the hall and onto the platform. I must doff my hat to the University Chancellor and await his permission to begin calling the students. As they are called forward one by one, the students walk across the platform, shake the Chancellor's hand and receive their certificates. More significantly, this setting is organized so that for these few moments each student in turn becomes the centre of attention of the whole arena. The space is laid out so that academic staff, graduands and relatives or friends are all separated in space, to emphasize the significance of the event and to heighten the ceremony (Fig. 2.7). In fact, in spite of all its medieval pomp, this ceremony is a largely modern invention. However, it is a reflection of initiation rites – passages of maturity to adulthood, birth celebrations, marriages and eventually funerals. All these share in common a way of explaining to a wider society just how certain individuals, groups and families are progressing through their lives. In turn, of course, this prepares other members of the society for these events in their own lives, and for the cultural norms that we attach to them.

However, this social structuring of society in space is not restricted to ceremonial and special occasions. Duncan Joiner has also studied a