



Corridors Which Live

Corridors in modern public buildings are unfriendly and sterile places. They are designed for scuttling people through, not for people to stay in.

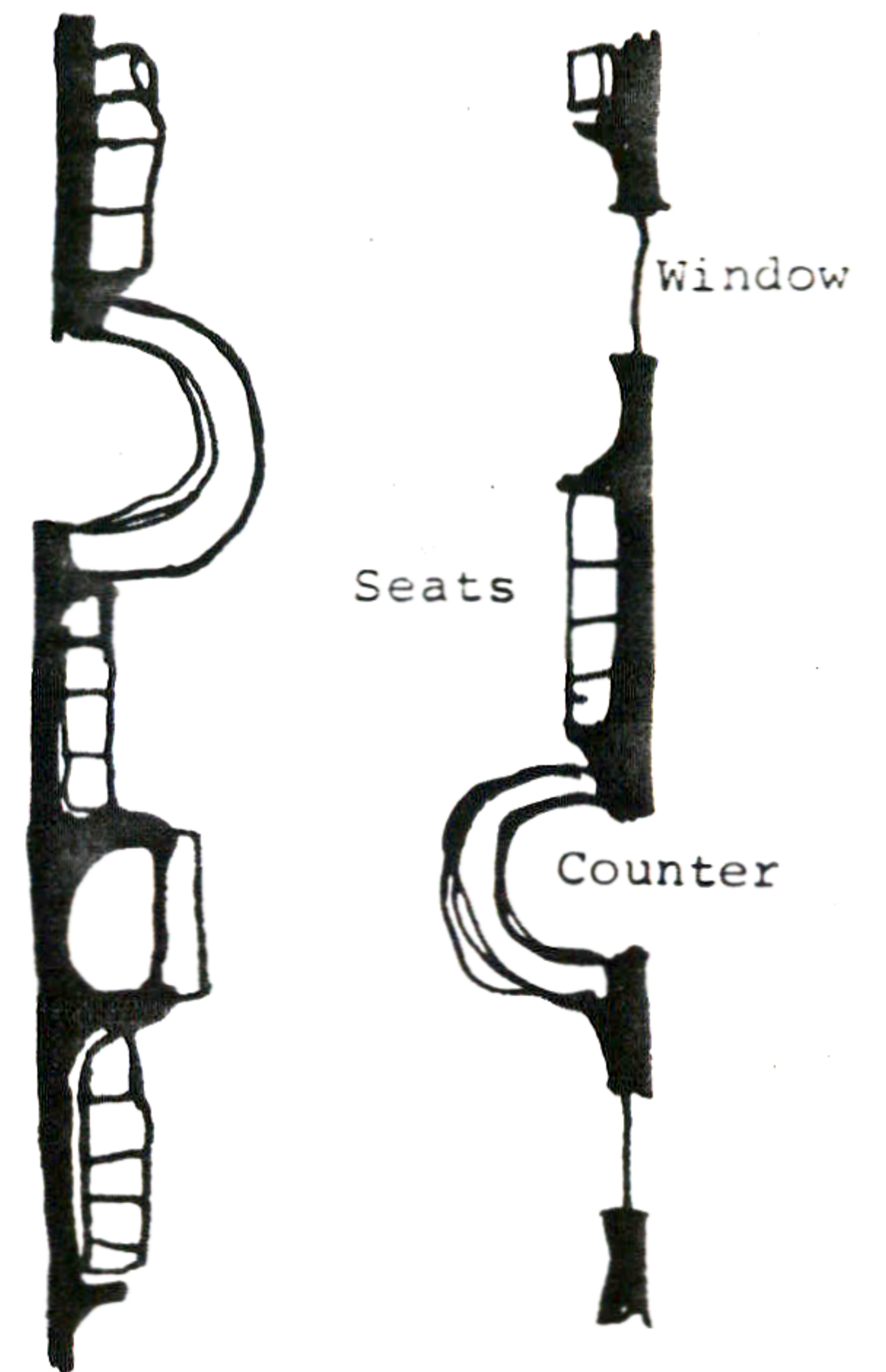
If a building is organized so that you feel as though you have to have an excuse to be in every part of it, it makes it impossible for anyone to get a sense of what the building is all about, and it gives a general feeling of being unfriendly.

While the rooms in a building are purposeful, the corridors and lobby do not have to be. It is true that they are mainly for circulation, but it is important that they be something more than just for moving through. It is from the circulation system of any environment that one gets a total sense of that environment. If the circulation system invites you to stop and be there for a while and see what is going on

around you, the whole environment seems friendly. For instance streets with people sitting on stoops, and stopping to look in shop windows or to buy something from a street vendor, are alive and wonderful places to be, while a street with only blank walls, where people pass through intent only on their destinations, are frightening and alienating.

So it is with corridors in public buildings. Like the street, these corridors should have many places to stop, to sit, to look at things, to buy things and should give you a sense of what is going on around you.

(continued over)



Therefore: Line the corridors with windows looking into the services; make places by concentrating seats and activities along the way; project counters and entrances of services into the corridors. Make the main part of the corridor about 12 feet wide, and between 12 and 16 feet high, and where activities and counters are placed – make edges about 7 feet high, going to a total width of 21 feet. Give the corridor as many windows as possible, and make other corridors lead into it wherever possible.



Corridors Which Live

Problem (continued)

Given the need for these qualities, what do they mean for the form of such a corridor?

1. Rooms next to the corridor should have windows opening on to the corridor. We know it is unpleasant to walk down a corridor lined with blank walls. Not only do you lose the sense of where you are but you get the feeling that all the life in the building is on the other side of the walls, and you feel cut off from it.

We guess that this contact with the public is not objectionable for the workers, so long as it is not too extreme; i.e., as long as the workplace is protected either by distance or by a partial wall. People do not want to be exposed to the public if the exposure is so direct that it makes them feel self-conscious, or as though they have to keep their desks very tidy, etc. Frank Duffy cited these concerns as being the major ones in an office setting which is too open (*"Role and Status in the Office"*, *AA Quarterly*, October, 1969, page 10). The balance between openness and protection can be achieved by providing windows into the services which begin at above desk level, and which are placed so that workers are not right next to the glass.

2. The corridor should be lined with seats and places to stop, such as newspaper, magazine and candy stands, bulletin boards, exhibits, and displays, etc.

Since most buildings cannot literally be lined with these kinds of things, it is best if they are concentrated to make places, in order for their impact to be felt.

3. Where there are entrances and counters of offices and services off the corridor, they should project into the corridor. Like activities, entrances and counters make places in the corridor, and should be combined with seats and other places to stop. In most public service buildings these counters and entrances are usually set back from corridors which makes them not only hard to see, but they give the feeling of being in the office, emphasizing the difference between corridor, as being only for passing through, and offices as being where things happen. These problems can be solved if the entrances and counters projected into the corridor and became part of it.

4. The corridor needs to be wide enough for people to feel comfortable walking or stopping along the way. Informal experiments

help to determine how much space people need when they pass others. Since the likelihood of three people passing three people is not high, we consider as a maximum two people passing two people, or three people passing one person. Each person takes about two feet; there needs to be about one foot between two groups which pass, so that they don't feel crowded, and people usually walk at least one foot away from the wall. The corridor width, therefore should be at least 11 feet.

Our informal experiments indicate that a person seated or standing feels uncomfortable if anyone passes closer than 5 feet. Thus, in places in the corridor where seats, activities, entrances, and counters are placed, the corridor should widen to about 16 feet (one sided) or 21 feet (two sided).

5. Ceiling heights should also feel comfortable for you whether you are walking or standing in the corridor.

According to the pattern, *Ceiling Heights*, the height of any space should be equal to the appropriate horizontal social distances between people for the given situation—the higher the ceiling, the more distant people seem from each other.

Edward T. Hall, in *The Hidden Dimension*, suggests that a comfortable distance to be away from strangers is the distance at which you cannot distinguish their facial features. He gives this distance as being between 12 and 16 feet. Thus, the ceiling height in a corridor should be roughly in that range.

Where people sit and stand talking to each other, the appropriate social distance is more intimate. Hall calls casual conversation distance Social Distance-Far Phase, and gives it a dimension of 4 to 7 feet. Thus, the ceiling height in activity and "edge" places should be 7 feet.

6. Long corridors should be avoided at all costs. This is discussed in the pattern, *Short Corridors*. The feeling of corridors being long, institutional, and unpleasant is diminished by windows to the outside, activities, as discussed above, other corridors leading into it, and the use of natural light as opposed to artificial light.

Context

This pattern applies to major corridors where public visits are frequent.

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This pattern is tentative. If you have any evidence to support or refute its current formulation, please send it to the Center for Environmental Structure, P.O. Box 5156, Berkeley, California 94705; we will add your comments to the next edition.