DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The relative similarity of people's responses to church and lecture room settings seems to reflect the well documented historical links between these two types of institutions: schools and universities were initially created and developed in close association with temples and monasteries. This strong similarity between these two types of situations was independently demonstrated by Price (1975), who found that church and class have more in common, in terms of appropriate behaviours there (intercorrelation 0.61), than have either class and movies (intercorrelation 0.08) or church and movies (0.29). Secondly, the difference in the way spatial closeness is perceived in these three settings seems to suggest that although all these three types of situations require people to participate in an unfocused type of interaction (Goffman, 1963), there is, nevertheless, a clearly marked difference in the degree to which the "we feeling" is developed between the people. It looks as if places in which people assemble in order to listen to and watch the use of live action and live words makes them less anonymous to each other and less indifferent to the presence of another person than with the people engaged in watching a celluloid and light recording of human beings. The fact that cinemas are for the most part fairly dark, whereas lecture rooms particularly are well lit might also be relevant here. Furthermore, the heightened feeling of spatial proximity to other individuals in a church and in a lecture room appears to be in line with our intuitive impression that the fact of participation in the church services or public lectures is indicative of much stronger social and ideological links between the members of the congregation or the lecture audience than it would be the case with people constituting the population of movie patrons. Numerous sociological literature on the definition of the situation (McHugh, 1968; Ball, 1971) also underlines the fact that situational definitions can have a strong effect on a wide range of behaviours. What we are suggesting here is that the physical distance between people appears to be perceived as being shortened or diminished whenever the people develop some common interests or are otherwise similar to one another. Such a hypothesis is certainly in line with the results of experiments on the extent of physical spacing between people of various degrees of interpersonal similarity and affinity (Lett et al., 1969; Evans and Howard, 1973; Argyle, 1975).

The second salient finding is the fact that people perceived themselves as sitting, on the average, closer to those who were in the seating arrangement type B than to those who were in the layout type C. One of the possible reasons for this seems to be the way various distinct groups of setting users were delineated by the configuration of chairs and aisles. It may be noted that in the configuration type B the presence of a horizontal aisle created two separate groups of chairs and placed nine out of fifteen target persons (60% of them) within the same sub-set of chairs. In the configuration type C, the presence of two vertical aisles splintered the whole assembly into three major groups of users with only seven out of fifteen target persons (46% of them) sharing with the observer the same sub-set of chairs and with four out of five highest scoring individuals (that is, those seated to the side of the observer) being placed in separate sub-sets of chairs. However, because the presence or absence of an aisle does not seem to significantly affect perceived interpersonal proximity, other factors unknown at present may be operating here.

Thirdly, the influence of spatial position relative to the observer on the estimation of the degree of interpersonal proximity seems to indicate that people perceived as seated closer to the observer are those who are fairly easy to see and who, in turn, can relatively easily see the observer himself (i.e., people in the side locations). Those seated to the front of him can be seen with ease but they themselves need to turn their heads and torsos before they can establish any visual contact with the observer positioned behind their backs. Finally those sitting diagonally to the observer are least accessible to the senses of the person acting in our experiment as the observer. They, in order to be looked at, need to be singled out from the mass of others sitting around them. Further, a person seated in such a sector of space still needs to turn his head and body in order to establish eye contact with the person diagonally and to the back. Taking all these factors into account, it is not surprising that the mean rating of interpersonal proximity tends to be inversely related to the degree of difficulty people may experience while trying to establish a spate of focused interchange.

The final important point is the issue of the changes in the proximity rating as the function of objective or physical distance separating two protagonists. As it was said earlier, the subjective distance tended to be systematically but non-linearly related to the extent of space obtained between a given set of setting users. significantly, these findings are in line with the earlier reviewed observations of psychophysicists. The fact that each subsequent person (counting from the observer) tended to score only 80% of proximity scores given to his predecessor suggests that, by extrapolation, the average rating of interpersonal closeness should diminish to the level of 1%, that is the level defined by us as "very far" at a distance of some 19 seats away from the observer. This distance, if translated into real-life dimensions, is an equivalent of 15.2 meters (or approximately 48 feet) and coincides with the distance at which human engineering handbooks suggest that an unaided speaker's voice in an indoor setting such as a seminar room or lecture room ceases to be effective (Taylor, 1967). It is very interesting to find that in this study subjects tended to set the upper limit for perceived co-presence at a range where the normal human voice tends to reach the upper limit of its effectiveness. This further reinforces our hypothesis that what does or does not constitute the spatial field in which people perceive themselves as being proximate to one another is largely a