

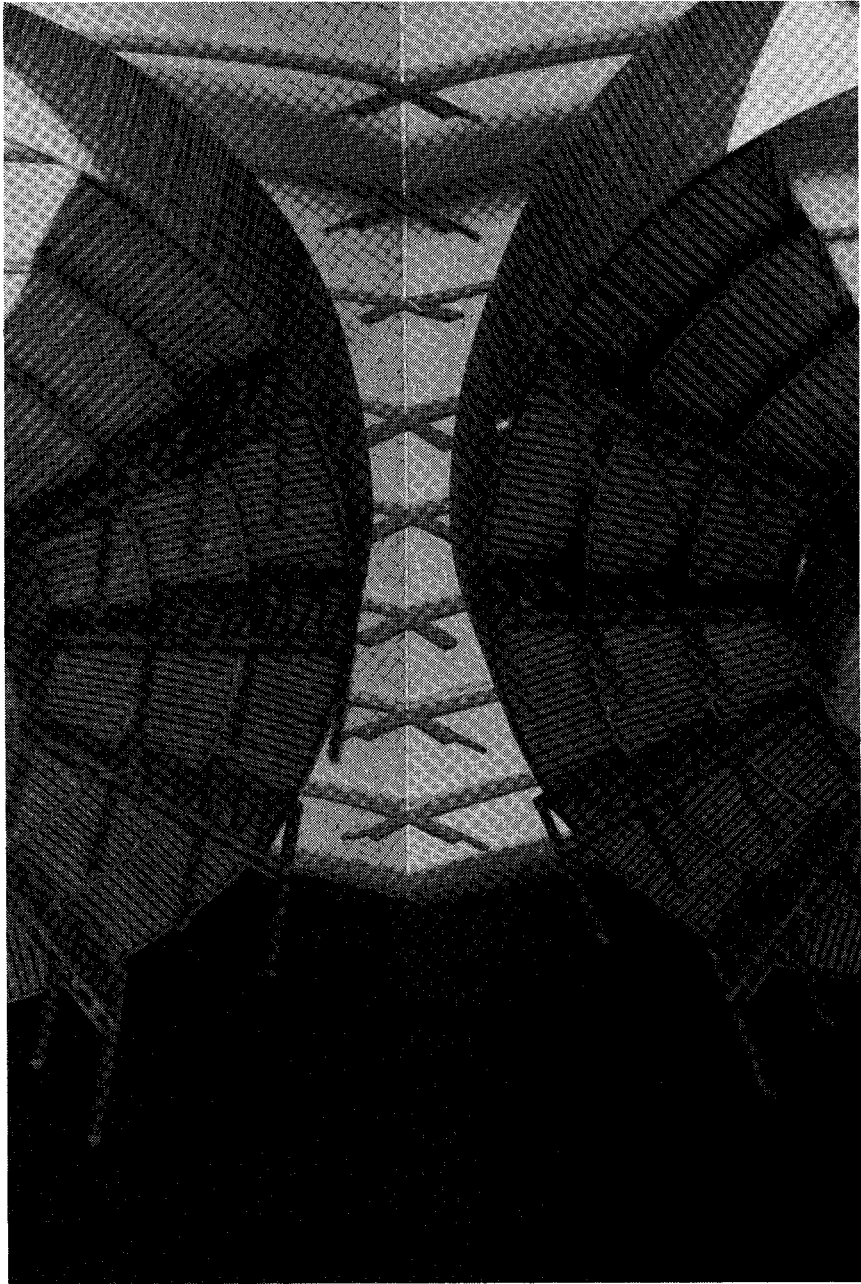


The Fisher Girl (1894); oil on canvas, p1933.7; Mead Art Museum, Amherst College; Gift of George D. Pratt

House of Justice: *Feminism in Architecture*

Kimberley Jones
Master of Architecture '91,
Yale School of Architecture

Copyright © 1991 by the Yale Journal of Law and Feminism



Interior view of the roof from the ground floor of the courthouse. Each of the two semi-circles house one of the courtrooms on the second floor. The space between the courtrooms contributes to the dynamic movement of the public throughout the institutional structure.

FOREWORD

Majestic temples, celestial gates, imposing columns and blindfolded Justitia populate a past parted from, and yet not a past departed. They continue to surround and transport the public through the spaces of its courthouses, and command the metamorphosis of all who pass the threshold of the Law to become judge, jury, spectator, innocent or guilty. The structures of the courthouse predispose the verdict before the legal process of decisionmaking is complete.

Architecture and Law join hands to resist and stifle the voices of change and of difference as traditional structures continue to shape legal identity. Outsiders now inhabiting the spaces inside the Law have informed the concepts of justice, equality and liberty with a knowledge of difference. From Divine laws to human creation, from imposed structures to situated constructions, and from neutral norms to contextual relevance, past ideas continuously yield to future ones in Law's eternal becoming. And yet a moment arrives when changes have left so deep and lasting an imprint on the face of the Law to warrant parallel architectural transformations.

This project originated at the Yale School of Architecture as an assignment to design a court house in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Its aim is to use architectural tools to give body to these new conceptions of law in the design of the very structure that to fully espouse these ideals must shelter them.

The House of Justice in Gloucester does not resist or alter the landscape, but responds to the gradual slope of the land toward water. In celebration of the local traditions and industry of a fishing community, its structure occupies the shape of a vessel. The rafters of the court room trace the ribs of a fishing boat. The court rooms form semi-circles that turn outward toward the community for guidance and legitimacy. The library lines the outer-most periphery of the courthouses, leaving it to the law books to mediate the passage from Law to Community. Each column is broken into two poles; the populated spaces captured between these poles challenge duality in construction, and remind us of multiplicity in society. The columns, multiple and modest, support the weight of the Law by joining their forces.

Justitia stretches her fatigued limbs and casts her sad and questioning eyes upon human history. And yet she moves deliberately and with hopeful strides to take her place in the making of human destiny. In the House of Justice, she occupies two places, now kneeling, now sitting, on opposing sides of a scale, resting at equilibrium, that supports and traverses the entire body of the courthouse. Justitia looks indiscriminately upon both public entrances, at front as well as at back, with a respect due to the institution of Law and with a caution rooted in the fallibility of all human creation.

Sarvenaz Bahar, Juris Doctor '91, Yale Law School

The courthouse project was born from an intent to explore the passage of architectural ideas, informed by feminism, to the construction of a social institution. In order to serve an interdisciplinary readership, primarily analogical architectural ideas have been presented, wherever possible, in legal language. This article, is made possible, however, by the collaboration of Sarvenaz Bahar, to whom I am dearly grateful. I would also like to thank Steven Canine for the graphic design, Professor Mary Jane Long for her guidance in daylight design, and Karen Van Meter and Heather Feldstein for their contribution and time. (K. J.)

DIVINE

The place of justice is a hallowed place.

Francis Bacon

Human law is law only by virtue of its accordance with right reason, and by this means it is clear that it flows from Eternal law.

St. Thomas Aquinas

The government of the United States has been emphatically termed a government of laws, and not of men.

Justice John Marshall

IMPOSED

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Virginia Woolf

Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite.

Marcus T. Cicero

"It's not the same courthouse," said Killian. "It's the building up on the top of the hill, on the right." Sherman could see an immense limestone structure. It looked quite majestic sitting up there on the crest of the Grand Concourse in the sunlight of a perfect day, majestic and stupendously heavy.

Tom Wolfe

The Maycomb County courthouse was faintly reminiscent of Arlington in one respect: the concrete pillars supporting its south roof were too heavy for their light burden.

Harper Lee

NEUTRAL

No great idea in its beginning can ever be within the law. How can it be within the law? The law is stationary. The law is fixed. The law is a chariot wheel which binds us all regardless of conditions or place or time.

Emma Goldman

A principled decision . . . is one that rests on reasons with respect to all the issues in the case, reasons that in their generality and their neutrality transcend any immediate result that is involved.

Herbert Wechsler

TRADITIONAL

They hauled in guilt by the ton, those blue-and-orange vans out there on Walton Avenue.

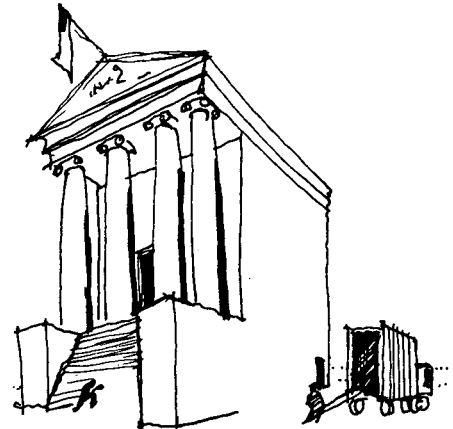
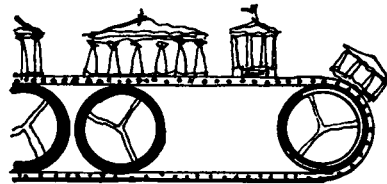
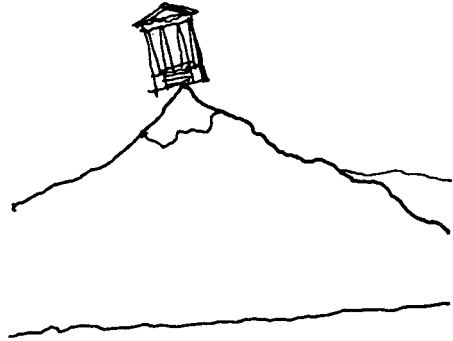
Tom Wolfe

Senseless killing—Tom has been given due process of law to the day of his death; he has been tried openly and convicted by twelve good men and true . . . Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed.

Harper Lee

You don't have many suspects who are innocent of a crime. That's contradictory. If a person is innocent of a crime, then he is not suspect.

Edwin Meese III





HUMAN

In America THE LAW IS KING. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law ought to be King; and there ought to be no other. But lest any ill use should afterwards arise, let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony, be demolished, and scattered among the people whose right it is.

—Thomas Paine

Eternal truths will be neither true nor eternal unless they have fresh meaning for every new social situation.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

SITUATED

The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience.

—Justice Oliver W. Holmes

No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for each decalogue a scripture. Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live.

—Robert Cover



CONTEXTUAL

Law can not stand aside from the social changes around it.

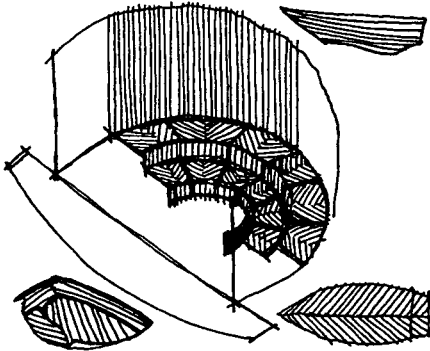
—Justice William Brennan

Outsider scholars have recognized that their specific experiences and histories are relevant to jurisprudential inquiry. . . . Their anger, their pain, their daily lives, and the histories of their people are relevant to the definition of justice.

—Mari Matsuda

Rights contain images of power, and manipulating those images, either visually or linguistically, is central in the making and maintenance of rights. In principle, therefore, the more dizzyingly diverse the images that are propagated, the more empowered we will be as a society.

—Patricia Williams



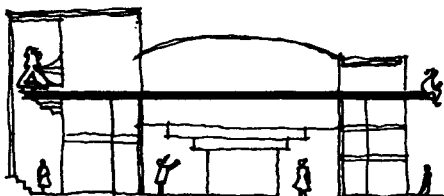
TRANSFORMED

Every accused person, of course, enters upon this trial clothed with the presumption of innocence.

—Justice George Sutherland

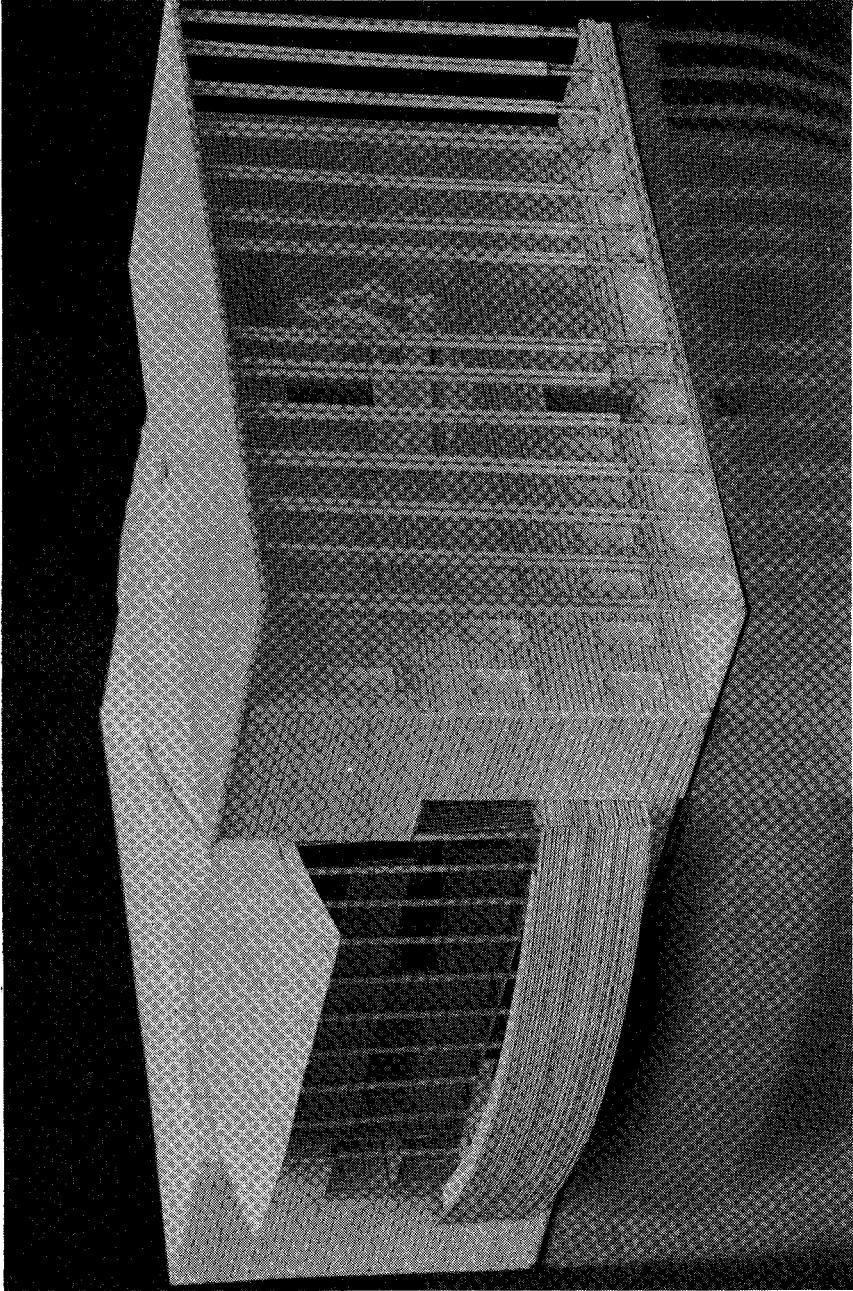
We more criticize what men have made of themselves and the world that we, too, inhabit. To us it is a male notion that power means someone must dominate. We seek a transformation in the terms and conditions of power itself.

—Catharine MacKinnon

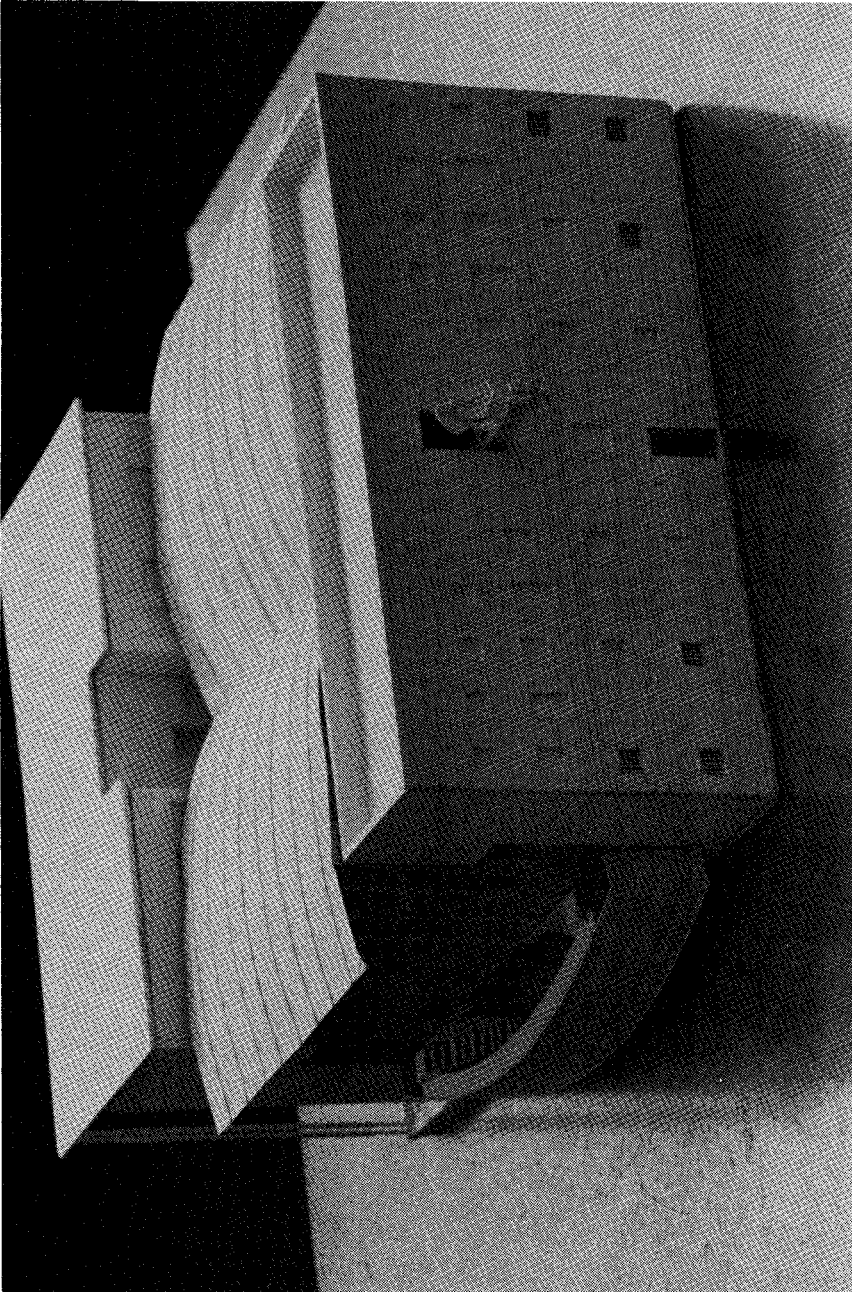


Architecture has traditionally complied with moral and philosophical systems; therefore, any break in these systems also implies an architectural break.

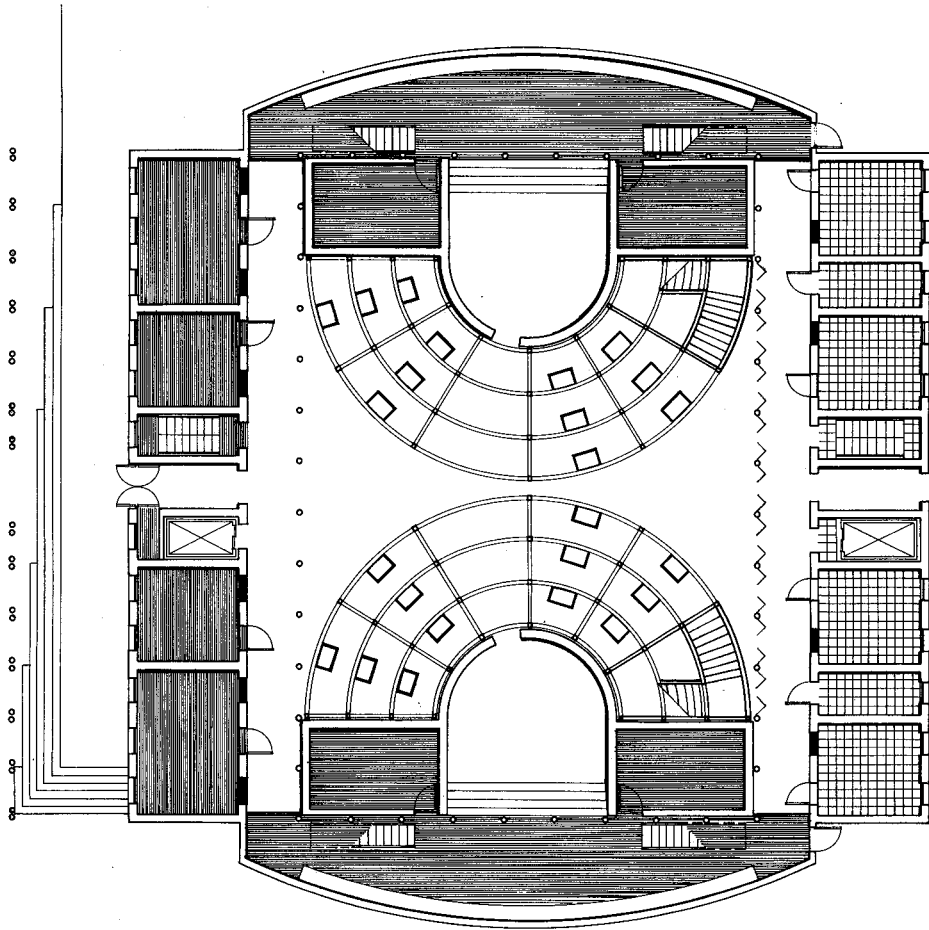
—Catherine Ingraham



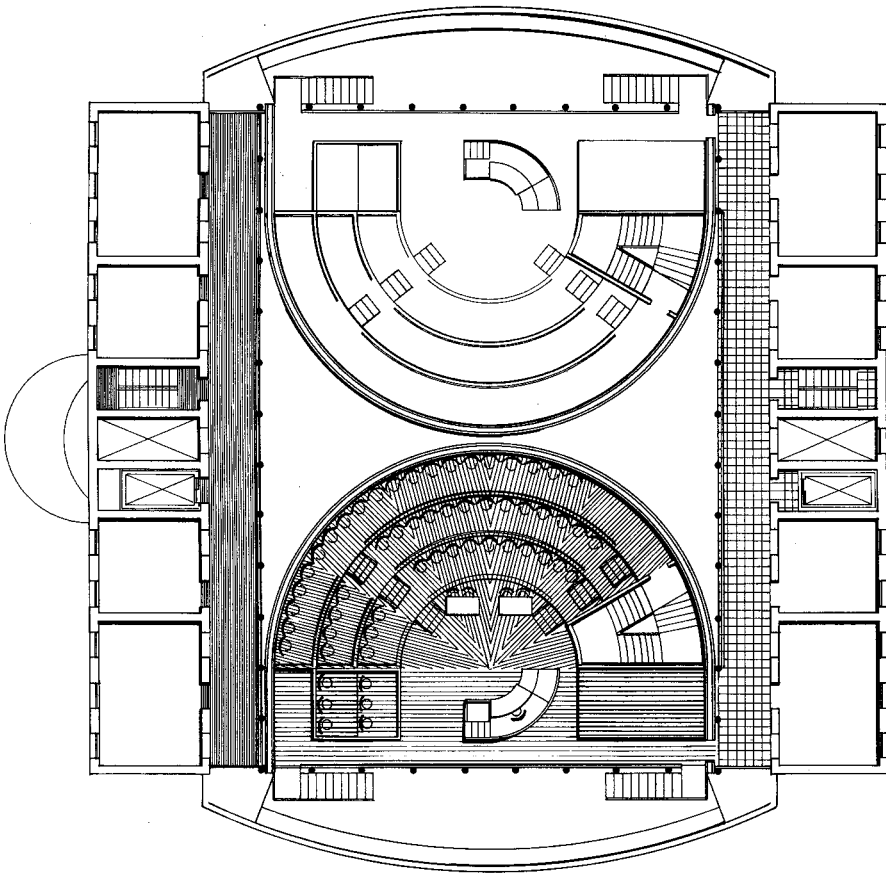
East entry of the courthouse. The main public entrance is through the east side. The brick bar building at front houses administrative offices on the first two floors, and hearing rooms on the third. The rectangular shape of the bar buildings accommodates the block pattern of city streets and acknowledges the urban context of the courthouse. The central curved roofs cover the two courtrooms, resting back to back.



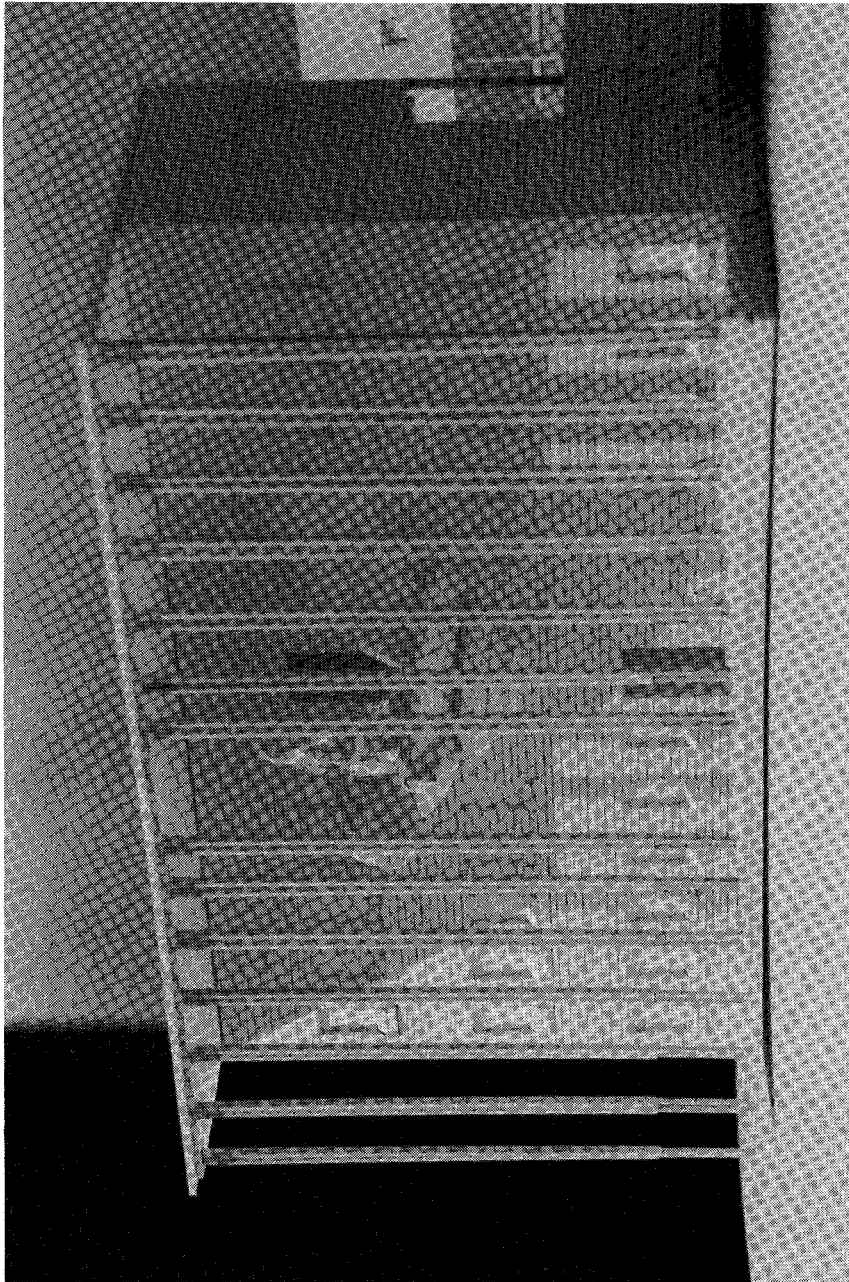
West entry of the courthouse. While also serving the public, entrance for the detainees is solely through the west side. The brick bar building at back houses additional administrative offices on the third floor, and holding cells on the ground and second floors. Comparable architectural detail and attention is devoted to the design of the front and back faces of the courthouse, in departure from the marked differentiation that characterize traditional designs.



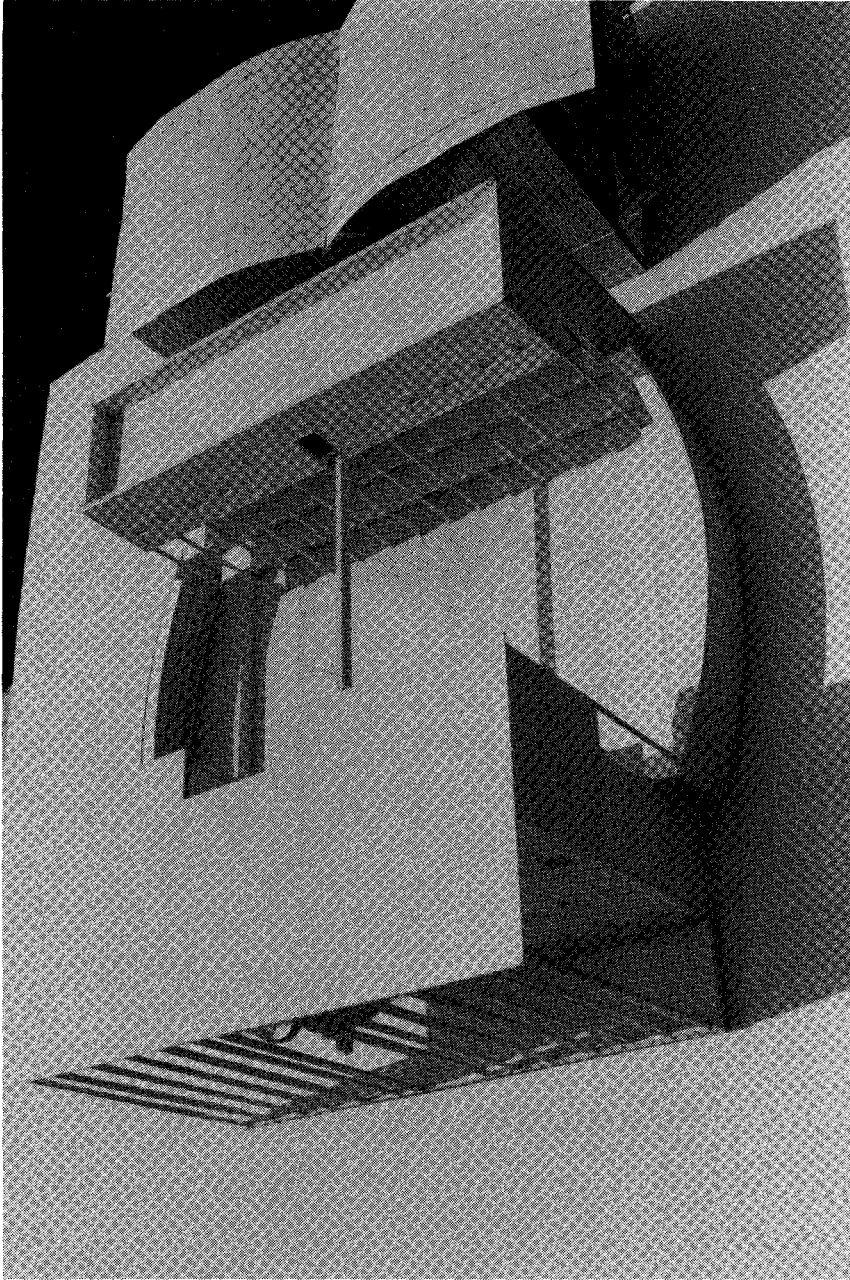
Ground floor plan. The public law library is situated underneath the two vessel-shaped wooden courtrooms. Architecture thus highlights the founding of legal decisions on the authority of precedent. Timber columns rising from the ground floor weave into a network of trusses and support the courtrooms resting above. Such use of columns and trusses draws from the principles of timber frame construction rooted in American vernacular. Moreover, the peristyle of circular columns on the ground floor forms an enclosure around the courtrooms, and connects the interior space to the surrounding bar buildings. The forest of circular and timber columns allows for uninterrupted passage along the east/west axis. The judges' chambers and the jury rooms are also housed on the ground floor.



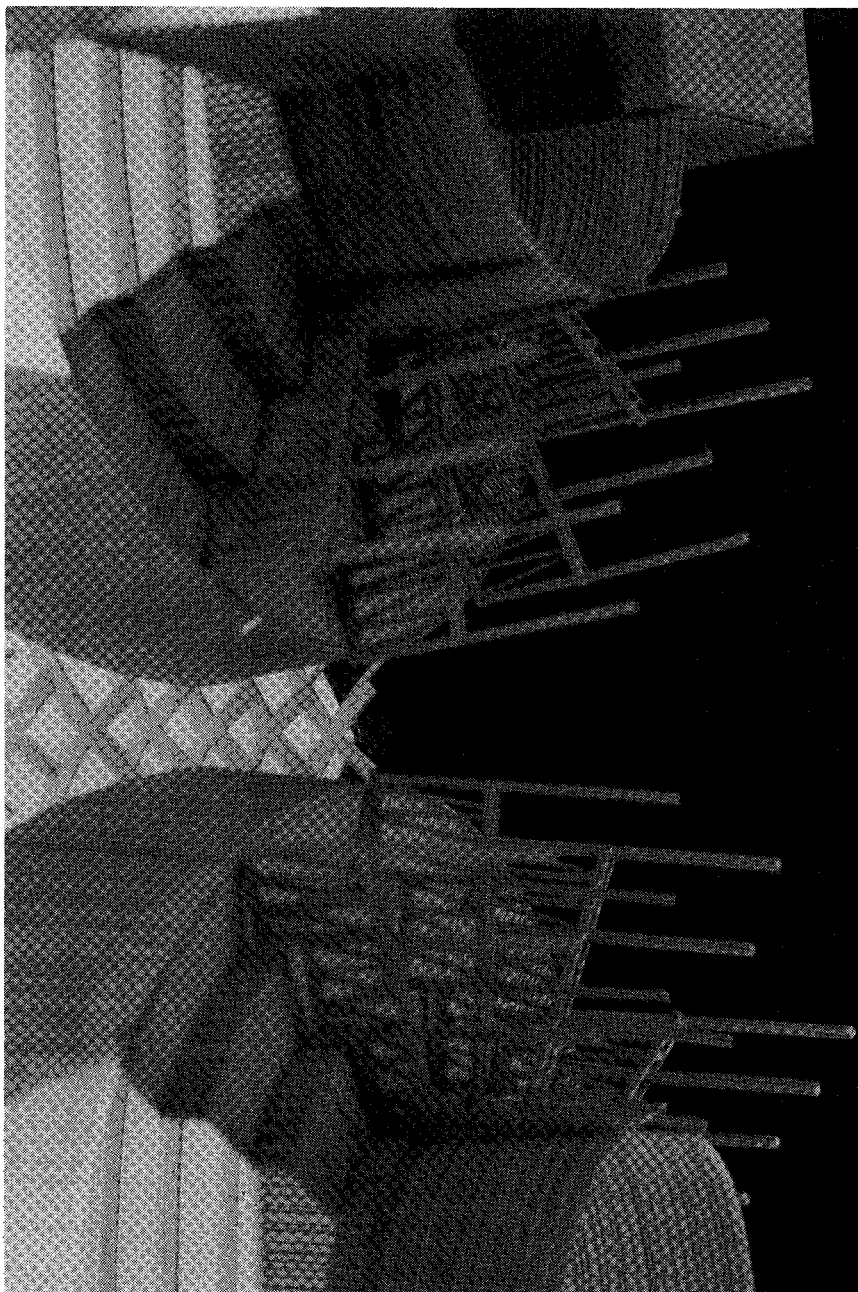
Upper floor plan. The courtrooms are created from a bisected circle. Each half of the circle turns outward toward the Gloucester community, and thus serves to open the courthouse on the north/south axis, as well. The back to back position of the courtrooms intends, moreover, to reinforce trust and mutual support, rather than confrontation, in the legal process. The semicircular shape of the courtrooms alludes to Ancient Greek amphitheaters, and invokes the connection between drama and storytelling, and subjectivity in Law. This design departs from the more hermetic use of circular design found in Roman theater. Greek theater is situated with respect to the hillside, and is open to the landscape; in contrast, Roman theater is constructed independent from the landscape, and its curia is closed to the urban context by a wall.



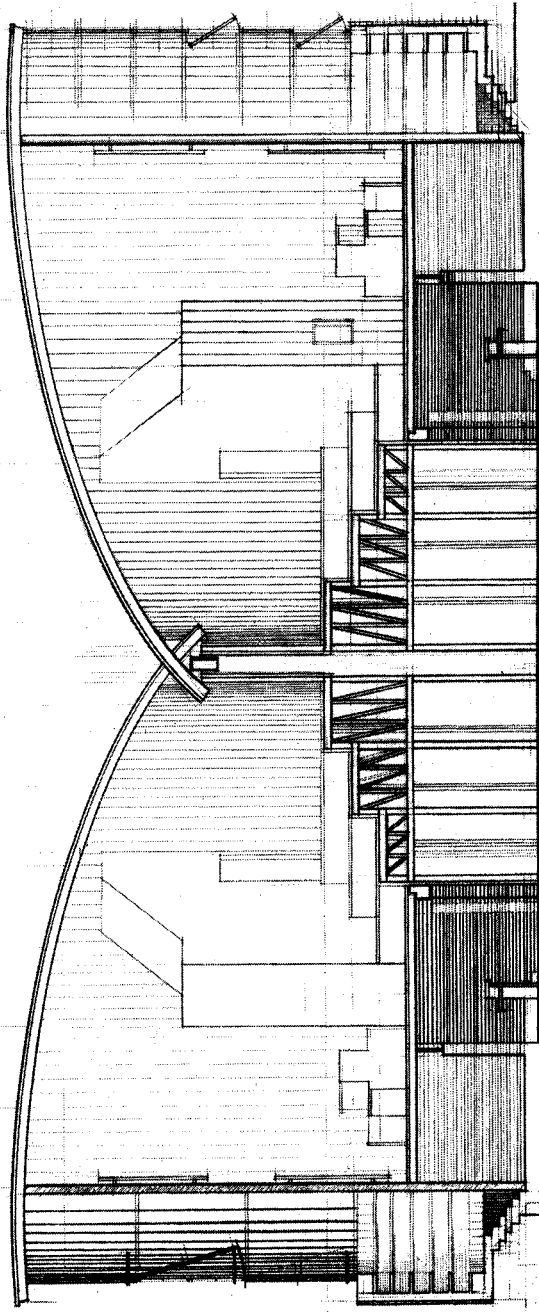
Colonnade and figure of justice at east entry of the courthouse. In tribute to traditional design, the colonnade signals the main public entrance; yet its design transform the significance of the colonnade. The colonnade is built to human rather than divine proportions. Its slender paired columns starkly contrast with singularly monumental columns. In contrast to colonnades raised on plinths, its columns gently step down with the slope of the rocky New England coast toward the ocean. Where the traditional white and cold marble columns resist any impurity, the terra cotta cladding on the steel columns combine with the red brick facade to invite their natural surroundings into the fold of the urban texture.



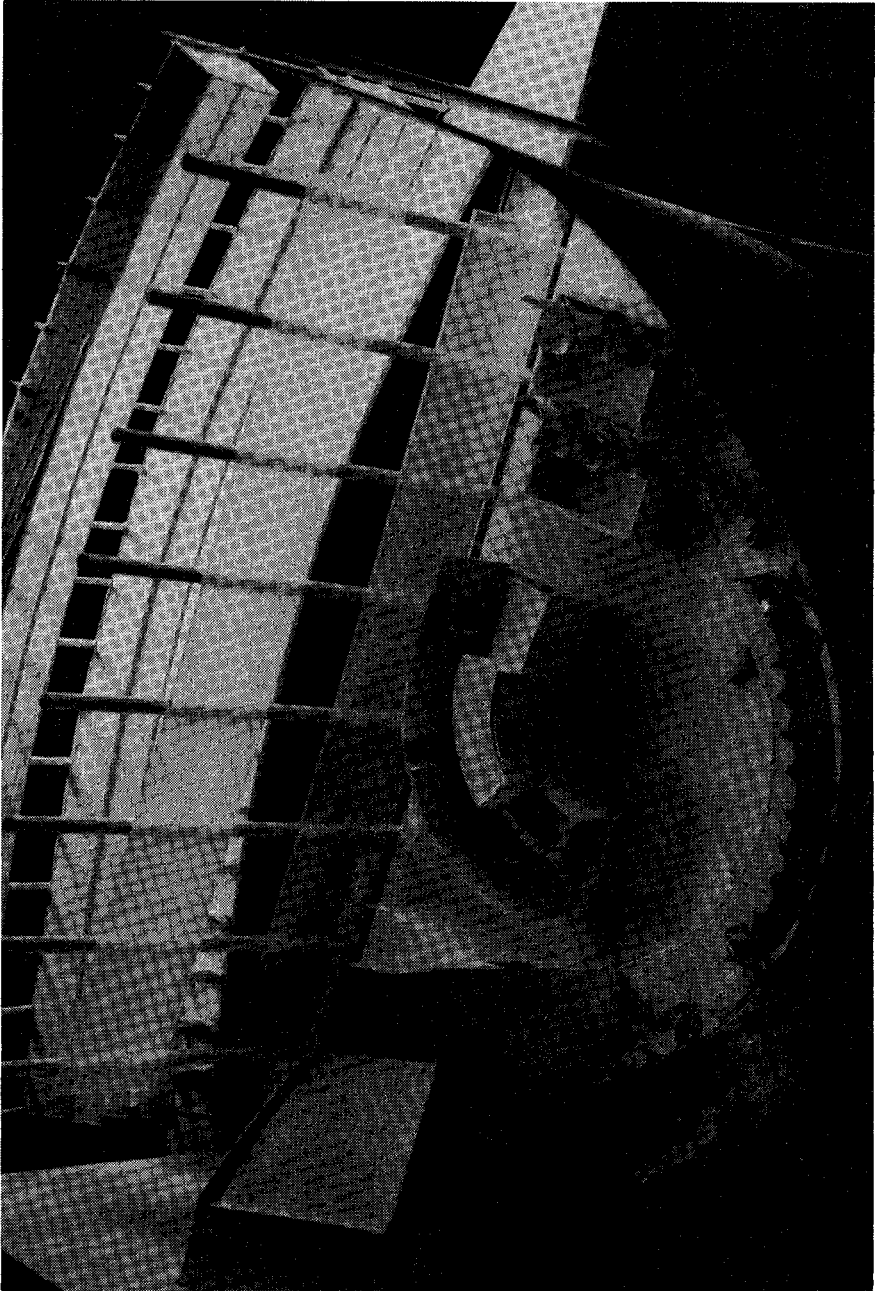
Aerial view of the courthouse with middle section removed and placed to the right. The girder spanning the building from east to west supports the roof, and balances the two bronze figures of Justitia resting at opposing ends of the building.



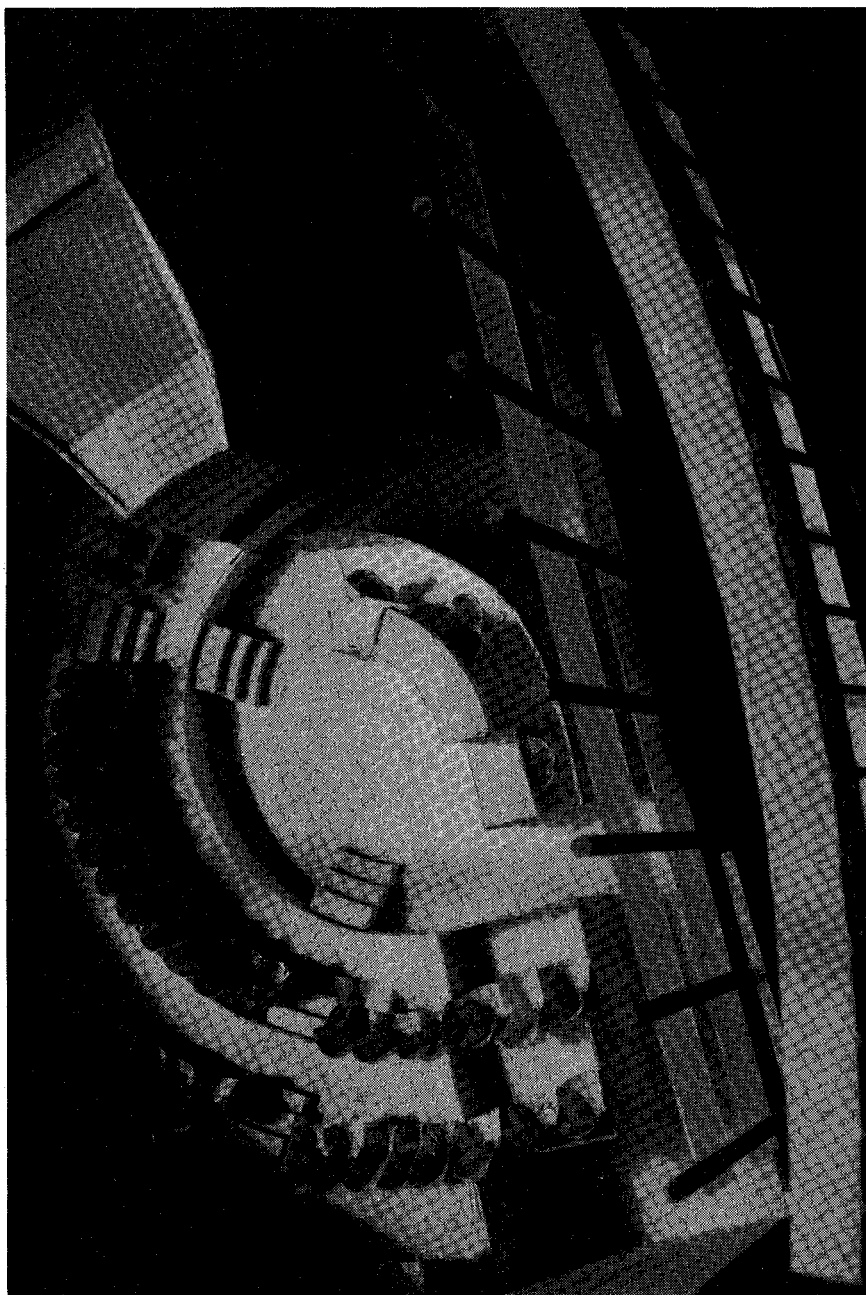
Upward view of the courtrooms from ground floor perspective. The wooden vessel-like courtrooms are inspired by fishing boats, and evoke the presence of the sea in Gloucester's geography, culture and history. Architecture thus asserts the relevance of context to structural design.



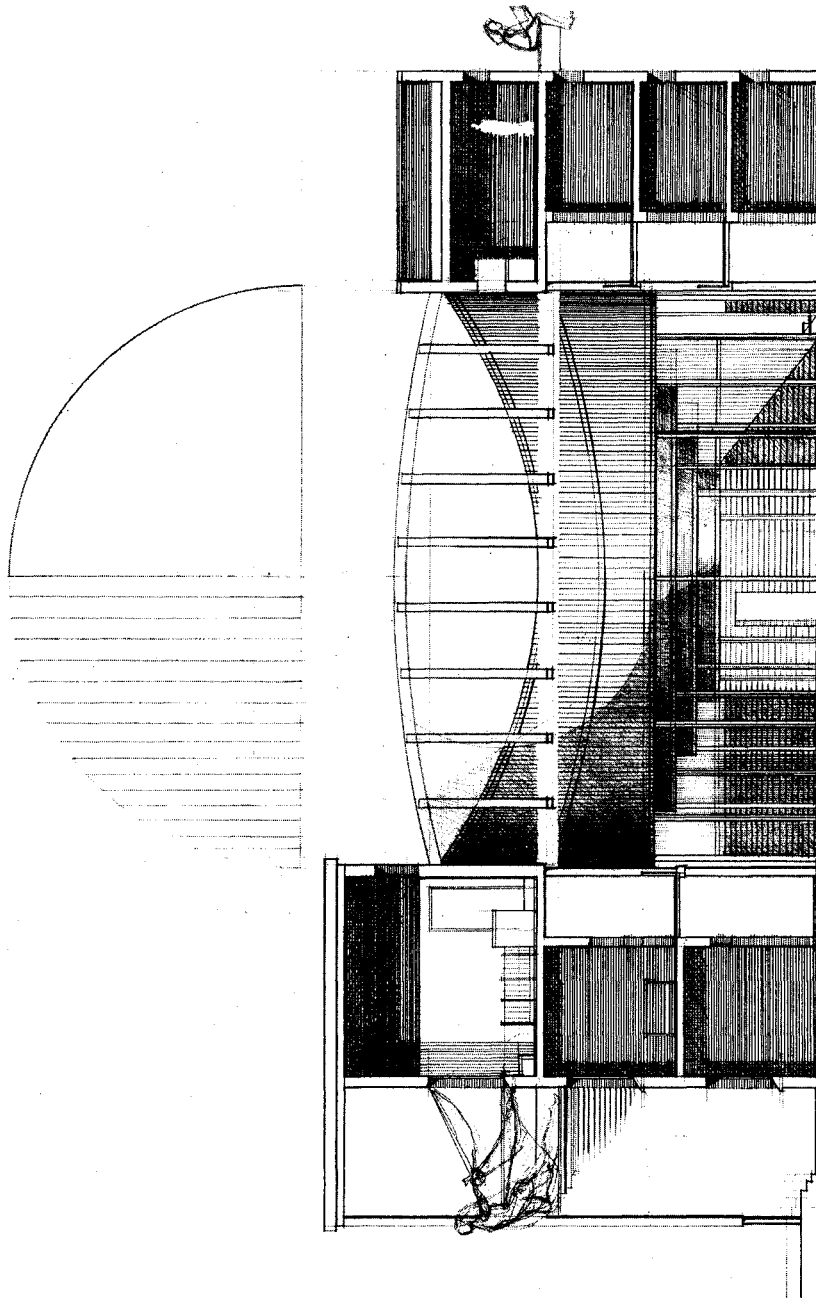
South-north cross section of the courtrooms. The roof rafters fan over the courtrooms. Each rafter rests upon the columns at the periphery, and on the girder at the center. The interlocking of the roof rafters at the center connects the courtrooms structurally and symbolically.



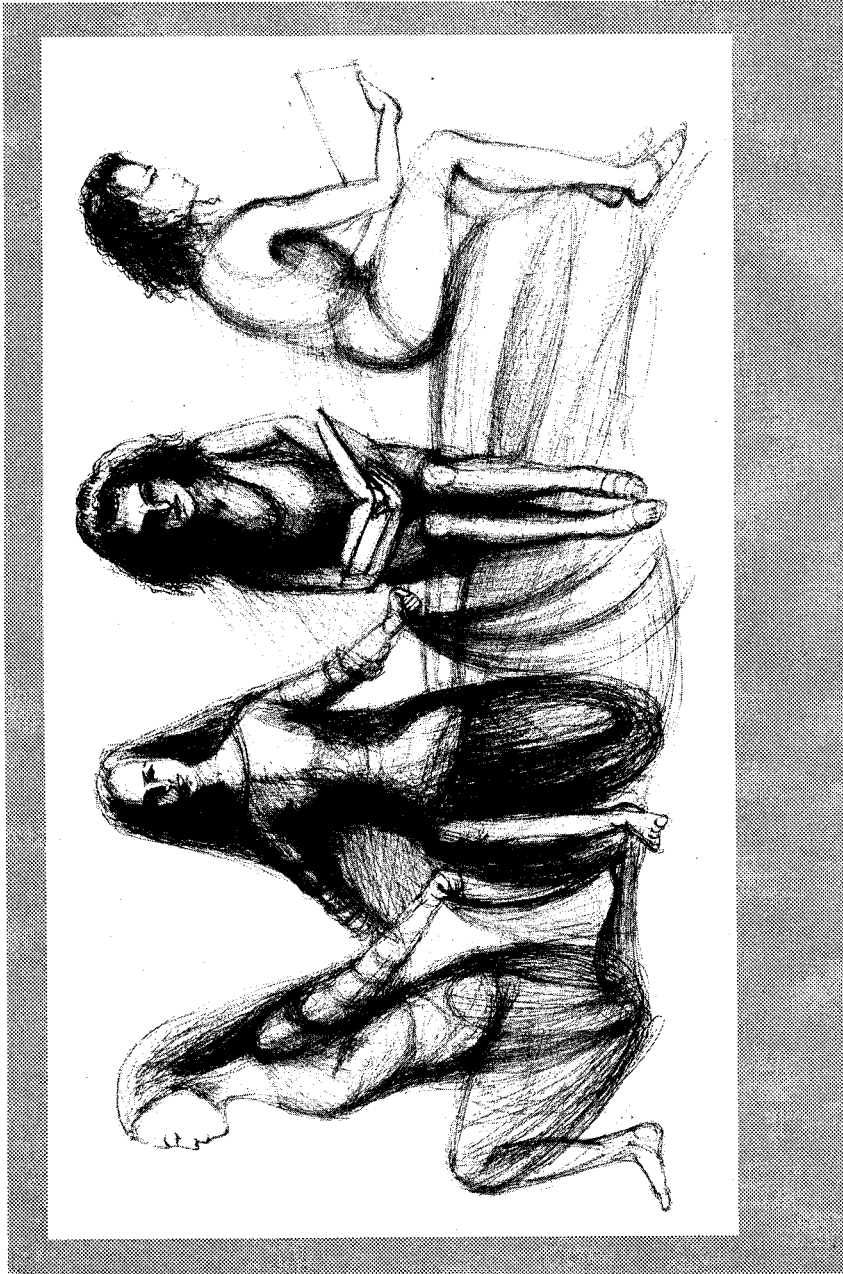
Interior of the courtroom, outward view. The choreography of the courtroom contributes to the overall institutional shift from a traditional static and symmetrical procession, to a transformed spiral and dynamic movement. In an attempt to challenge notions of neutrality and infallibility in the legal process, and de-emphasize the courtroom hierarchy, the judge's bench occupies a slightly off-center position in the semi-circle. The jury box is a tangential extension to the public seating area. Juror seats swivel in order to broaden visual access and participation in the courtroom. Two marble panels, adorned with legal inscriptions, diffuse daylight entering the courtroom. The public can view the law library below and the town of Gloucester beyond. The stairs leading to the judges' chambers and jury rooms on the ground floor are also visible.



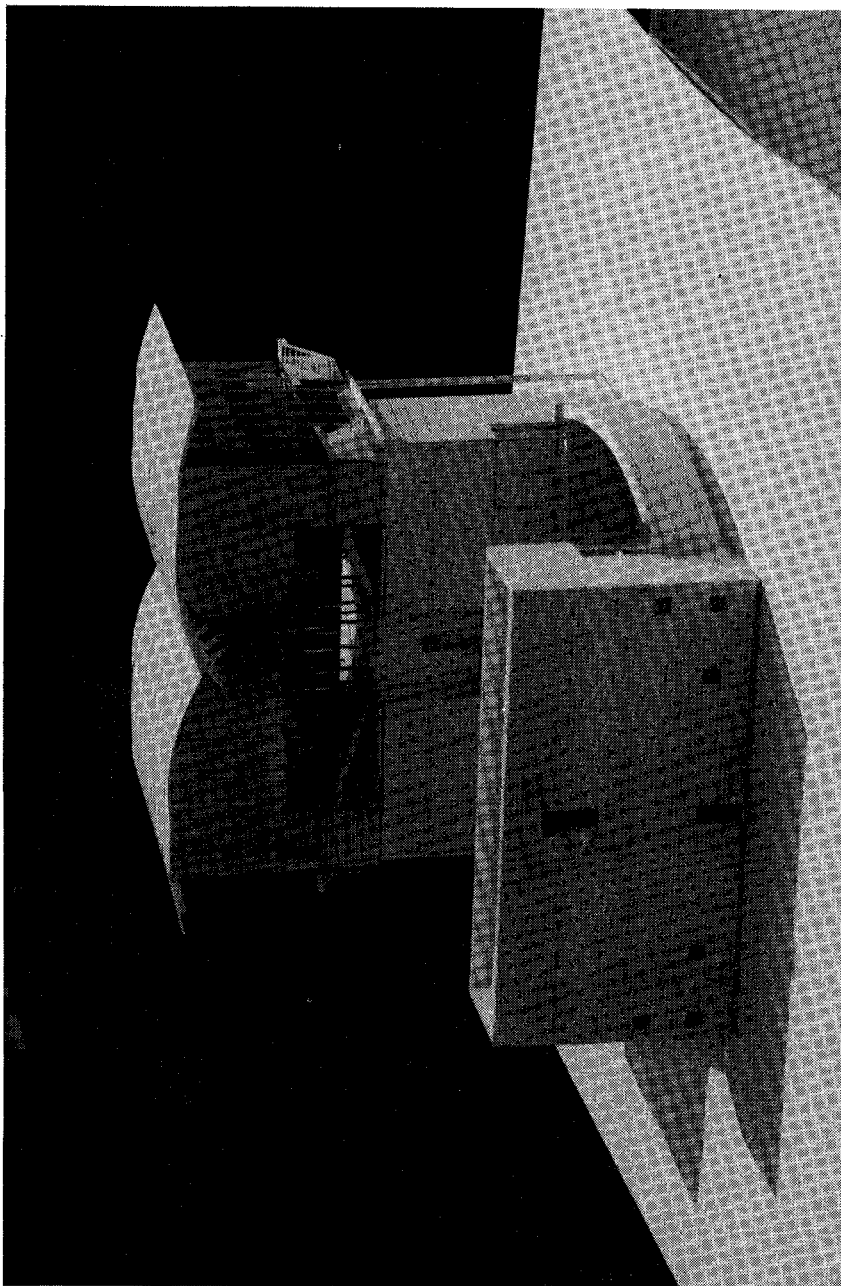
Interior of the courtroom, inward view. The curved seating and the off-center placement of the judges' bench necessarily set up a dynamic, spiral circulation in the courtroom. The seating area breaks into three sections, rather than the traditional division into two that compelled the public to choose sides in the legal proceedings. The articulation of individual seats is calculated into an ergonomic shaping of the benches. This accommodation is meant to welcome an individualized and extended stay of the public in the courtroom.



West-east cross section of the courtrooms. The two bronze figures of Justitia rest on opposing sides of the central girder. This new design transforms the primarily ornamental and traditional design of the figure of Justitia in two ways. She no longer carries the scales of justice, but rather the attribute of the scales is incorporated into the central girder that serves as structural support balancing the load of the building. The blindfold removed by Justitia now functions as the handrail for the balcony on which she kneels.



Justitia kneeling at front. Justitia sitting at back. Her traditional sword is exchanged for a book. While violence remains integral to the power of law, this exchange emphasizes the need to inform the use of power by factors external to force itself.



View from the west of the courthouse. The middle section of the courthouse is removed and rests on the eastern bar building.