**Courthouse architecture as technology:**

**Some thoughts on form vs. function**

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The abstractedness of the law has always used material tools, gadgets, technologies, in order to gain meaning and power (Mohr and Contini, 2011). Such one tool is territorial jurisdiction, which, according to Ford (1999), is simultaneously a material technology, a built environment and a discursive intervention. Another tool is the built environment of the courthouse, that can thus be seen as a technology within a technology. We could perhaps claim that the courthouse is the hardware and the courtroom is the software, where furniture, procedure and rituals interact with people’s lives, regulate behavior and subject them to the authority of the law and the application of justice.

But like any other technology, courthouse architecture has evolved over time, creating somewhat fixed structures with enormous impact on our codes of representing justice, creating mental image(s) of the courthouses’ external form(s). A form that sometimes does not seem to correspond to its function(s). And with it comes a sense of losing recognition and efficiency.

At the same time, the internal, highly determined, conventional and rigid setting of the courtroom, with all the furniture fixed, is also being contested, and more flexible and adaptable hearing rooms are required, by both professionals and users. For that reason, and on a day-to-day basis, judges, prosecutors and court clerks seek to address the lack of appropriate spaces for the different hearings and users of the courts by adapting available rooms: and here we can introduce the indeterminacy of the 'spare room'. As a result, and most of the times, the pro-activism of the judicial professionals takes place ahead of the initiative of the entities responsible for the construction/adaptation of courthouse buildings, creating everyday spatial practices that supply the deficiencies of the buildings, their settings and accessibility.

In this paper I’ll seek to address the issue of courthouse architecture as technology with impact on peoples’ lives, from different angles. A technology viewed differently by architects, professionals and users. It is a technology that encompasses failures. Most of the time, highly determined. Where the logic (or app) of the ‘spare room’, as indeterminate, can create a flexibility capable of dealing with some of the failures.