

Figure 12.1
Kit Allsopp told a 'story' about 'streets and trees and sky' to help design these law courts at Northampton

site, which was triangular, was divided up into slices or a 'sandwich' as he calls it, the central strip of which is conceived of as a street between two buildings rather than a corridor in the middle of a single building (Fig. 12.2). The 'street' is then detailed as if it were outside space. We can also see that the columns supporting the roof over the 'street' are detailed as if they were an avenue of trees partially blocking out the sky with their canopy. By sticking faithfully to his 'story' about the building, Kit Allsopp has produced a much admired place which is intended not to seem separate from the rest of the urban fabric, thus fulfilling one of the architect's twin

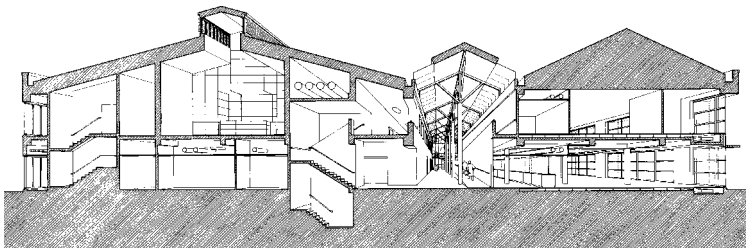


Figure 12.2
The Northampton court building is constructed about its own 'street' complete with an avenue of 'trees'

objectives of 'gravity and accessibility'. Of course, the inside of such a building is quite different from a conventional street in many ways, but that does not really matter here. What matters is that the architect found it helpful to use a story about the building in order to design it and, as a consequence, many aspects of the building feel somehow consistent rather than arbitrary.

The architect John Outram has described a complete design process based on very rich and extremely elaborate stories (Lawson 1994b). His method evolved over a number of years but was always based on the telling of stories with a mythological quality. Outram has described and demonstrated a design process in which he passes the site through seven stages or rites. Here he imagines the place undergoing an evolution rather than the sudden revolution of his design. Thus he imagines the site initially to be a 'grove' on which is then built a 'cenotaph', which is eventually buried ('cataclysm') and built over ('entablement') and then old and new are connected by the folding of a 'valley' into the landscape. Being concerned with decoration Outram goes on to his final rites of 'inscription' and 'façade'. Outram went so far as to reveal these extraordinarily elaborate stories in his submission to the Venice Biennale of 1991, but he accepts that most users of his buildings will not 'read' these stories from his architecture and he is sanguine about this:

I am arguing the reverse, that it is sufficient for most people that they know there is a meaning, this enables them to engage with the architect at whatever level they choose.

For John Outram the whole design process is based around his own narrative. Such extensive use of narrative is probably rather unusual but then John Outram is an unusual architect who produces unusual architecture! Certainly the architecture of John Outram is very different to that of Kit Allsopp, and this indicates the power and flexibility of story-telling as a design technique. The telling of stories within a design practice about the emerging design solution seems a relatively common technique. As we shall see in Chapter 15, the telling of stories within a design practice also seems to help cement the design team together around this shared but slightly private world.

One or many solutions?

Broadbent's suggestion that his four methods could be used to generate different design solutions has not met with widespread formal approval, but again he points out another very useful