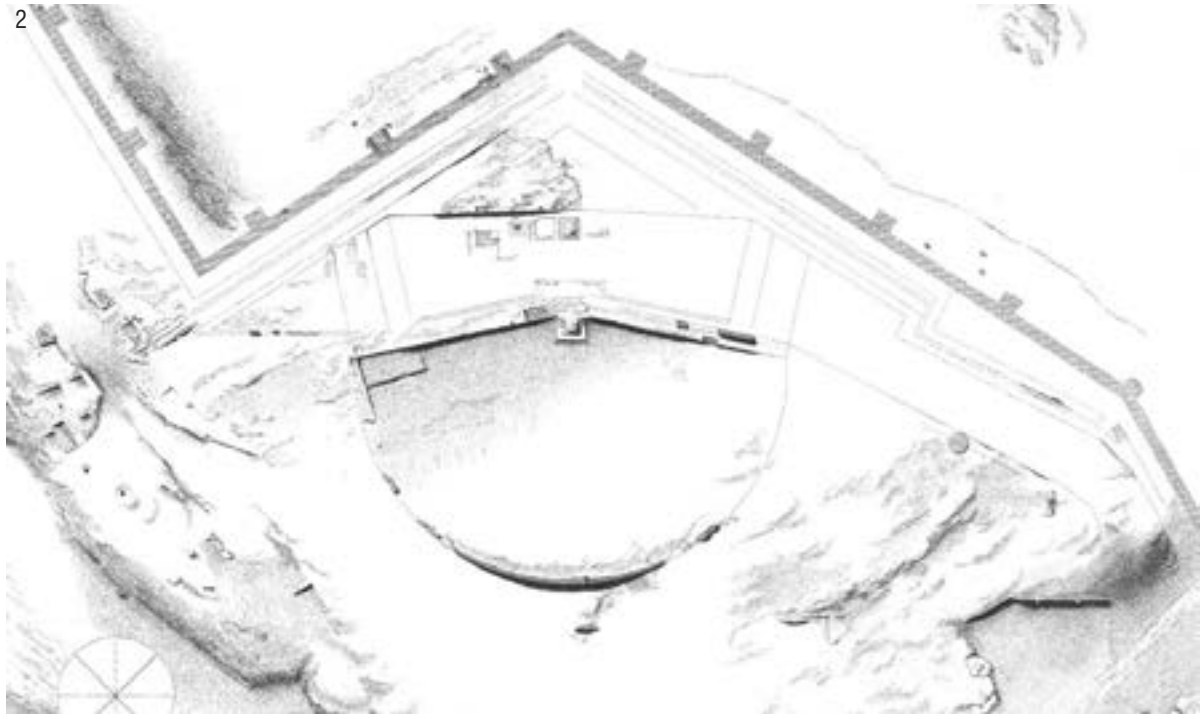


Politics and the **Poetics of Space**  
Laurence Elsdon



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# Part A: How has parliamentary architecture developed and what are the characteristics of a modern parliament?

## Introduction

Democracy – derived from *demokratia*, *demos*: the people, or the citizenry and *kratos*: rule – is the rule of people, by the people as equals. At its formation the stage of democracy was the Athenian Pnyx (figure 1 & 2) where *ekklesia* – public meetings of at least 6000 citizens – were held every nine days.

The scale of the *demos* and the Mediterranean climate made it logical to hold meetings in the open air and the semi-circular Pnyx 'ensured that every participant could not just see the speaker, but all those present' (Sudjic, 2001).

Greek city-states – such as Athens – governed themselves, this meant that though a large assembly, it was possible for every eligible person to attend. As populations grew and where it was not possible to convene the citizenry, representative speakers were chosen on their merit as a speaker. 'The best orator was considered to be the best citizen' (Sudjic, 2001).

The semi-circular layout of the Pnyx permitted every person to hear and see the speaker while a complete circular layout – though more symbolically equal or democratic disadvantaged some spectators. For 'those behind the speaker would have a forfeited view ... it was deemed important not just to hear the words of the speaker but to judge the totality of the performance and of the character who advanced an argument' (Buchanan, 2000).

The symbolism of meetings being held in the open air, against a 'panoramic backdrop' (Buchanan, 2000) is inherently exoteric; honesty, openness and answerability.

Over time populations have grown, empires have evolved and politics has changed. The Roman senate (figure 3) consisted of selected officials as opposed to elected individuals and were answerable to a monarch, meaning they 'retained their position only as long as they retained the favour of the reigning monarch' (Sudjic, 2001).

## Characteristics of a Parliament Building

Parliamentary architecture is a potent expression of a nation's political power, it communicates both to the citizens and other countries.

The classical style has been adopted by many Parliaments (for example the USA, Ireland and India) because of its monumentality, craftsmanship and connection to the origins of democracy.

However the classical style lacks a key component that should be hereditary to a national parliament: national identity. A parliament should express the interests and identity of a nation. In some cases this is difficult for instance as a new republic the United States had very little history to relate its identity to.

## Palace of Westminster, Great Britain

In 1834 the Palace of Westminster was gutted by fire and a competition began for its rebuilding. The design brief stated the style should be either Gothic or Elizabethan. The classical style had declined in popularity and it was felt that Gothic and Elizabethan styles best represented the 'aspirations of the British nation' (Sudjic, 2001).

Although French in origin the Gothic style had quickly drawn popularity in England and became the style of a new generation of cathedrals and churches such as those at Canterbury, Salisbury and Wells.

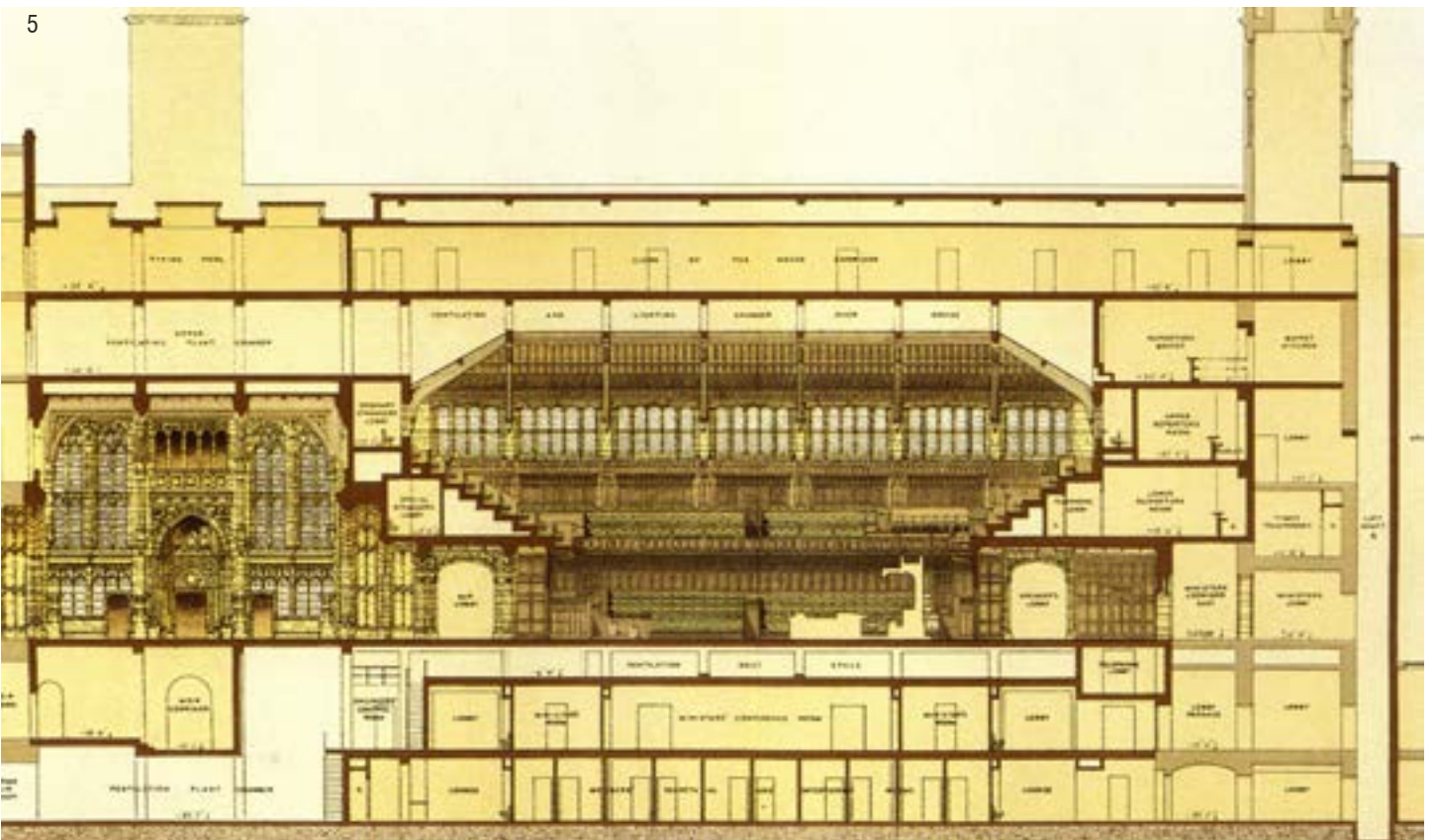
The winning submission by Charles Barry – in cooperation with Augustus Pugin – was Gothic in style but the plan demonstrated a very significant classical form, described by *The Gentleman's Magazine* as 'a Grecian design overlaid with Gothic Ornament'.

The Palace retained its original site on the banks of the river Thames (figure 4) though

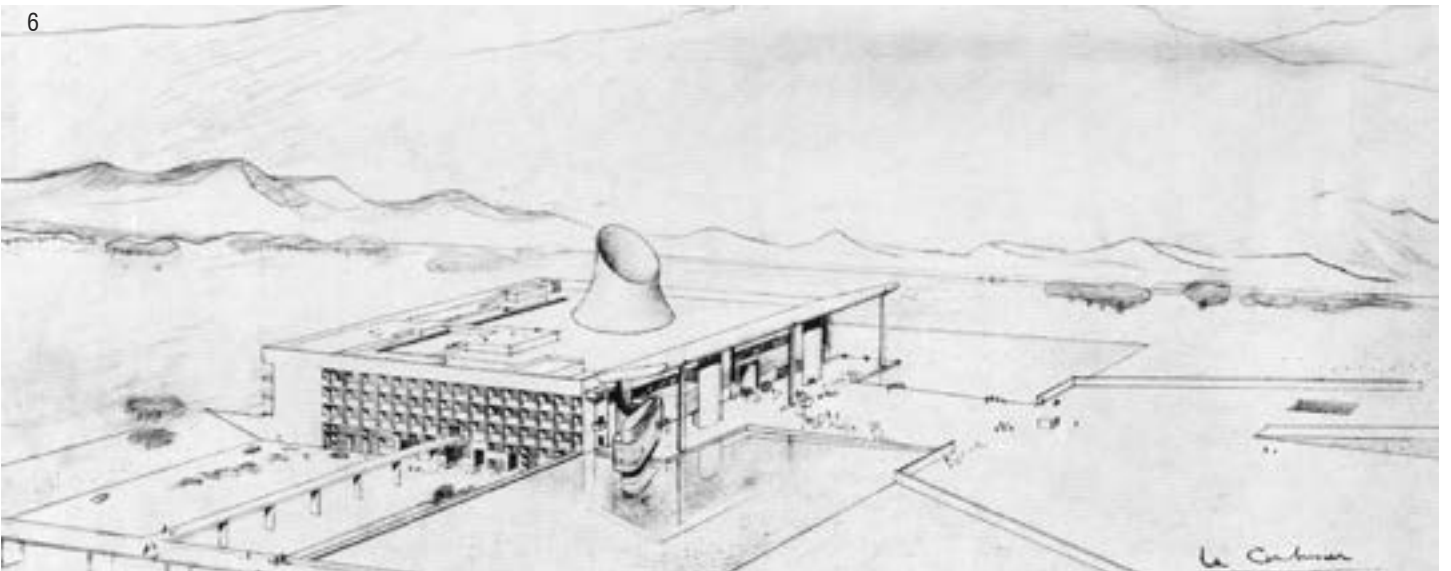
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the committee had been divided in this decision. The central location emanated history, dominance, power and influence but it was inconvenient and remote from the member's residences.

The rebuilt Palace's defining feature is the unique oppositional layout of the commons debating chamber (figure 5) – the Greek semi-circular layout was far more popular. Other layouts had been considered by other architects such as James Savage and Rigby Watson but as Winston Churchill later stated 'the whole character of the British parliamentary institution depends upon the fact that the House of Commons is an oblong and not a semi-circular structure'.

The origins of the facing benches are traced to the Chapel of St Stephen where parliament began meeting in the mid sixteenth century. Politicians would sit in choir stalls across from one another.

The intensity of argument in the chapel led to another defining decision: the front benches were placed two-and-a-half sword lengths apart 'in order to prevent argumentative MPs drawing their swords and fighting each other' (Sudjic, 2001).

Former MP and minister for the Arts – Mark Fisher – describes the House of Commons as a bear pit, with the public and press as observers, high above in the public gallery. 'The public and the press are pushed up under the rafters' (Fisher 2005).

The acoustic performance of the chamber was also incredibly poor and a new ceiling had to be hung. By the time the parliament was complete in 1870 the Perpendicular Gothic style had fallen out of fashion and the 'Palace was condemned as a stylistic travesty' (Sudjic, 2001).

## Chandigarh, India

The twentieth century was a defining era for parliamentary architecture, with many developing nations keen to express themselves with innovation and technical advances.

Le Corbusier's masterplan for the Chandigarh, the new capital of the Punjab, includes a new state assembly. The inspirational plan is modernist in nature but incorporates local tradition, classical form and a great deal of symbolism; which are integral to national identity.

The scheme is innovative simply by the fact that a non-national architect was asked to develop a national icon. This has since become a common theme, it is argued that a non-national architect is better placed to identify a nation's identity without preconception or prejudice.

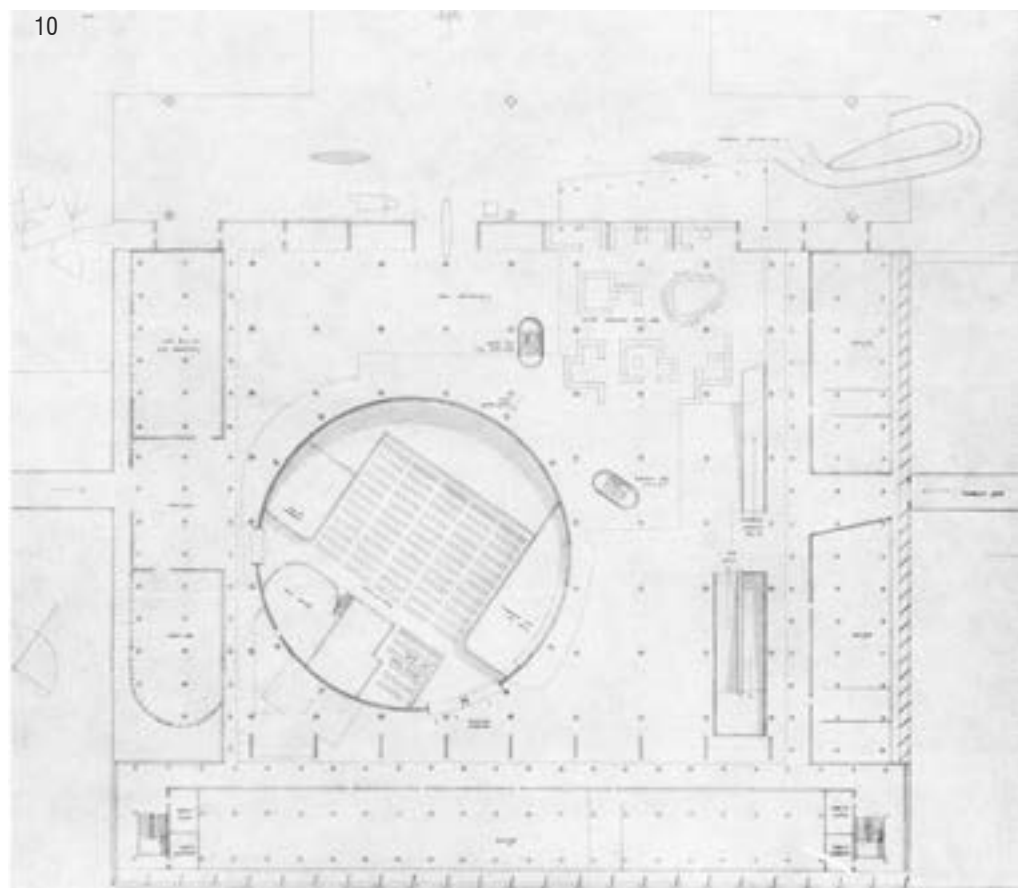
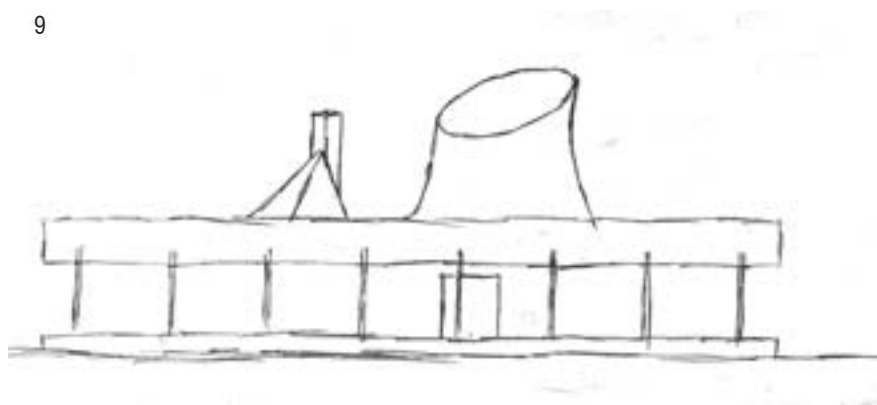
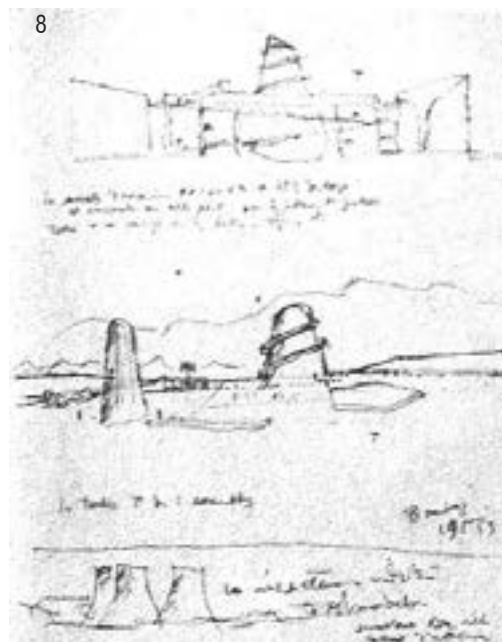
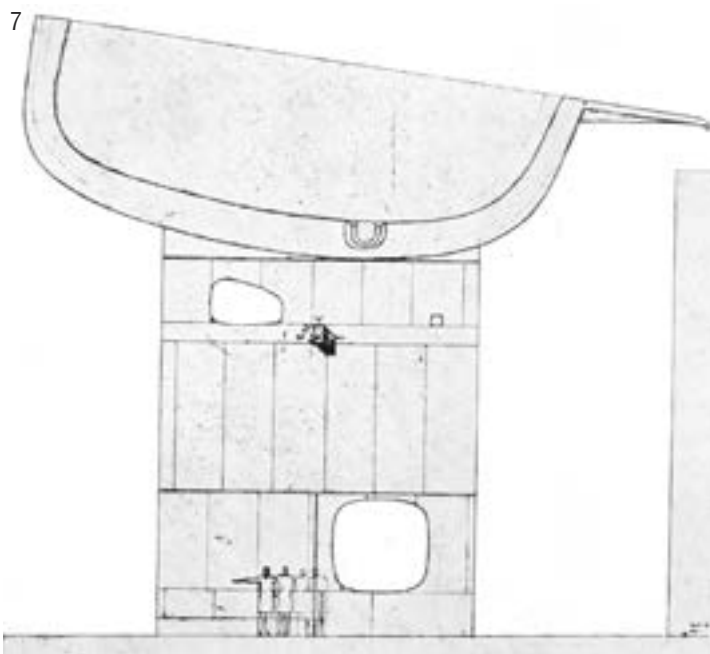
Carefully calculated cosmic connections characterise Corbusier's Chandigarh Capitol, hinting at precedents such as the observatory at Jantar Mantar and Mayan civilisation. The Capitol – the district comprised of the Assembly, the High Court, the Secretariat, and the Governor's Palace – was Le Corbusier's main focus, and is the crowning achievement of the masterplan.

The High Court is capped by a vaulted parasol, a tectonic device ever present in Le Corbusier's Indian designs. The fenestration is defined by brise-soleil shading the offices behind in cooperation with the shading of the parasol roof, excluding 'the bright glare and heat to become a cool, shadowy refuge' (Buchanan, 2000).

The facade is tranquilly reflected in the pools created around the Capitol, a part of Le Corbusier's most esoteric masterplan. The plan 'transcends the limitations of the humanist perspective to achieve a new legibility that he associated with the Cosmic' (Constant, 1987).

'He sought to transcend this difference in scale by infusing modern spatiality with mythopoeic content. The vast pedestrian esplanade linking the Assembly and High Court was inspired in spirit and detail by airport runways, while the reflecting pools to reduce the visual distance derive from Mughal precedents. ... Large earth mounds positioned to enhance the perceptual sequence allude to the distant mountains and contribute to the primal imagery' (Constant, 1987).

The Assembly at Chandigarh is defined by a concrete frustum (figure 6) which ascends from the square plan, rectilinear building (figure 10). The frustum immediately announces the





presence of the circular assembly chamber within.

The fenestration of the Assembly bears similarity to that of the High Court. The exterior offices are defined by vertical brise-soleil, 'the exterior is of rough concrete ... which stands out against the sky' (Le Corbusier, 1981). The front facade bears a grand concrete portico parasol, announcing the entrance. Seen end on, and in section (figure 7) the portico suggests the form of the local cattle's horns that Le Corbusier sketched frequently.

The frustum protruding from the roof form has a presence on the inside, defining the circular plan of the assembly hall. Le Corbusier incorporated it for its environmental benefits, inspired by industrial cooling towers it encourages natural ventilation by stack effect and on still days is assisted by mechanical apparatus. Cross ventilation is encouraged through the building by irregular holes punched in the portico to the south-east.

The frustum enables generous top lighting and there is an 'interplay of natural [and] artificial lighting' (Boesiger, 1957). The circular plan and concrete structure are not ideal for acoustics and subsequently sound-absorbing acoustic clouds line the chamber. The surface of the shell and the sound-absorbers demonstrate another interplay.

The assembly chamber was designed as a circular layout but on Le Corbusier's final trip to India in 1956 it was realised that this didn't meet the Indian constitutional procedure which by custom – influenced by the British empire and the parliament at Westminster – faced the government and opposition across from one another.

Le Corbusier sketched ramps spiralling around the frustum (figure 8), but these never came to fruition. The roof is however designed to 'be accessible to accommodate evening or night-time entertaining' (Boesiger, 1957) with a particular focus to 'enjoy solar and lunar festivities' (Buchanan, 2000).

The joy of Le Corbusier's architecture is the combination of esoteric and exoteric symbolism. On the exact day and hour of the opening of Parliament each year a light is focused directly on a statue beside the Speaker's chair. Precedent for such calculated architecture can be found in many Hindu temples as well as the observatory of Jantar Mantar.

## Bonn, Germany

Following the second world war the German parliament was moved to the small town of Bonn 'away from the tensions of the eastern frontier' (Sudjic, 2001). However it wasn't until 1992 that the modern parliament building was completed, by which time – the Berlin wall having fallen three years previously – Germany was on the path to reunification and discussions to return parliament to Berlin were already under way.

Behnisch and Partner's parliament at Bonn was an innovative building, drawing influence from Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer's 1927 League of Nations competition proposal which used transparent or glass walls exoterically to inspire openness and accessibility in political decision making. There are 'no back corridors for backstairs diplomacy, but open glazed rooms for public negotiation by honest men' (Meyer, 1927).

Russell L. Cope reflects that the openness and honesty sought through architecture is 'a reaction [against] the National Socialist era and to the even earlier influence of the notion of the strong, generally authoritarian state, where the executive held parliaments in slight regard and met without any thought being given to public accountability' (Cope, Unknown Date).

As well as providing daylighting the transparency of the Bonn Parliament permits a strong connection to the site, the landscape and the Rhine in particular. Not just allowing the public to see inside but also encourage the politicians to relate to the real world outside.

The layout of the assembly chamber at Bonn was a complete circle (figure 11) 'which for Behnisch epitomises democracy in both function and symbolism' (Buchanan, 2000). The intention was for politicians to address one another from their own seats, eliminating the sense of privilege; however in practice the speaker would address from the rostrum at the centre and thus disadvantaged those seated behind the speaker.



The parliament at Bonn experienced a number of unfortunate events emphasising its unsuitability as a place of power. In November 1992 a month after opening the audio system failed resulting in the parliament being returned to its temporary chamber and not returning until September 1993. Then in December of that year the Rhine rose to 'levels unprecedented since 1926, flooding part of the supposedly protected building site' (Cope, Unknown Date).

## Berlin Reichstag, Germany

Following the decision in 1992 to return the parliament to Berlin a competition was held for the refurbishment of the Reichstag. It was open to all German practices and 14 practices representing other countries with Norman Foster selected to represent the UK.

There was a great significance in the decision to return the Bundestag – German legislative body – to the Reichstag. It served as a symbol of the reunification of Berlin and Germany. Foster was keen to explore this notion and emphasise it in a symbolic form.

Drawing inspiration Le Corbusier's frustum in Chandigarh a glass dome announces the assembly chamber on the exterior (figure 12).

The dome is far more than a symbol though, it serves as a clever environmental device, much like the frustum of Chandigarh. Foster's design benefits from significant technological advancements and is a much more sophisticated device (figure 15) but the principles are the same.

Hot air rises to the dome from which it is mechanically evacuated while natural light is permitted to filter in. A mirrored reflector 'reminiscent of that of a lighthouse' (Buchanan, 2000) serves dual purpose, by day it maximises the daylight potential of the assembly chamber and at night it reflects the chamber lights out into the night sky, a beacon announcing the parliament is in session (figure 13).

Another correlation to be drawn with Chandigarh is the expansion of public spaces to the roof form. Like in Le Corbusier's sketches (figure 8) of the frustum Foster's dome features spiralling ramps ascending the interior of the dome. The public have reign of the roof terrace, with the fantastic views out across Berlin as well as down to the chamber below.

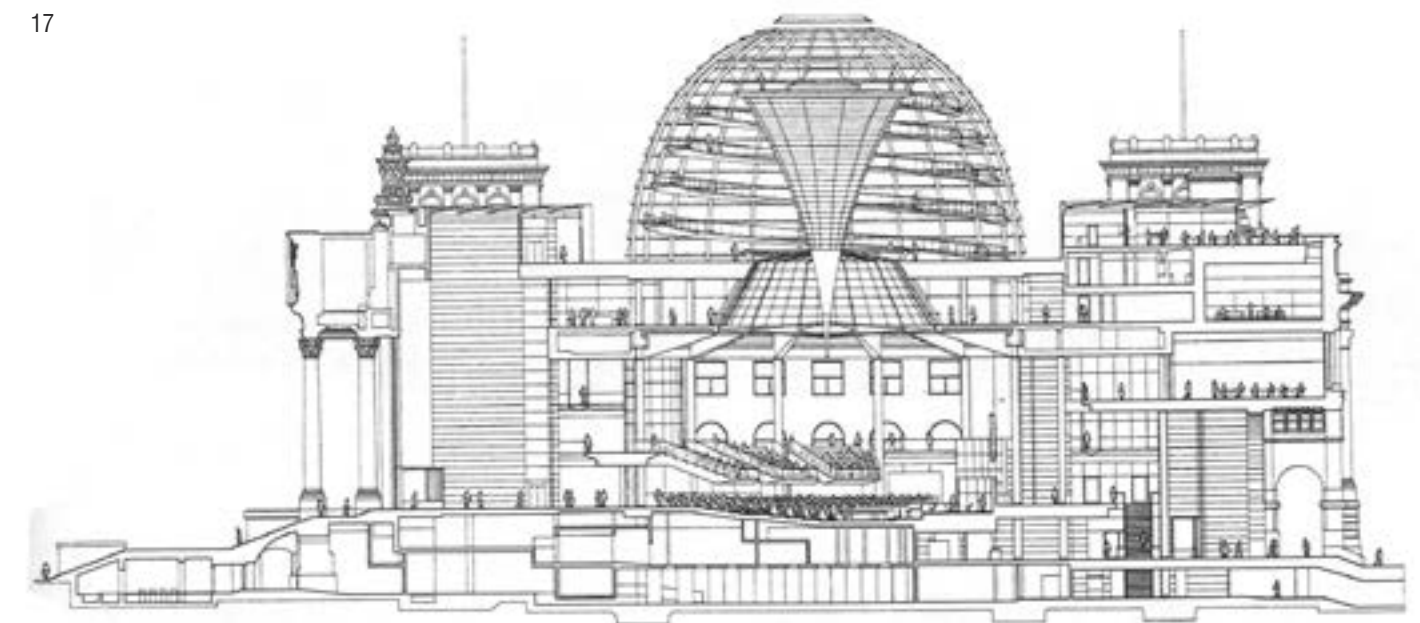
At the public entrance the openness of the chamber is immediate, 'upon entering the Reichstag, members of the public are offered a clear view into, and through, the chamber via the glazed screen' (Buchanan, 2000). Buchanan goes on to reflect that while a symbol of transparency suggesting the 'accountability of politicians' it can also be seen as a defined physical barrier between the public and the politicians. Further in the building invited public get the opportunity to walk down the same high-vaulted corridors as their elected representatives but they must do so on suspended bridges (figure 15), a clear barrier suggesting that perhaps the public and politicians are not equals.

Traces of the Reichstag's dramatic history have been preserved around the the building 'defaced ornament, the scorch marks of flame-throwers, and Russian soldiers' graffiti' (Buchanan, 2000) meaning in places the Reichstag is 'a living museum' (Jodidio, 2001).

The decision to preserve the past is much more easily made by a foreign architect. It is difficult for the German people to determine themselves whether enough time has passed that the first and second world wars may be laid to rest or forgotten. Or whether the history should be preserved in its fullest 'as a mark of maturity, and an unflinching commitment never to forget' (Buchanan, 2000).

The assembly chamber is laid out in a compressed semi-circle (figure 16) avoiding the mistakes made at Bonn and staying true to the democratic legacy of ancient Greece. Tribunes rise above the chamber permitting invited members of the public and media to oversee proceedings while maintaining a distinct separation for the safety and security of the politicians.

The glass dome was a very contentious issue between Foster and the parliamentarians. Foster favoured a less classically symbolic 'drum-like form' (Quantrill, 2000), while a number of the parliamentarians were still arguing to reinstate the square-based glass and steel dome original



to the building.

Foster eventually conceded to a glass dome which retained the environmental benefits of his drum creation. The form of the dome is vaguely egg shaped, perhaps suggesting the rebirth of the parliament, and the carrot shaped mirrored reflector at its centre points down – in an almost intimidating manner – to the chamber below, perhaps suggesting the accountability of the individual politicians.

## Summary

The intricacy and complexity of parliaments and their importance as a symbol of national culture and political philosophy make it essential that the form follows function. Foster's Reichstag intervention draws from a wealth of precedence and has borrowed, from existing parliaments, many of the architectural elements which have stood the test of time; such as Le Corbusier's frustum, Meyer's glass walls and the semi-circular layout of the ancient Greek ekklesia.

Foster's Reichstag is the most appropriate parliament today, best representing the ideals of a modern democratic government and nation. The parliament is rooted in history, steeped in national identity, environmentally sound, encourages openness, honesty and accountability; it permits interaction between the public and their representatives while maintaining their security.

Le Corbusier's assembly is an impressive and inspirational building that draws heavily from historical and traditional precedent and maintains a magnificent array of symbolism. However such a rich tapestry of esoteric imagery, especially astronomical associations don't relate to the people and don't capture the national identity that we now consider essential to a national monument.

The architecture does however express the keenness of the nation to explore technical innovation. The frustum in particular is a successful environmental experiment.

200 years since it was rebuilt the Palace of Westminster may represent the traditions of the United Kingdom but it is a dated, insular, building which does not reflect or encourage modern democracy and subsequently may no longer be suitable for today's politics.

There is a clear contrast between the transparency of Foster's Reichstag and the stone corridors of Westminster. Politics is secreted away within the Palace of Westminster and the nature of the corridors and tunnels enables MPs to scuttle around without ever being seen by the public.

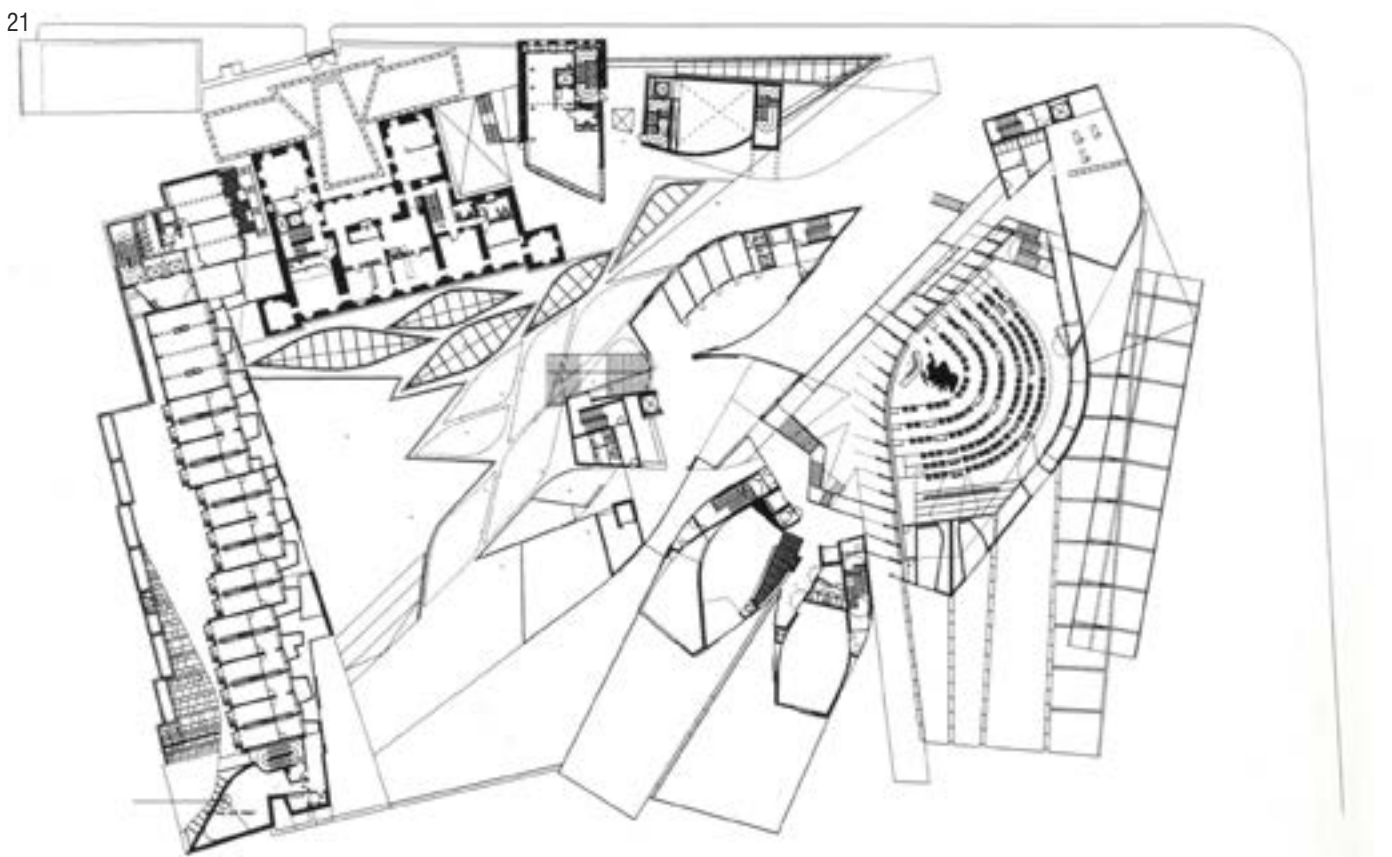
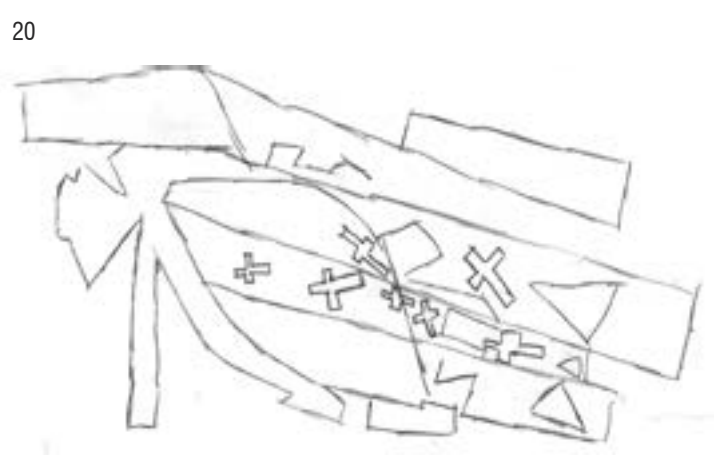
The ubiquitous back corridors and dark spaces mean politicians do not have to maintain their public images within the privacy of Westminster. In addition the facing benches of the oppositional chamber lend themselves to opposition and argument; when a semi-circular layout could instead stimulate discussion and consensus.

The Palace of Westminster was designed in a time where public buildings were built decorative and monumental, the focus was on the power of the elevations and the ostentatious displays of wealth rather than the poetics of the spaces within. The Assembly at Chandigarh was the first to incorporate environmental architecture and the parliaments at Bonn, focuses on the potential for public accountability and humanism.

## Conclusion

Parliamentary architecture has evolved with the evolution of politics. Ancient Greek parliament brought together the entire citizenry and made use of only the natural landscape. As politics developed nations used parliamentary architecture to assert their power and dominance; classical styles and decoration exerted wealth. It was also an expression of national identity to both citizens and foreign powers.

The industrial revolution, the modernist movement and advances in science and technology changed how architecture was built, nations were keen to express their innovation. Therefore humanism and environmentalism became a part of the parliamentary architectural palette.



For a long time politics had lost the concept of democracy – the rule of people, by the people. The most recent development in parliamentary architecture attempts to express the public accountability of politicians by more thoroughly opening debates to the public.

## Part B: Scottish Parliament Building, Edinburgh

### Introduction

Typically parliaments are ‘grandiose statements of authority’ (Fisher, 2004) designed to demonstrate the political power and importance of a nation; the Scottish parliament is however a stark contrast. Inspired by the Salisbury Crags and upturned boats, on the shore at Lindisfarne, Enric Miralles’ proposal was a monument to Scottish identity as opposed to political power.

At the competition phase most competitors presented ‘monumental assembly halls – circles and ovals – either placed on a plinth or set off against the city background’ (Jencks, 2005) while Miralles’ concept was a simple nest of twigs and green leaves, connected to the Salisbury Crags, and situated at the end of the Royal Mile opposite the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The scheme drew from the ‘physical, historical and psychological resonances of the building’s site’ (Cohn, 2005).

In his brief Miralles suggested the ‘building comes from the rock and arrives in the city. It should be like the land, built out of the land and carved in the land. Instead of an overwhelming monument, with rhetorical forms and classical dimensions, we would like to think about it from a psychological approach. This is not a building in a park, but rather a the form of people gathering, physically shaping the act of sitting together.’ (Miralles, 1998).

The selection panel – chaired by Donald Dewar – unanimously selected Miralles’ scheme citing the sympathy they saw within the scheme, the ‘fusion between topography and building’ (Cohn, 2005).

As a Catalan architect Miralles empathised with how Scotland – though a part of the United Kingdom – was keen to define itself individually, just as how Catalonia held a distinct identity within Spain. As such Miralles explored Scottish identity deeply and incorporated a great deal of it into the new parliament.

The attention to Scottish identity is powerfully emanated through the material palette. Stone, oak and steel, with the majority sourced within Scotland or based on Scottish origin. A dark Caithness stone, speckled Kemnay granite and pale Scottish oak (though some sourced from France).

### Entrance

The public entrance to the parliament is just across the road from the formal Palace of Holyroodhouse. The parliament, being of the land and landscape, contrasts with the formality of the iron fencing and formal gardens; ‘Long curving terraces of vividly green turf look as if they have flowed out of the Salisbury Crags’ (Cohn, 2005). The terraces have been left to grow wild and unmaintained (figure 18), exoterically linking them to the wild Crags and contrasting the mown lawns of the Palace. The terraces become a grass roof, defining the entrance as a series ‘low [ceilinged], and low lit, vaulted spaces, caves with smooth concrete ceilings’ (Fisher 2005) (figure 19). The vaulted ceilings are engraved with abstract saltire crosses (Figure 20), an immediate reference to Scottish identity.

Unusually as you move deeper into the space it becomes more light, leading you, enticing you up to the debating chamber – Catherine Slessor describes this experience as a ‘literal and metaphorical enlightenment’ (Slessor, 2004).

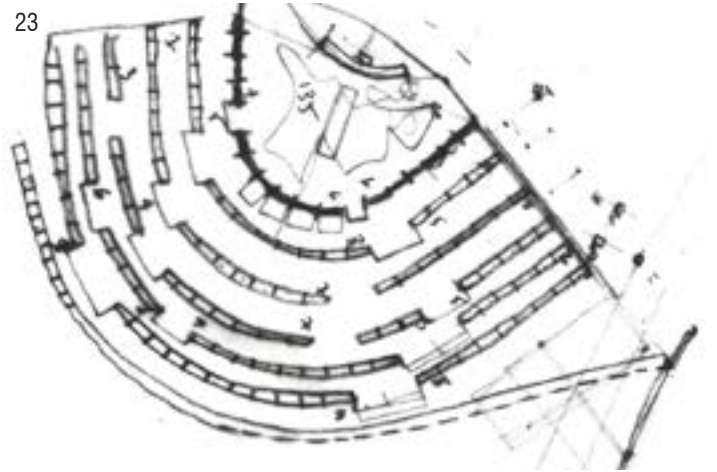
### Debating Chamber

The debating chamber of any parliament is its defining feature and Miralles’ is inspirational in concept and execution. An open, expansive, flattened semi-circle of widely spaced oak and

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sycamore lecterns on a gently sloping floor (figure 22, 23) suggest a classical link but bear no true precedent.

Foremost the chamber contrasts the Houses of Parliament. There is no defined opposition here, instead 'the new parliament ... stresses conciliation in its layout' (Jencks 2005). The dominant green leather of the Westminster benches gives way to soft sycamore.

The front the lecterns are adorned with the 'motif of leaf and twig' (Jencks 2005) Miralles presented as his competition concept. The attention to detail and furnishing in the parliament is intense and have become a part of the spirit of the building. However in some places the detailing has become excessive, for instance the extravagance of the £88,000, oak and sycamore, reception desk caused controversy as the building is funded by public money.

It's impressive how much light Miralles' design pours into the chamber with such a heavy roof form. The chamber is flooded with a 'yellow ambience' (Jencks 2005) from the skylights behind the presiding officer. Windows behind the public gallery flood the space with light from the sides and 'capture vistas to the Royal Palace and the Craggs' (Cohn, 2005) emanating the concept, 'the deep metaphor that Scottish identity is wrapped up in its landscape' (Jencks 2005).

The public and press gallery in the Scottish Parliament follows the curve of the chamber it is not elevated high above it but instead sits the public 'literally at the shoulders' (Fisher 2005) of the MSPs. This again contrasts Foster's and Behnisch's parliaments, where the tribunes rise high above the politicians, and the Palace of Westminster where 'the public and the press are pushed up under the rafters' (Fisher 2005).

The roof structure of the Scottish Parliament is reminiscent of the hammer and beam roof of the old 1639 Parliament. Glulam-oak members work in compression contrasting with slim stainless steel rods working in tension. These are woven together in 'an elaborate three-dimensional chorus' (Cohn, 2005). David Lewis – an Arup structural engineer working on the project stated 'Miralles was a terrific spatial architect. As somebody who thought deeply down to the layers and how the layers work together to form a harmonious vision in space'.

The combination of elements 'choreograph a continuous unfolding of space, light and views' (Cohn, 2005). Large south facing windows opposite the lecterns provide views of the Salisbury Craggs (figure 24). This could be a reference to the public accountability achieved by Behnisch's parliament at Bonn but most likely Miralles is opening the interior to the landscape as opposed to the opening the building to the public.

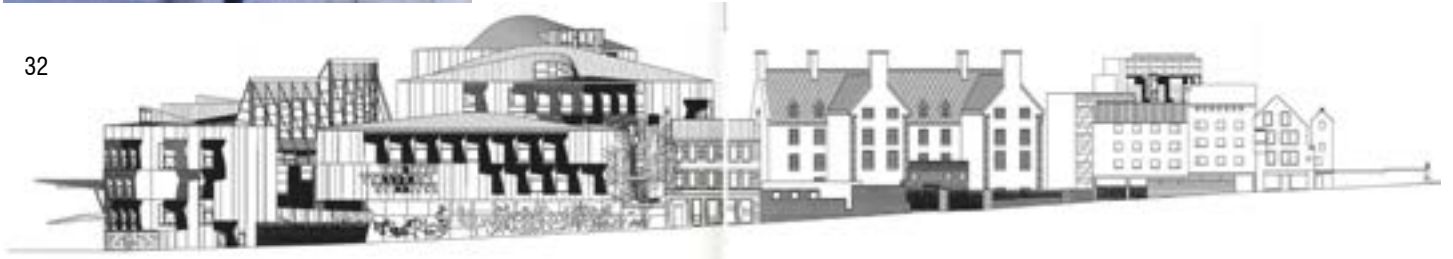
## Garden Foyer

Donald Dewar – head of the clients committee – insisted that Queensbury House be renovated and serve as the MSPs entrance. Connecting Queensbury House to the Parliament is the garden foyer, another low-ceilinged space. Lit from above by leaf and petal shaped skylights (figure 25), interspersed with keel-like shapes. Another exoteric link to the original leaf and twig motif.

The garden foyer is a private space for members to enjoy, boat shaped seating alcoves project into the garden courtyard providing casual spaces to host meetings as well as 'a dramatic backdrop for television interviews' (Cohn, 2005).

When the parliament took the role of client the brief changed significantly, requiring an additional 13,000 m<sup>2</sup> of space on top of the original 15,000m<sup>2</sup>. This pushed the strength of Miralles' concept and resulted in the loss of spaces between the buildings. Originally Miralles had wanted to let the grass and rock more clearly penetrate the building 'drawing in the surrounding landscape' (Fisher, 2005).

The low-ceiling shields the grey and white Kemnay granite ceremonial stone staircase from view until you're right underneath it and able to experience it in its full splendour. 'Shallow treads ... narrow dramatically as they rise so that your eye is drawn, as in a Uccello painting, up the receding perspective to the massive oaken doors of the debating chamber' (Fisher, 2005).



## Committee Rooms

The staircase also leads to the MSPs offices and the committee rooms. The committee rooms are defined by organic, curving walls with ‘soaring vaulted walls punctuated by light fixtures, air nozzles and audio-video gadgetry (figure 26). Suggesting organic caves – albeit futuristic, enveloping and flooded with natural light – they embrace and dignify the idea of gathering’ (Cohn, 2005).

An oak trim to the walls and ceiling once again relate to the image of upturned boats, and the hanging fixtures mimic a shoal of fish. Each committee room is organic in form and differ in shape, size and function.

The committee rooms are housed in three structures called the Meeting Room Towers. They ‘appear in plan like fallen leaves colliding’ (Cohn, 2005). However the ‘jagged masses of pale gray Scottish granite ... huddle together like a rugged volcanic outcrop emerging from the predominantly sandstone beiges of the historic city’ (Cohn, 2005).

## MSP Offices

The MSP offices (figure 27) are designed in a humanist style, defined by a concrete cast barrel vault ceiling they are ‘cave-like spaces’ (Jencks, 2005) with a cantilevered thinkpod window seat. The thinkpods extrude from the facade (figure 28) exuding the ‘human components’ (EMBT, 2006) of the members’ wing.

Twigs and leaves, again, this case in the form of bamboo like vertical brise-soleil (figure 28) ‘shield the MSP from the sun, and inquisitive eyes of those inhabitants just across the street’ (Jencks, 2005).

The thinkpod is a fantastic inclusion in the scheme, it permits each MSP a private space for reflection and decision making away from the public. It enables them ‘to gain courage to act as an individual with a conscience’ (Jencks, 2005). The pods have inspiring views of the Craggs as another reminder that the parliament is rooted in the landscape.

## Facades

Enric Miralles’ studio – EMBT – prides itself on not designing from elevations, this results in fantastically complicated facades. Complex combinations of all the symbolism that has been poured into the building. Catherine Slessor notes that ‘Miralles cannot seem to bear to leave a window unornamented’ (Slessor, 2004) each window unless unique in shape is adorned by a cutout (figure 30) or a trellis of bamboo-like oak tubes.

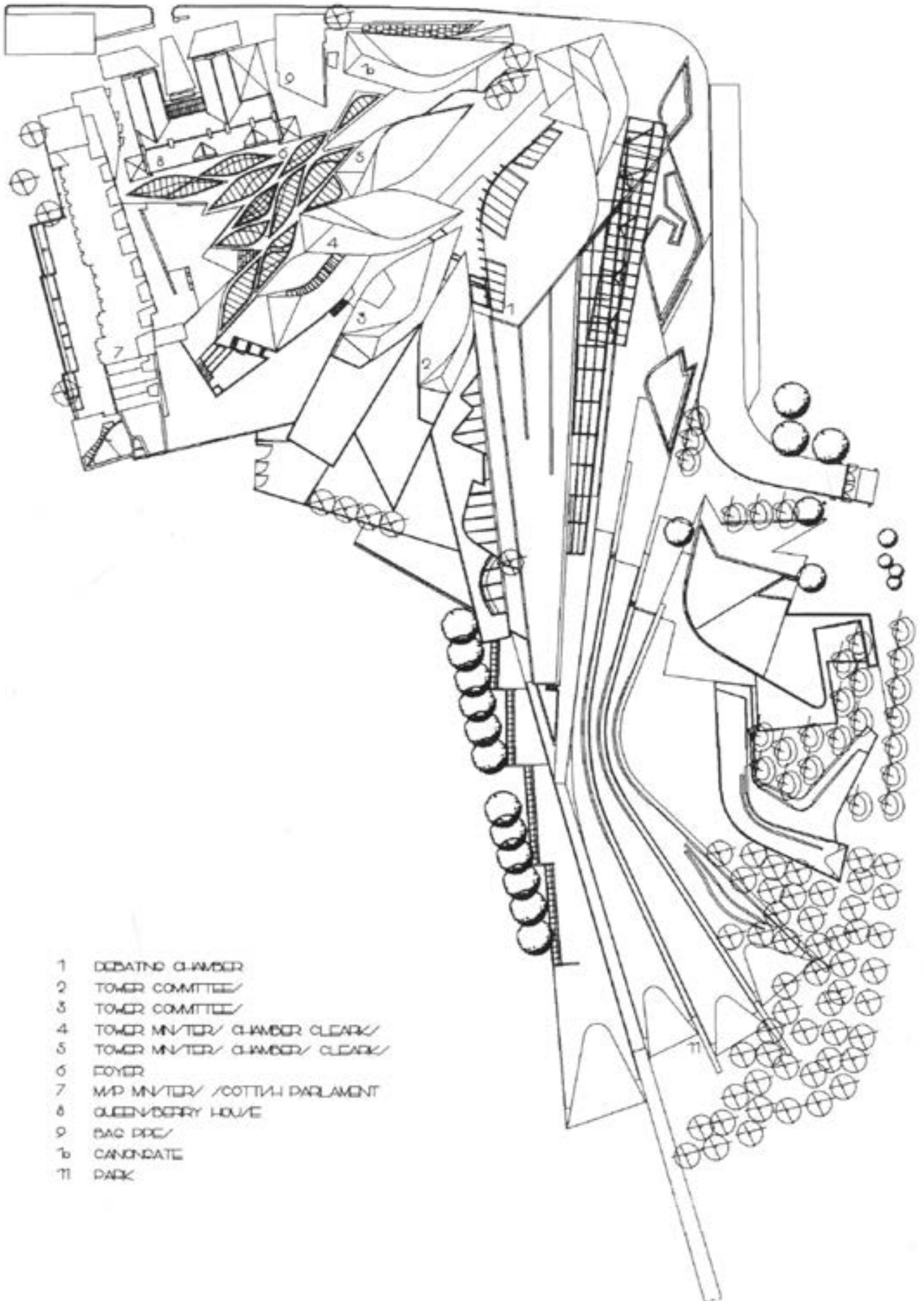
The cutout is an abstract silhouette of a notable Scottish painting by Sir Henry Raeburn: a reverend ice skating (figure 29). These shapes in stone and timber ‘transform the shape of the windows’ (EMBT, 2006).

The Canongate wall (figure 31, 32) is a fantastic inclusion, the shocking events of September 11th 2001 resulted in increased security requirements, one of which was a blast wall on Canongate. Miralles’ studio took this as an opportunity to incorporate ‘a narrative piece of architecture. Fragments of scottish stones, literature, earth and city profiles mingle in a composition from the hand of the artist Soraya Smithson’ (EMBT, 2006). The Canongate wall is the first part of the building the public really experience as they approach the entrance along the Royal Mile and the poetry and thickness of the wall ‘lend the building its monumental quality’ (EMBT, 2006).

The wall symbolises Miralles’ approach to architecture, every feature, however inconsequential can be made special.

## In Closing

Enric Miralles and Donald Dewar – head of the parliamentary committee – both died in 2000, just as the project was beginning construction. The project was completed by his widow and architectural partner Benedetta Tagliabue. This tragedy, and spiraling costs, due to the



changes in the brief meant the scheme was not without complications and controversy.

The building was initially met with a critical reception from the public however as they came to experience the building they understand the how 'the spirit of Miralles' concept permeates the Parliament and has been realised with intelligence and flair' (Fisher, 2005).

## Conclusion

Designed and built around the same time; Norman Foster's Reichstag intervention borrows elements from Le Corbusier's Assembly at Chandigarh, Behnisch's Parliament at Bonn and Meyer's League of Nations concept.

Enric Miralles' Scottish Parliament however is removed from the trend of preceding parliaments. The glazing does not inspire openness, there are no distinct environmental features, the building does not evoke monumentality and power. It is simply a temple to the identity of a nation within a kingdom.

Miralles has proven that a Parliament does not need to take a predetermined style. The Scottish Parliament is steeped in the defining characteristic of a parliament – strong national identity – but otherwise it is unlike any other.

'Because the Parliament is low and complex' (Jencks, 2005) there is no defining image of the parliament unlike iconic buildings such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Sydney Opera House. But the Parliament is swarming in identity and throughout it has stayed true to Miralles' original concept.

'The new Parliament sits in the land. This was our goal. We had the feeling that the building should be like the land, built out of the land and carved in the land. In the form of people gathering. The Parliament is a fragment of a large gathering situation an amphitheatre, coming out from Arthur's Seat' (EMBT, 2006).



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