

THEATRES OF PUSILLANIMITY AND POWER IN HOLYROOD

Charles McKean

INTRODUCTION

A site can be invested with significance by its location, its broader geographical setting, the views that can be had of it, its historical associations, its buildings - or by its use. As can be inferred by the translation of barren hillsides into the mythic 'braes of Glenfinnan' or the 'braes of Mar', an activity can ennoble an unlikely location in equal measure to the location lending significance to the activity. The best results probably emerge when the two are in balance. An indifferent piece of variably historic real estate at the south east extremity of Edinburgh's suburb of the Canongate - largely valueless for the last 200 years - has been selected for Scotland's 'Ting'. A new use of this significance will jack up the stature of the site into balance with that of its neighbour - Holyrood Palace - the premier seat of Scotland's monarchs.

In a democracy, the parliament building is the principal expression of national identity, power and authority. It is the focus of power and protest; not just the place of judgement, but the place where judgement can be seen to be done. It and its environs form the classic 'theatre of power'. There is nothing neutral about it. Will it appear dominating and aloof (as in Canberra), or urban, urbane, amorphous and as theoretically accessible as is Brussels? Presumably, there will be a formal relationship with its host city with a clear and unambiguous route between the two. Indeed, in this post-vehicle, post David Begg era¹, one would expect the Parliament to be approached primarily along a pedestrian processional route with all the gathering places necessary to encourage political debate and interaction between politicians

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¹ *Begg was convener Edinburgh's Transportation Committee, and a strong proponent of public and foot transport.*

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and those who elect them. Since an heroic building just uphill from Holyrood Palace could not help but compete with it, and could only be imposed upon the site at the expense of Canongate's inherent characteristics and existing grain, it is legitimate to assume that the Holyrood site was chosen from the four options by the Secretary of State for reasons of anti-monumentality¹.

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

The site could hardly be more inspirational for architectural creativity. It slopes quite steeply in two directions - to the east and to the south. When the Abbey of Holyrood had first been founded on a virtual island, much of the lower part of the Parliament site would have been marsh or even under water (the wetness of the location recalled in the name 'Watergate' on the north-east side of the Girth Cross). Indeed it had been the water and the wells which had attracted the brewing industry in the 19th century.

The concept of the 'Royal Mile' implies a homogeneity of building form and function that never existed between the High Street and the Canongate. The city's eastern boundary lay at the Netherbow gate, now marked by the lights at the crossing of St Mary's Street, and the Canongate was a separate burgh. Until at least the 17th century, Holyrood was known as the palace in the suburbs². The supposed coherence of the 'Royal Mile' - that most of the competitors accepted as fact - scarcely emerged even once some of the buildings in the Canongate began to adopt the tall tenemental form customary in the High Street at its upper end. The urban grain was much less dense than the High Street, and once the King had chosen Holyrood as the centre of the Kingdom, it developed the cosy character of a courtier's *quartier*.

Here emerged the (usually courtyard) town houses (or *hôtels*) of the courtiers and the greater nobility. The great houses included Moray House, Huntly House, Acheson House, Queensberry House, and - perhaps the greatest - the

¹ *Feasibility studies were carried out into a site adjacent to the Scottish Office in Leith (by Benson + Forsyth); Haymarket (by RMJM); Calton Hill (by Page and Park) and Holyrood (by RMJM). Popular consensus appeared to favour Calton Hill, which the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland considered offered the most impressive setting. (RFACS **The Scottish Parliament Architectural Competition** booklet (Edinburgh, 1998)).*

² *Holyrood is frequently referred to as the 'palace in the suburbs' by both George Buchanan in his **History of Scotland** (Glasgow 1799, p.149) and by Robert Lindsay of Pittscottie **The History of Scotland** (Edinburgh 1778).*

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town house of the Earls of Winton. Houses of slightly lesser degree, such as Panmure House (home of Adam Smith), might be built in the gardens behind. As the Canongate descended further away from the city and approached Holyrood, these great houses tended to predominate over street front tenements. Moray House, perhaps the best surviving exemplar of a nobleman's hôtel, turns its back on the street, its two projecting wings facing south over its own gardens and thence to Arthur's Seat.

The lower reaches of the Canongate became a narrow European street, sometimes houses, sometimes tenements, sometimes later tenements, but primarily of great U- or H-plan noblemen's houses of the Renaissance and the later Renaissance, with huge gardens behind with garden walls and summer houses running down to the Highland countryside of Arthur's Seat. It offered a variety of semi-private open spaces comparable in its own way to the much grander display of such forms in Genoa's Strada Nova. William Edgar's 1742 map shows the Parliament site as consisting of one large house (Queensberry House) and a number of smaller houses and closes, only one of which - and a very insignificant one - is Horse Wynd. Perhaps the most striking feature from Edgar's map is the indivisibility between Holyrood Palace and the rest of the Canongate as compared to the traffic-dominated cordon sanitaire (or moat) of vehicles, noise and fumes that surges around it now.

The Canongate did not retain its quality. Some of the nobility - most notably the Earls of Winton - were forfeited after 1746. Their house fell into ruins and is now occupied (probably including much of the old masonry) by Sir John Whitefoord's house. In the later 18th century, the pattern of great houses, courts, closes and tenements was disturbed by a new arrival - the free-standing villa, Lord Milton's house by William Adam just uphill, and the Marquis of Lothian's 'Hutt' (simply called the Lothian Hut) just downhill on the eastern boundary of the site. The Lothian Hutt was bought for its easy access to water by brewer William Younger in 1823 who, over the next few years, added to the site in the creation of a major brewery. By the time Queen Victoria had determined to re-establish the royal use of Holyrood House, its immediate environment had become semi-industrial with beery smells, high chimneys and smoke.

The Canongate, like the rest of the Old Town, had been abandoned into slumdom, and despite a certain amount of renewal in mid-century, it had declined into slumdom again by the 1930s. Little wonder that it was bruited abroad that Holyrood became the least favourite royal Palace. In 1958, the Canongate was subject to a substantial renewal programme under the leadership of Robert Hurd. Patrick Geddes had earlier attempted some minor intervention at the east end down by the Watergate, and his successor firm,

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Sir Frank Mears & Partners, softened its eastern corner round into Abbeyhill in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

With the exception of Queensberry House, therefore, the cultural significance of the Parliament site is that it had never been monumental, on which there probably remained traces - and perhaps complete storeys - of buildings which had spread southwards from the Canongate itself.

THE THEATRE OF PUSILLANIMITY

For political reasons, the top priorities in the process of selecting a designer for the new parliament were speed of delivery and reliability. They had to have done something of comparable size and complexity before. Yet few Scottish architects ever have the chance to design large buildings of this scale, since, as recent major commissions demonstrate, the pervasive view (not untypical within the colonial mind-set) is that the only good architects for symbolic buildings should come from outside Scotland. Thus was Glasgow's Armadillo conference centre designed by Sir Norman Foster (as was Robert Gordon University's new building), Edinburgh's Conference Centre by Terry Farrell, Dynamic Earth by Michael Hopkins, the Maybury Business Park by Richard Meier, and the proposed Oceanspan complex in Leith by Sir Terence Conran.

Instead of holding an open design competition, the trick was to require architects to submit a portfolio of past work, with guarantees about enormous levels of professional indemnity insurance. Lacking practice of designing large buildings and without the requisite size of office, most Scottish architects fell at this hurdle. Several excellent smaller firms who had formed consortia for the project, as is the norm in Scandinavia, were ruled out *a priori* as inherently unstable. Speed first, safety second, security third, design last. Seventy-one firms put their names forward for initial consideration¹. Slightly under half of these, 33, were either Scots or had Scots connections. However, for the most part, the architectural practices that had been winning awards for their designs (or who had appeared in the **New Architects** publication²) had not bothered to submit. With the exception of seven

¹ A full list of architects is given in RFACS, *The Scottish Parliament Architectural Competition* booklet (Edinburgh, 1998).

² published by The Architecture Foundation (London 1988).

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practices linked to overseas firms, and three special Scots consortia¹ established for the purpose of the competition, the remainder were large and, for the most part, commercial practices. Twelve practices were to be shortlisted, and eventually five selected to prepare designs. Realising, however - despite the political agenda placing highest priority upon deliverability (i.e. non-Scots) - that it nonetheless contained a hankering for a soupçon of Scots flavour, some deft manoeuvring took place between the first expressions of interest and the selection. In particular, Reiach and Hall (Edinburgh) joined with Rafael Vinoly (New York), and RMJM (Edinburgh) joined with Enric Miralles y Moya (Barcelona)².

Nothing, it seems, had been learnt about commissioning procedures since the competition for the Museum of Scotland seven years earlier. After years of hard bargaining³, a two-stage, open international competition was held. The winner, from an entry of 365, was the then little known office of Benson + Forsyth. In the museum competition, there was no question of considering Scottish architects as too little talented, too unreliable or too risky. They had simply been asked to demonstrate their design capability; and support systems had been put in place had the project been won by a firm without adequate resources⁴.

A long list of 12 firms to design the Scottish Parliament was drawn up. In addition to those selected to compete, there were three firms from London, and one each from Cologne, Stuttgart, Oslo and Bruges. The judges⁵ invited Miralles-Tagliabue with RMJM, Michael Wilford & partners, Richard Meier with Keppie Design, Rafael Vinoly with Reiach and Hall, and Glass Murray with Denton Corker Marshall to submit designs. And they judged the Miralles entry the winner.

¹ *The three group of Scottish architects who banded together were: 1. Allan Murray, John Hope and Nicholas Groves Raines; 2. The Edinburgh chartered architects network; 3. Richard Murphy and Law & Dunbar Nasmith.*

² *RFACS, The Scottish Parliament Architectural Competition booklet (Edinburgh, 1998).*

³ *Charles McKean The Making of the Museum of Scotland (in production, Edinburgh 1999, Chapter 4).*

⁴ *Charles McKean The Making of the Museum of Scotland (in production, Edinburgh 1999, Chapter 4).*

⁵ *Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, Secretary of State for Scotland, Prof Andrew McMillan, Joan O'Connor, Robert Gordon, Dr John Gibbons and Kirsty Wark.*

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So the procedure adopted by the Secretary of State for Scotland for selecting the designer of the Scottish Parliament eventually had the result that no Scottish architect was deemed capable or worthy of competing for the design with the selected non-Scottish architects. In most of the teams, Scottish firms appeared as collaborators, 'executant architects' or rather makeweights. In no instance, were they deemed to be adequate as the creators of the new design. It was not, perhaps, the best omen for the future Scottish Parliament as patron of architecture.

DESIGN GENERATION

Architects' current preference for seeking direction and design stimulus from context, references, and the features of the site is very much a later 20th-century preoccupation. There is scant evidence of the architects of earlier periods doing so quite so self-consciously. Many clearly defined attitudes to architectural expression - neo-classicism, baronial or Gothick revival for example - were neither site-specific nor function-specific. A Grecian temple would be equally satisfactory as the home for the professional body for surgeons in the narrow urban setting of Edinburgh's South Bridge, as it would be on a much more expansive Mound, cloaking the government offices of the Royal Institution (now the RSA).

Historically-based architectures were superseded in the 20th century by the search for understandable and acceptable modes of expression emerging from the spatial and structural opportunities of new technologies, structures and materials. From cubism, functionalism (through a myriad of *isms* including modernism, expressionism, romantic nationalism, bowellism, brutalism, organicism etc), the century has ended in eclecticism in which references from the site tend to dominate. This preoccupation with locationally derived sources of inspiration may possibly have emerged as a response to what is widely regarded as the artificiality of post-modernism. The latter, like Art Deco, was primarily decorative and two dimensional, and primarily on the facade. Post-modernism did not, per se, produce particular interiors or spaces. Nor had Art Deco. The inspiration of the expression of a new building - the clothing as it were - has greater justification if it is sought from its environs.

A striking example of design predicated upon location is the Museum of Scotland, by Benson + Forsyth, which turns the western corner of Chambers Street. Benson + Forsyth almost certainly won the prize as the result of their clever but simple resolution of the museum's function expressed as an organic

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growth from the site¹. Representing the site as mediating between rational Enlightenment Edinburgh (represented by Chambers Street) and irrational, jumbled medieval Edinburgh lying down to the Grassmarket and the Castle to the west, they designed the museum as the hinge between the city's contrasting characters.

But if the new dispensation requires designers to evaluate the *genius loci*, the trouble is that there is no single approach to identifying it. A minimum sensitivity and knowledge of history, at the least, but there is an unerring tendency (as may most mellifluously be read in **Brilliant Cacophony**²) for creative folk to discover *genii loci* which peculiarly suit their design intentions, which are then deployed in justification of their proposals. How many *genii* were lurking in downhill Canongate? To judge from the extraordinary variety of justifications presented by the competitors (see later), the ether was dense with them.

CLUES FROM THE ENVIRONS

That there is no universally accepted contemporary architectural language may easily be deduced from the substantial building work already in progress in the vicinity of the Parliament site. On the south side of Holyrood Road, the new headquarters for the **Scotsman** newspaper heavily exemplifies what might be called monumental commercialism. Its immediate eastern neighbour, Dynamic Earth, designed by Sir Michael Hopkins, will have the appearance, belying its current state of concreteness and pimply concrete dome, of a canopy floating over an outside atrium. North across the road lies the early fruits of the pioneering Canongate Redevelopment, a project managed by architect John Hope. Rather than tackling the entire site with a single design for a single function (as had been proposed by the other two competitors for the site), uniquely several architects were given small commissions. What characterises the Canongate Redevelopment is the mixture of new build and conservation in a way that derives from a detailed understanding of the historic development of the site. Smaller buildings include the headquarters of the Royal Fine Art Commission (Richard Murphy) and the Scottish Poetry Library (Malcolm Fraser); there is housing by Van Heyningen and Hayward, by Ungless & Latimer, and flats by Ewan &

¹ Charles McKean, *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*, chapter 5; **Brilliant Cacophony** Ed. Lise Bratton, Scottish Sculpture Trust (Edinburgh 1998). See also Charles McKean review in *Cencrastus* (Edinburgh January 1999).

² see previous note.

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Fiona McLachlan. Some of the buildings facing the Canongate have been extended and restored in a vivid multi-coloured manner. Thus, even before the Parliament competition was launched, all the potentially competing aspects of contemporary Scottish architecture were emerging only metres uphill to the west.

SITE ANALYSIS

The single most important feature of the site itself was the proximity to Holyrood Palace, with the danger that since some parts of the site were higher than the Palace, the new building might either challenge the Palace or overwhelm it. The slopes to both south and east provided clear design opportunity and the possibility of underbuilding. The requirement to include and respect Queensberry House implied that the jury was not seeking a monumental building in the traditional sense but one that might evince a different design approach. There were a number of other existing buildings - including a tenement and a high, old, window-blocked wall facing the Canongate; low 19th century military buildings flanking Queensberry House's garden; and brewery buildings of varying, largely 20th century date and character, save the turreted baronial pavilion at the south west corner facing Holyrood Road. Competitors appear to have had a free hand in the extent to which any parts of them might be incorporated in the new design.

The 1742 William Edgar map shows the foot of the street, widening into a broad triangle by the Girth Cross, its apex at the tight Water Gate leading north to Leith. The Cross represented the boundary of the abbey's sanctuary for debtors. (There is a curious drawing by James Skene of Rubislaw showing a debtor fleeing from pursuit down into the abbey precinct¹). The space, as it then was, had form and tension, and could have provided an appropriate outdoors public ante-chamber to the theatre of power: indeed it could have become part of that theatre. Unfortunately, the original sense of enclosure has been shattered by successive road widenings, and by the current use of Horse Wynd² and Abbeyhill as a rush-hour rat-run. (The Miralles scheme depends upon the City Council removing the rat run and there is no sign that the Council is like minded. Miralles, however, is correct. No sense of spatial activity, or unity with the Holyrood precinct, will be possible if the current traffic patterns are permitted to continue.)

¹ *Skene of Rubislaw collection, Edinburgh Central Library.*

² *Currently running between the boundaries of the Holyrood Palace site and the former brewery site.*

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The theatre of power of the Scottish Parliament necessarily includes its approach and its axis. If the main axis were downhill from the High Street or from Waverley Station, the Parliament would remain almost totally invisible almost until you were next to it. If the intention was to produce a symbol of the new Scotland visible from uphill, to rival the distant glimpse of the submerged Holyrood towers, it would require either the contours to be flattened, or the site to be built up high. That would necessarily have resulted in a building likely to rival or overawe Holyrood in scale. The essence of most of the unsuccessful designs lies in addressing the conundrum of how to be monumental and powerful in a site without axes, and whose scale is controlled by a lower neighbour. (The obvious conclusion reflecting the new political circumstances - that the Parliament should occupy Holyrood, and the Queen have a new palace slightly uphill - was probably too radical. In any case, a space the size of the Debating Chamber would have been too great an intervention in Holyrood without unacceptable damage.)

Alternatively, the principal axis could have been reorientated to the north, approached along Calton Road¹ and through the old Water Gate. Ironically, Calton Road was much more part of the original processional route of Scotland's monarchs from Holyrood to St Giles than the Canongate ever was². A rebuilt/refurbished principal route from Waverley on this axis could be joined by traffic using a new elevator next to Jacob's Ladder up Calton Hill, providing access to car and coach parking in Regent Road, and thus lessening that burden on Holyrood. Approaching the Parliament through the Water Gate route would bring you face to the broad front of the site, thus giving the opportunity for appropriate ceremony and grandeur without the problem of competition with Holyrood House.

THE BRIEF FOR THE BUILDING

Even though the project is the Parliament House of Scotland, preparing the schedule of accommodation is usually the easiest part of the preparation of a brief. There were seven broad types of activity: the Debating Chamber and ancillary accommodation (at 4150 square metres slightly smaller than the Burrell Gallery displays); accommodation for Members and Ministers (4480 square metres); accommodation for staff (1750 square metres); dining area and gallery (2000 square metres); public and press areas (1480 square metres); facilities (1150 square metres); and parking (3200 square metres)

¹ on the map, the street to the north of the Canongate running roughly parallel to it.

² Charles McKean, *Edinburgh, Portrait of a City* (London 1991) pp.28-29.

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and security entrances etc (1050 square metres). (What kind of green priority is it that requires more space for parking and security entrances than for the Debating Chamber within easy walking distance of Scotland's premier railway station?) Parking, the Debating Chamber and the Members' and Ministers' accommodation were the principal elements seized upon by most of the competition entrants as the key to their designs.

The effort in a good brief is usually spent addressing the aspects difficult to measure - the aspirations, inter-relationships, and functional, operational, intellectual, social, ceremonial and psychological consideration¹. Possibly because there is so little experience of building Parliament Houses in Britain, these aspects of the brief were scant. The original Parliament House, still lying beneath classical clothing just to the south of St Giles, provided a largely irrelevant model since, for example, it contains none of the Committee Rooms, MPs' rooms, and administrative support that are now judged so important. Moreover, that original Debating Chamber was not a unique space, but occupied a part of a larger building, one function of which was to act as a location for the Courts. So there were few precedents, which may be one reason why the brief appeared to be quite thin, and based largely on an inflated version of a regional council headquarters.

Few buildings are more important than those symbolising the Government of a nation. Consider the resonance of Capitol Hill, of the Kremlin, of the Reichstag or of the Houses of Parliament. The brief writers were anaemic: the building 'must, in its setting, command respect and contribute to an enhanced urban environment'. Again the brief kept repeating the significance of the building, stating that 'the approach for the public and adjacent areas should provide for a setting in keeping with its importance'², without having the courage to be any more explicit. Hints or echoes of monumentality, therefore, rather than conviction. It is, perhaps, no longer within Civil Service training to understand or express concepts of nobility or heroism. Instead, a nerveless government appeared to be looking to the competitors for a lead in certain essential aspects of the brief.

The brief then stated, in truly deathless prose, that the design should reflect the Government's stated aim of open Government, whilst at the same time maintaining appropriate levels of security. As the designs were to demonstrate, it was unwise, perhaps, to use such a metaphor in a project

¹ *Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland A Brief Brief for Building Briefs (1993)*

² *The Parliament Brief, as contained in the RFACS Festival Exhibition, 1998.*

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where so many have proved to be so literal. Miralles pinpointed the simplistic nature of the circular transparent debating chambers in both the Vinoly/Reiach & Hall and Michael Wilford & Partners schemes by pointing out that 'excessive transparency is inconvenient' whereas television would make the Debating Chamber accessible to all¹. After all, a distant glimpse of a legislator lounging on a seat could be as much a screen over democracy than its aid.

Security was emphasised several times in the brief. The necessary consequence of building in the heart of the capital of Scotland was the impossibility of achieving an island fortress - something like Alcatraz - which would be almost perfect security against a potential bomber. Had they considered the matter closely, they would have realised that few Parliament buildings throughout the world are secure in the manner of Alcatraz; and that few of them have ever been attacked. It is the same mind-set that tarnishes the importance of the new Scottish Office in Leith by still enfoldng it in temporary-seeming link fencing after it has been occupied for several years.

SYNTHESIS

Conceptually, a Parliament House is a building requiring a multiplicity of spaces for people to meet - the public meeting the public, the public meeting MPs or staff, MPs or staff meeting other MPs or staff, and then MPs taking decisions. Such spaces would be considered by an analogy with a honeycomb. The value of planning the site as a sequence of spaces, primarily, rather than of building forms, enables it to be considered in terms of human comfort. It must be assumed that part of the enjoyment of people meeting people would be that such meetings might take place out of doors: and yet the site is strongly afflicted by wind. People interaction and Parliament functions would be the better for the curtailment and control of the wind: once again implying enclosure of space.

The two extremes of possible design approach were either that the site required a contextual and organic response grafted upon and around the existing structures; or that the parliament required a monument on a cleared site. The Burra Charter² requires designers of buildings in historic locations

¹ *Extracted from the drawings and presentations at the exhibition mentioned in previous note.*

² *Peter Marquis-Kyle and Meredith Walker **The Illustrated Burra Charter** (Brisbane, 1994), p.12*

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to understand and build upon the cultural significance of the site. That was not going to be easy, since the speed at which the politicians drove the process forced the competitors to produce their designs before any deep knowledge could be gained of what archaeologists might find on the site. It was, and is still, highly possible that there could be as much as a storey height or more of ancient building at the Canongate edge of the site available to contribute to the character of the new building. Indeed, the original precinct boundary of the Abbey of Holyrood may have extended right up into the current site, further west than people believed¹, and that, as a result, some significant discoveries might yet be made. When comparable construction was being carried out in Treviso, the architect Tony Follino incorporated finds made on site - pavements, walls, fragments of ancient building - into his new designs. It is not an approach that commends itself to modern monumentalists and their monumentally inclined clients.

All of the short-listed designs proposed substantial demolition (Miralles the least) implying that they could see no design value emanating from any part of the structures on site with the exception of Queensberry House (over which they had no choice).

The brief was also wilfully unspecific as to site boundaries and the surrounding conditions. For example, how would traffic - visitor traffic, delivery traffic, mail traffic etc - arrive at and depart from the site? Would it be required that Holyrood Road, Horse Wynd, or the Canongate should remain open to traffic, or could be closed? Could any of them perhaps be sunk and roofed over? Did the promoters have any view about linkages west from the site, or would they prefer to see the site bounded and impermeable? Where, by preference, would the promoters wish people most to congregate? How would they prefer most people to arrive - by bus, or on foot, by rail, or by vehicle? The way the site is currently being developed in the Canongate, there is uncertainty on this matter. Whereas it would be tempting to presuppose that the principal pedestrian entrance would be from the Canongate, the new buildings facing Holyrood Road are being provided with major entrances facing Holyrood Road, their backsides facing the Canongate. Lastly, to what extent could the competitors level the site, or were they required to work with its existing slopes and constraints?

The brief appeared to offer no guidance. It is as though the hesitant promoters trusted the competitors to resolve these issues. Inevitably, that meant that the judges might have to decide between widely differing proposals; for example,

¹ *Information from Dr Pat Dennison.*

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between those who accepted the site boundaries and those who did not - as proved to be the case, not least in the winning design by Miralles. You might have thought that the dangers of such confusion might have been well learnt from the failure of the National Trust for Scotland's 1990 abortive competition for a restaurant in Inverewe Gardens.

The lack of vision for the ceremonial setting for the Parliament is extraordinary. It is a parliamentary proposal with its epaulettes ripped off. It is a sign of our diluted times that the brief could not even contemplate the closure of a modern and intrusive rat-run - Horse Wynd - for the process of constructing a new seat of Scottish power. One can sense the amazed if ghostly guffaws of the great patrons of the past - the Prince Bishops of Wurzburg, Richelieu, the Renaissance popes, the Medicis or Frederick of Prussia, never mind the embarrassed squirming of the giants of neo-classical Edinburgh. James V and Sir James Hamilton of Finnart achieved more in the re-orientation of Linlithgow Palace in 1535.

THE DESIGNS

The time of the competition was limited, and the competitors focused upon the big moves - the broadest of land use in placing the key functions of debating chambers, committee rooms, MSP rooms, administration and car parking. Each scheme sought to identify the characteristics of the site, and match them to the likely characteristics of the building.

Michael Wilford & Partners

Michael Wilford & Partners perceived the site as 'nestling between' Arthur's Seat and Calton Hill, as though it were being squeezed by the hills on either side until a pip squeaked, and produced a drawing to emphasise not only that relationship but how it implied a monumental result¹. They discovered a 'tradition of towers' among the natural forms of Old Edinburgh (which they viewed as a continuous street with common characteristics) with four urban forms - the free-standing pavilion, the hôtel, courtyards, and streets and squares; and combined interpretations of several of them into their design. With the focus, therefore, on forecourt, courtyard, wall and pavilion, they considered that their design was 'rooted in the bedrock of Scotland'. What they wished to bring to the proposal was what they called 'the clarity and function of modernity' in a building that would be 'inspirational and beautiful',

¹ *Extracted from the drawings and presentations at the RFACS Festival Exhibition, 1998.*

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and emphasised that they wished to create a journey, continuing that tradition of towers, down to create a ceremonial entrance. Beneath the rhetoric, that implied 'no frilly bits' but a strong symbolic form.

They characterised that form as a 'castle without the walls. Open to the people for the people'. The big move was to create a new platform east of Queensberry House thus creating several storeys below at the downhill end within which the Debating Chamber was embedded. Its glazed rotunda or glass lantern would glow when Parliament was in session: 'representing transparent democracy'. Queensberry House remained private to Members of Parliament, and its gardens would be recreated for a Members' promenade. Further administrative accommodation lay uphill of Queensberry House, in a Z-plan linear building. The Wilford design more imposed upon the site than grew from it. The uphill administrative block jostled the geometry of Queensberry House uneasily: and no existing building, edge, contour nor boundary appeared to play a significant part. Little in the detailed design of the building - insofar as it could be gauged - appeared to arise from, or abstract from, the Scottish tradition, and the slender stone-clad tower adjacent to the lantern would have been token gesture to a misunderstood sense of place.

Rafael Vinoly/Reiach & Hall

This design was based upon typologies which the designers interpreted from the Old Town - the 'street wall', the 'building as infill', and the 'building as object'. They regarded the Old Town of Edinburgh as a linear route with two icons - the Castle at the top and Holyrood Palace at the bottom - and sought to add a third. They enjoyed the analogy of the Old Town of Edinburgh as the spine of a fish, its closes as ribs running off it, and emphasised the characteristic of hills and valleys. Their reinterpretation of Edinburgh's tall, vertical stone street walls emerged as a four-storeyed, horizontally proportioned building enclosing the south and the east of the site: the covered plaza (as in old Parliament Hall itself) in the circulation areas, and the 'building as object' like Holyrood House reflected in the Parliament House at the apex.

The entry proposed transparency. 'We have the notion of using the roof as a garden, giving views down the valley and up the Royal Mile.' Comparable to the Wilford scheme, the public access in the Vinoly design would have been down the Canongate and then on to a rising platform. Using the axis of Queensberry House and its garden, they levelled out and excavated the ground to provide, at the eastern end, a building with a public terrace/viewing gallery on the top, surrounding the glazed Debating Chamber which rose

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approximately two storeys higher. The plan was approximately like a basilica - a large, walled rectangle of building, open only for the garden, which culminated in the circular debating chamber and its curving enveloping structures. The circular form not only led to urban erosion (i.e. the cutting back of the street edge) at Girth Cross and Horse Wynd, and the lessening or urban tension on all sides, but the building nonetheless would have appeared monumental by its sheer height and scale.

Their proposed use of Queensberry House was uncertain: the House did not appear in the model - although there was an indication of a glazed loggia running in front of it - and in the photo montage it was not shown as restored. Given the scale of the buildings surrounding it, Queensberry House garden would have appeared shrunken and sunken, and its view to Arthur's Seat sorely circumscribed by a continuous wall of offices at the bottom. This design fell foul of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland which described it as 'the intrusion of an alien form into the grain of the Royal Mile'¹.

Richard Meier & Partners/Keppie Design

The approach to the Meier design was that the 'building must command respect through its physical form'. The designers highlighted the goals of open Government, which they considered implied some form of physical transparency; permanence and timelessness, which they exemplified by illustrating their library in Ulm; and a refusal to mimic context but rather to respect it, exemplified in their museum in Frankfurt. Their aspirations were for a building in which the spaces were filled by natural light, naturally ventilated, designed to a human scale but with adequate grandeur, and which was welcoming. Without explaining the rationale, Richard Meier stated that 'it is important that the building does not cover the whole site'² - an inconvenient consequence of which, however, was that the building, as proposed, provided insufficient accommodation.

Meier's entry-studies unaccompanied by detailed plans (which was the level of response the process deserved) consisted of three big moves: a car park beneath the gardens of Queensberry House (with some offices on either side); a tall triangular building fossilising the linearity of two inherited closes, immediately to its east, to house the majority of offices needed for MSPs and

¹ RFACS, *The Scottish Parliament Architectural Competition* booklet (Edinburgh, 1998).

² Extracted from the drawings and presentations at the RFACS Festival Exhibition, 1998..

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their staff; and a large open plaza facing Holyrood House, focused upon the large, circular Debating Chamber. The last would be the icon, with battered walls echoing the broch, which Meier considered to be 'the only exclusively Scottish building type'. Despite its monumentality, there was a clarity about this design, and an attractiveness in its pure form. However, either the designers rejected the notion of any outdoors activity out of hand, or they failed to understand the micro-climate of the site.

There might have been something reminiscent of Chandigarh - Corbusier's Parliament building in India - in this design: but even less promise of a popular site and thronging usage. Moreover, there was such a resemblance to other Meier schemes as to question the extent to which the design emerged from the site, or was one masterfully imposed upon it; and that the locational inspiration was *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

Glass Murray/Denton Corker Marshall

This entry, based on a good spatial analysis of the High Street, and of the Canongate, correctly identifying their differing spaces, legibility and accessibility, embraced both the Canongate and the Girth Cross, and the open land to the south. Queensberry House was to be flanked on each side by tall, thin 'closes' of new buildings, the house itself restored, and given status as Members' rooms with a Members' private garden.

Downhill, along Horse Wynd, there was to be another tall, stone linear close. Between the two lay the enclosed Parliament Hall, and the ovoid, tilted Debating Chamber rising in its south west corner. The key to the design was less the buildings, but the spaces - inside and outside. Paving across Canongate to the Water Gate, they created 'Parliament Place' as the primary public entry into the Parliament Hall. You would have entered between two linear blocks of stonewalled ramps and offices, through a proposed 30-metre tall glass porch. This great space - the public ante-chamber to the Debating Chamber - was thus entirely transparent north and south. Walking through, you would have exited through another glazed wall into a paved exterior (no Holyrood Road) straight on to what they called Parliament Field which extended right out into Holyrood Park. The Debating Chamber therefore acted as a marker where the greenery of Holyrood Park ended, and paved urbanism began.

Conceptually, the notion of long linear closes defining the spaces was excellent. The Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland was concerned at what they saw as unrelieved masonry enlivened only by glazed/perforated metal screens, and considered that it would be overwhelming. The architectural realisation of the design was likely to have been overscaled and

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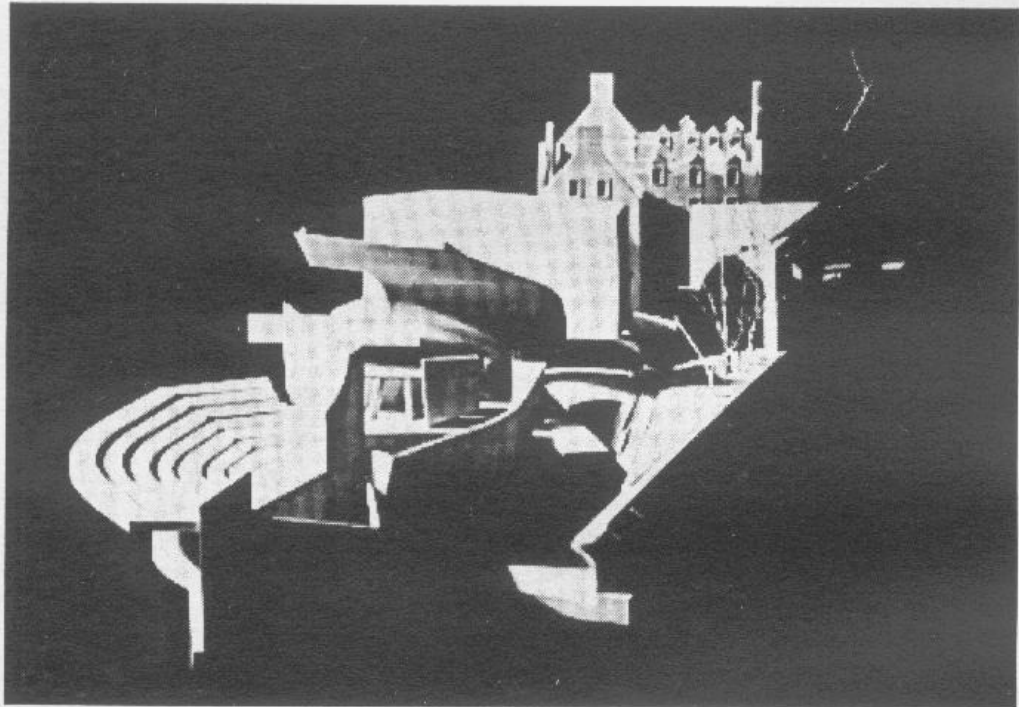
unnecessarily monumental. Yet of all the entries, this design would have added nobility to the character of the Girth Cross part of the Canongate, and provided a wholly new experience in standing within the Hall, looking south out over Parliament Field to Arthur's Seat.

Model of Miralles's scheme, from the north east (so that Holyrood Palace is on the left). Reproduced with the permission of the Scottish Office.



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Model of Miralles's scheme, with view of Debating Chamber, from east (so that Queensberry House is straight ahead). Reproduced with the permission of the Scottish Office.



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Winning design: Miralles-Tagliabue/RMJM

The judges selected the scheme with the least finite information by way of drawings and plans, and by far the most by way of inspiration and influences. Miralles's analysis of the site and its history was the deepest and the most sensitive, exemplified in the intention to retain more of the older existing buildings than the others - including 99 Holyrood Road, the Lodge, and 58-62 Canongate. Possibly inspired by Holyrood Abbey, they conceived the image of a campus or a monastery rather than the primary seat of power in Scotland. That necessarily implied a design approach that favoured an accumulation of enclosing structures rather than a single monument. They had, as it were, intuited the desire for something suburban and decided to lend it some spirituality. Miralles considered that the Parliament should be a strong and clear statement. 'It is a moral place.' The design stretched across Holyrood Road ending in a series of south-east facing grass steps, carved out of Holyrood Park in the form of a natural amphitheatre which could act as a Speakers Green. By this method, the designers intended to provide the participation and transparency desired by the brief.

Seeking 'a construction that is not monumental in the classical sense', they intended that each building would develop its own iconography but that the overall campus would be unified by movement patterns throughout. Queensberry House would have the Parliament's Library, and Parliament Manager, and its gardens were to become something of a protected cloister for Members. Since only small-scale construction should exist around the Girth Cross, the buildings facing the Canongate would house the Clerk. Offices for Members and Ministers would flank Queensberry House uphill, with a non-orthogonal expression justified by 'buildings have to have the form most convenient to their use'.

The two principal icons are the Debating Chamber and its lesser sibling containing two Committee Rooms, with views north to the Burns Monument and south to Arthur's Seat. Walls would be of stone, and the roof of laminated timber. The necessary speed of construction would require some prefabrication, and so laminated beams were selected for the floating roofs, and the resulting 'boat' forms is the natural result. Since there was water at the bottom of the site, and it requires to be pumped if it cannot be used, Miralles proposed to return Horse Wynd to its original condition - namely water.

ANALYSIS

Given the very short timescale, these entries demonstrate that the basic building blocks of Debating Chamber, Members' Room etc were not in themselves difficult. Rather, the issues were the symbolism and significance of the site; the public gathering spaces; access and axis; viewing; and the extent to which the designs embraced the possibilities of the site. Of these, the gathering space or spaces were probably the most significant, since the attitude to gathering spaces and shelter almost certainly also included the attitude towards views, vistas and location. The Wilford and Vinoly schemes, by taking the public access up onto higher raised platforms, and eradicating the contours, achieved elevation for view, and little else - and the views would have been undifferentiated and unfocussed. The scheme by Richard Meier would indeed have been a monument: but without substantial additional treatment, the proposed open space to the east would have remained windswept and largely unused, comparable to, for example, the spaces around the rebuilt City Hall in Arnhem.

The two schemes that paid most attention to contours and views were those of Miralles and Denton Corker Marshall. Both of these schemes submerged Holyrood Road and extended the Parliament activity out into Holyrood Park. Miralles was just that much more subtle, building in contours to create a grass amphitheatre, and emphasising the lowness at the east end of the site by returning it to its original watery condition. Both, however, provided an impressive gathering space when coming from the Girth Cross in the Canongate. Where they differed was Miralles' treatment of the Parliament as a non-monumental scatter of separate buildings (partial monumentality signified in the roof design of the two principal spaces), linked by circulation patterns and a series of informal outdoor rooms. Denton Corker & Marshall's heroic monument, by contrast, comprised a glazed indoor room incubating an ovoid Debating Chamber lurching out towards Queens Park, framed by long, close-like horizontal blocks, and symbolised by its overscaled 30-metre-tall glass screen.

Why did Miralles win? By comparison with all the other entries, Miralles offered a design approach and ideas rather than a finite design. Although Richard Meier hinted that his scheme was only embryonic, it had already taken the shape of recognisably Meier pure form. Save Miralles's, the other entries were likewise formalised, giving rise to concern that once the selection had been made and that dialogue with the clients was ready to begin, the designers would be coming with *idées fixes* about form and site relationship: and the extent of design development would thereby be limited. That was always said to be one of the problems with architectural

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competitions. By offering only a set of principles and ideas, Miralles, by contrast, invited the jury - and the client - to share a risk with him in developing those ideas in the most appropriate way.

A more significant question would be: why was this selection of designers made given that the Miralles design was so distinct from his competitors? One must presume that the initial selection was made upon the design approach of the selected teams. So why were such dissimilar designers chosen: five monumentalists and one organicist? Being a small capital, Edinburgh was predictably awash with rumours - the most pervasive being that the other selected designs were purely makeweight in the face of an initial jury preference for Miralles. Unfortunately, the lack of transparency, and the lack of paperwork or published analysis of the reasons for the choice, provide endless opportunity for such speculation. It is an inevitable result of an unsatisfactory selection process.

The Miralles presentation certainly displayed the deepest engagement with the site and its falling contours, and greatest sensitivity to the nature of the Girth Cross and the Canongate. It retained the largest number of the existing buildings (although probably not as many as could have been reused - even if only as parts of walls and chunks of masonry). The attitude that monumentality was required only where necessary (i.e. the Debating Chamber and the principal Committee Rooms) emphasised, in contrast, the fact that the Parliament complex as a whole should not be monumental, and thereby appear less formidable to visitors.

Insofar, therefore, as it is fair to judge from such speedily completed designs in such a hastily-organised competitive selection, the scheme designed by Miralles-Tagliabue with RMJM of Edinburgh showed the greatest potential to adapt to the site and to client demand, whilst empathising not only with what was there, but with the potential of what was to come.

Ironically, as the winning design has developed, this essentially non-monumental scheme has become more monumental (although no more comprehensible nor better justified in exhibition). The east facade appears to have developed more of a cliff-edge facing Holyrood. People coming to the Parliament will no longer have the swelling of the Canongate at the Girth Cross as the point of congregation. They will now have to saunter past a neat suburban boundary wall, through a new public space in the shadow of the Parliament building, round in the lee of this new facade to the entrance facing the other way. It appears as though the suburbanites have won. The proposal to waterfill Horse Wynd and to close Holyrood Road - both essential to the

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concept - remain, but it is still unclear whether Edinburgh City Council will have the imagination to implement them.

CONCLUSION

The process of selecting a design for the Scottish Parliament reveals a desire to retain control, and an unwillingness to take risks. The aspirations implicit in the selection of the Canongate as the chosen site should have influenced not only the decision as to the winning architect, but also the selection of all his competitors. Had design approach been given equivalent priority to prior experience and international cachet, all the Scottish architects who were excluded might well have displayed comparable skill and creative imagination.

Lack of imagination is what characterises those who set up the contest. For a building as important as the Scottish Parliament (as distinct from a new council headquarters) there should have been a published urban strategy assessing all the matters of symbolism, access and routes addressed in this paper. Crucial matters of road closure should not have been left to the City Council.

The invisibility of the proposed Parliament from most of the Canongate stretches the benefits of reticence beyond credibility. Perhaps that is intentional, as suiting this electronically voting, sensibly-ordered seat of government. Perhaps, as you proceed towards this imperceptible seat of power down the Canongate on some minor issue like the Union with England, you will gradually be cleansed of angst by the sheer lack of drama and tension in the route. Nothing of the new Parliament will be apparent as you leave Edinburgh and wind past the strongly symbolic Canongate Tolbooth, the Royal High School up on the ridge, and the Canongate Kirk. The view then turns downhill into a distant vista of the towers of Holyrood Palace as the (restored) but bulky magnificence of Queenberry House looms on the right. Proceeding beyond, parts of a new street wall will emerge, followed by a pleasantly suburban boundary wall: all this time your view focused upon Holyrood. Only then will the vista open up to the right and to the new buildings. Notions of the 'theatre of power' have been rendered obsolete by the non-disputatious, all-consensus parliament of the new suburbia.

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