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TWENTY

The Parliament Sits in the Land

Ambrose Gillick and Lee Ivett

Introduction

When, in 2005, the architects Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue's (EMBT) Scottish Parliament Building was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architect's Sterling Prize, it was not a decision which chimed with much popular sentiment. Although an undeniably significant piece of work, designed and constructed to a degree of precision and care seldom seen in contemporary architecture, the building's massive budgetary and time overruns had to a great degree become the main story. The architecture's meaning and possible value as a democratic space were lost in a sea of public hostility towards a government flashing the cash on a project it neither needed nor could afford and an architecture industry out of touch with the public mood.¹ The intricate formal and aesthetic language of the building and its quality of construction were transfigured, changed from virtues to vices, becoming further evidence of the inappropriateness of the *idea*, let alone the reality of the building itself. Consequently, appreciation of the building as *architecture* has in some respects remained the preserve of an 'enlightened' minority and its valuable addition to the discourse on public, civic space in twenty-first-century urban and architectural design has too readily been missed. This is not to disregard issues relating to the discontent of the tax-paying public as insignificant – it is certainly legitimate to suggest that a building costing over 1,000 per cent of its original budget was poorly managed in its conception

and execution – but that painting EMBT’s work in Edinburgh as entirely bad because of its price is needlessly blinkered after the event. Instead, in this essay, we’ll explore the idea that the nature of the architecture realised for the nascent Scottish Government is (or was) seen to be so intrinsically valuable to the project of forging a new Scottish identity and the manufacturing of a renewed nation that issues as mundane as astronomical costs were not important enough to hold the client, the architect or the building back.

The Scottish Parliament Building is without question one of the great architectural pieces of the twenty-first century, a totalising vision that celebrates the fragmentary qualities of postmodern culture within the context of a globalising, enlightened story of renewed democracy, of symbiosis between public and state values, and reciprocity between nations. Its form and aesthetic can be read as an embodiment of the new Scottish Government’s idea of what might be understood as a sort-of progressive memorialisation, whereby the past is reconstructed better to support a renewed, emerging national identity.

History

EMBT’s design for the Scottish Parliament Building grew out of a competition held by the Scottish Parliament in May 1998, launched by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Donald Dewar. Dewar had been instrumental in bringing about the establishment of the devolved parliament, having campaigned for Scottish devolution for decades prior to the successful 1997 referendum. He would go on to become Scotland’s inaugural First Minister in 1999. The competition shortlist was put to a public vote, with a design by Rafael Viñoly Architects chosen by the public, but Dewar overrode this, selecting instead EMBT’s proposal. As with the site, the designers’ work can be read as a significant embodiment of Dewar’s desire for a Scottish icon. Whereas Viñoly’s proposal embodies a sort-of classical language of spatial dominance, a circular glazed debating chamber suspended above a public precinct overlooking the Queen’s Gallery and the Palace, wrapped in a big imposing wall, EMBT’s proposal, as well as being significantly more speculative and vague in its presentation, is consciously subservient to the

natural and historical hierarchy of the site. And whilst the logic of Viñoly's proposal is legible within a continuum of big civic architecture, EMBT's represents a definitive break, a new way of doing democratic space. The implication of this is that Dewar saw the building as a mechanism to promote the meaning of the new Scottish state to a public but also to signal a vision of progressive governance to the world.

Site

The full history of the development of the construction of a suitable environment for a new Scottish Parliament has been the subject of much debate and conflict. Central to it, however, was a decision taken by Donald Dewar as leader of the first Scottish government, to reject the presumed and accepted repurposing of the Royal High School on Calton Hill on the grounds that it was too small (it has about 2,500 m² of floorspace compared to 18,000 m² in the Scottish Parliament Building today) and had become a 'nationalist shibboleth' having been the site of a proposed Scottish Assembly following the 1979 devolution referendum. Dewar opposed nationalism and chose instead a site at Holyrood, thereby subverting a political heritage he didn't like. The classical language of the High School, with its implications of imperial power and hierarchy, had little relevance to Dewar's visions for Scotland as a nation and the Holyrood site was cheap, the brewery company who occupied it offering it at a discount. But it was also a more sophisticated site, permitting a measure of complexity and nuance in the design in both urbanistic and architectural ways. Simply, the new Scottish Parliament could use the clearer site at Holyrood to rewrite an old story.

As such, the essential character of the Scottish Parliament Building was established by the selection of a site which faced the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the historic seat of the Stuarts, to the easternmost end of Edinburgh's Royal Mile. The effect of this was to imply a narrative of continuity between the past and the present, itself embodying ideas of resistance and resilience, ennobling once more the old Palace by placing beside it a building of significance (rather than a brewery). EMBT's proposed leaf-like plan can be read

within this idea too, green shoots sprouting after a long winter. The palace's associations with English imperialism support this idea, both articulating the triumph of Scottish resistance and, as per Dewar's anti-nationalist tendency, articulating a relationship between Scotland and the wider UK. However, alongside ideas of native rejuvenation, the impact of occupying this site has latterly affected the development of a governmental district, with the new Edinburgh City Council offices opening nearby along the Royal Mile in 2006. As such, the meandering plan and diffuse, anti-classical façades of the Scottish Parliament Building belie the reality that power is being coalesced in the city at this point. This is more likely due to the *fact* of the building, rather than its design but, even so, the design, as EMBT stressed in their competition submission, is tied to its geographical location as interpreted through socio-historical ideas demarcated by institutional actors. By adopting *this* aesthetic of Scottish heritage and culture, the building is inherently a manifestation of power: the newness of the building, in contrast to the option of repurposing an old one, is the only way such a story could be effectively described, free from counter-narratives which might obscure an agenda developed around ideas of openness and accessibility, enabling the building to both connect people with power and even, perhaps, articulate the mutuality and symbiosis of the two.

This being said, the site also situates the new parliament within a geography of tourism, thereby explicitly and intentionally broadening the definition of ownership beyond a narrow, regional democratic vision. As visitor attraction, the building resists the possibility that it becomes a space only for those who are local or who have a stake in its function. The Scottish Parliament Building's ornamental design can thus be read as submissive acceptance of the all-powerful leisure culture from which the city gains so much of its reputation and wealth. At the time of the building's commission, the Bilbao Effect, whereby a large, extravagant building was commissioned for a derelict part of a city as a mechanism for attracting people and investment to post-industrial wastelands, was pursued relentlessly by municipal authorities the world over (Kengo Kuma's V&A Dundee is the latest iteration of this old idea). The area of Edinburgh to the west of the Palace had been identified in the late

1980s as an area in need of renewal. Dynamic Earth by Michael Hopkins & Partners, built to the south of the Palace in 2000, was part of this renewal push and, in its design (a suspended white tent sitting behind an amphitheatre, explicitly contrasting with the heavy, dark, native buildings) foregrounded the formalism that was to overtake civic architecture in the following years. The natural assets of Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat lie to the south and the Royal Mile escalates westwards into a hyper-abundance of touristic thrills.

Nevertheless, the relationship between tourism and power embodied in the building is not entirely uncomfortable or unwelcome for the government as an institution: the quick, snap-happy touristic gaze performs a substitution for actual scrutiny. For the cultural and social critic examining meaning in the built environment, the effect of inviting so much attention onto the metaphorical and abstract connotations of the aesthetics of the architectural object, as we see at the Scottish Parliament Building, is to distract analysis from where the critique should actually be applied. This is key here: the Scottish Parliament Building doesn't really change the manner in which democracy is conducted, it just changes its appearance and performative nature; the architecture serves to theatrically frame the same old story. The stated ambition to facilitate a less adversarial form of politics (has there ever really been a government building designed with the intention of enhancing conflict?), manifest through the application of a voting system designed to make coalition government more likely, enhanced by a building plan which promotes thoughtful walking and talking, is now reduced to tour guides corralling tourists about, telling them about the boat-roof and how Rennie Mackintosh's flowers were important design principles. In response, we're minded to ask: Is this really enough?

Building

To a significant degree, the Scottish Parliament Building defies a cohesive description. At once a sinuous whole, the building also appears to be composed of three separate sections – foyer, debating hall and offices – wrapping around Queensbury House on

Canongate, a seventeenth-century townhouse, later repurposed as a barracks, to the north side. An external space, something like a public square running along the east side, fanning out into a landscaped park, models an amphitheatre without ever actually being one. Approached from along the Royal Mile, Queensbury House obscures any sense of the drama or significance to come until, as the street turns, a highly articulated façade of lateral curved concrete vaults supported by embedded buttressing grimaces onto the street, topped off by misshapen panelling in dark grey. Overhangs and cutbacks abound, the entrance at the northern corner framed between two sections of the composition, a nominally open square now baffled by bollards and intricate fencing. Turning the corner to face the south, one is confronted by the spectacular Salisbury Crags and the idea of the low, fissured building nestled in or emerging from the landscape becomes apparent. The building's façade here is broken up, forming a sort-of colonnade to the public space, initiating public engagement. The office section of the building, a slab block five storeys high that forms the boundary to the west of the site, is a fruit salad of stuff, leaf-cum-tessellated shapes forming sort-of oriel windows that protrude to various degree across the elevation, here and there obscured by bent wood poles, shiny silver panelling giving way to lustreless grey. In short, something new is happening, a hodgepodge of ideas and moments that, strangely, holds together. Everything is designed, clearly – the interior is a symphony of superb instances, refined and finished to near perfection – and there are no moments in the original building where the architects have dropped their guard. As such, everything has intention and meaning, a superabundance of gestures and ideas – the plan is leaves, twigs, river flows, strata; the roof is boat hulls, cathedrals, water, wings; the materials are nature, Scotland, time, runes. The whole thing is as many things as you care to put to it – it is democracy, an invitation, a question and hope, yesterday, tomorrow, here and there – and as such, it serves to visualise and spatialise belonging and ownership.

The Scottish Parliament Building's guiding logic was, according to the architects, initially based around the idea of the monastic cloister, a walkway connecting a series of functions that are given coherence and meaning by the walkway itself. In this way, the frag-

mentation of the plan is a device to promote that image of slow-stepped, murmuring thoughtfulness common to the caricatured monk. Perhaps here, at the Scottish Parliament Building, EMBT hoped to engender a sense of communality and common purpose, the sinuous routes permitting a gentler discourse between political adversaries. Likewise, the debating chamber eschews the oppositional dynamic of the face-to-face debating chamber at Westminster, in favour of a more modern semi-circle style, thereby promoting not confrontation but mutuality. Of course, the possibility that sitting beside your foe might actually incapacitate vigorous debate (who argues side-by-side? Is it even possible?) isn't considered. Committee rooms and offices are as they might be expected to be, but with fewer parallel walls, and the MSP's personal rooms are each provided with an inglenook in which to sit and ponder the weighty responsibility of making laws and guiding a nation.

In many ways the idealism and ambition of the design has ended up getting into a fight with pragmatism and none ends up the victor. As stated earlier, whilst EMBT's work performs a kind of radicalism in its architectonics and visual language, it does not, in the end, actively seek to destabilise or reform the way democracy is done. The building's fragmented plan, spatial complexity and artistic flourishes disguise democratic business-as-usual: a debating chamber (with public gallery) is surrounded by a corridor off which radiate committee rooms, leisure spaces (for members) and a large concourse. The Four Towers are occupied by parliamentary business and a long block to the south west of the site, is filled with MSP's offices. The new democracy is, fundamentally, organised around the principles of older ones and the opportunities that there were, to begin to explore how the public might come and participate, are not really proposed. Of course, three years after the commission for the Scottish Parliament Building was set, the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq radically changed everything for architecture. How the public were allowed to behave and move through the urban realm shifted as the relationship between the governed and the governors was rapidly reinterpreted through a prism of mutual distrust and potential epic violence. In light of this, the design of the Scottish Parliament Building gained heft, walls thickened, security measures interrupted organic spatial

flows and the movement of people was mediated by an architectural infrastructure designed to ensure security. The Lee Boyd-designed check-in-style External Security Facility, added to the original building in 2013, is just the latest example of this. Nevertheless, even without this build-up of carceral objects, the building replaces a physical spatialisation of public engagement with a visual language of public interpretation – the building recedes from the world of action, the Arendtian ‘space of appearance’, into the world of the mind. And, as if to emphasise this cerebral engagement, interpretation is mediated, either by informed tour guides in the building or, like this piece, by suitably qualified people proposing suitable assessments using an accepted language. And perhaps this is right – even the public space to the east of the building is, in truth, no assembly space at all – but is instead a linear, interrupted and overseen strip that diffuses into splintered landscape *by design*.

Conclusion

Our discussion here does not seek to question the significance or quality of the Scottish Parliament Building as architecture, but rather to question its value as an expression of a progressive vision of Scottish governance. This was clearly its intention: despite its florid appearance, the building is a characteristic example of late-twentieth-century public architecture, foregrounding ideas of civility, unity and transparency through the use of spatial and formal devices which either explicitly or through metaphor propose an enlightened and progressive political vision which attempts to link Scottish national identities to mainland Europe, in so doing, consolidating Edinburgh’s professed identity as the capital of a fundamentally European (and not *just* British) country. As such, the playful and complex postmodern tone and aesthetic of the Scottish Parliament Building cloaks an inherently modernist idea – that buildings themselves can and should be actors in the contemporary political and urban discourse, and that their commission, production and use indicate desirable praxis. The *building* is a pedagogue, capable of leading the narrative. As such, the explicit and somewhat clumsy superficial aesthetics and formal devices used to evidence the rhetoric of political transparency disguise a more

subtle agenda which insinuates the Scottish Parliament into a story of pan-European identity and values, one which is based around a sort-of nationalised globalism, whereby national identity is treated as something that can be gathered together and pitched into the international cultural market place by institutional actors. In this way, the architecture's use of nature and the corralling of a sort-of Scottish-Celtic mythos can be read as a mechanism for delineating and therefore 'owning' Scotland, as a place and as an identity. In this way, the building itself can be read as a tool which grants the right to a political institution to define Scotland: Parliament takes control of the identity of Scotland as it might the rail network or public utilities, the better both to control it and to sell it to a global audience too.

This idea of a nationalised globalism extends from Kenneth Frampton's fairly well-established ideas of critical regionalism, by which the austere and universalising International Style of the high priests of modernist architecture, such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier was nuanced by reference to local beliefs and practices, with an emphasis on 'meaningful' materials and arbitrarily selected, eclectic references to indigenous forms. The site, superficially a key aspect of this late modern style, is considered principally in relation to its climatic aspect, particularly the passage of the sun through the sky, but this remains fundamentally subservient to the formal aesthetic. The architecture of nationalised globalism extends this, using postmodern and critical regionalist principles to promote the internationalist credentials of the nation. Local knowledge, values and stories are instrumentalised towards situating Scotland (in this case) within a global marketplace of ideas. In a strange way, the architects thus insulates themselves from criticism, a position perhaps relating to the delicate position EMBT found themselves in – Catalan architects designing for a born-again Scotland finding its way in the world, with all the layering of internationalist and separatist discourses this implied. There is a subtlety here, perhaps.

Unsurprisingly, and in common with many people of our profession, we suggest that a focus on cost during and after the buildings completion caused other important ideas to be missed which might help articulate a new language for secular civic space in the decades to come. A great deal of time is spent by architects debating

the way good civic space can be made; with the Scottish Parliament Building we are presented with an example of how it might be done, not perhaps in the nature of its formal and spatial organisation, but as an embodiment of a relationship between the governed and the governing that derives its logic from a tacit acceptance by the electorate that only institutional power of the scale of a regional parliament could have the leverage and agency to gather national characteristics into a cohesive, defined character and national identity. EMBT's building, then, specifically selected above the heads of the public by the Scottish government, is an embodiment of this idea: that Scotland's identity was plural and hybrid, perhaps even fragmented, but the institution of a parliament operated as an opportunity to begin to coalesce these identities into a coherent whole. The hybrid architecture, a mess of ideas and themes, volumes and details, is thus not only an example of late-postmodern design characteristic of EMBT's output but is the subtle articulation through architecture of another way of governing in the twenty-first century, one based around coordinating plural identities and narratives towards common civic goals in a globalised public square.

And it is this vision of a globally situating architecture, we suggest, that constitutes the most significant critique of EMBT's work for the Scottish Parliament. The fact that the client and architects' bold vision of cooperation and participation for the Scottish Parliament Building, has not been realised in the democratic processes would barely surprise even without the impact of subsequent terrorism. Nor do the attempts by institutional power to administer memory and meaning and instrumentalise them for political goals come as a surprise. Instead, and unfortunately, the building's greatest legacy, we suggest, has been in the reaffirmation of perceptions of architecture in Scotland as either lifestyle or spectacle, its services and outputs accessible only to the ordinary citizen through invitation or when actively pursuing leisure. In addition, the effect of the Scottish Parliament's choice of an international 'starchitect' to produce Scotland's figurehead building (supported by a local practice), a decision closely linked to the idea of a nationalised globalism, has clearly significantly affected wider perceptions of architectural culture and its role within common life in Scotland. That model – foreign architect with local partner – has become

a common occurrence when architects have subsequently been sought to deliver nationally significant buildings in Scotland, institutional bodies apparently unable to resist the idea that an international genius is required to gather, interpret and represent local culture, function, histories and amenity: Zaha Hadid's Riverside Museum, Steven Holl's Reid Building, Schmidt Hammer Lassens' University of Aberdeen Library and, most recently, Kengo Kuma's V&A Dundee, have all followed this model. This is to the detriment of Scottish design culture and, ironically, global visibility.

Note

1. The original cost of £40 million for a 23,000 m² building had a proposed square-metre price of £1,739. At completion, the building had a per-metre-square cost of £13,800 (30,000 m² at a total cost of £414 million).

TWENTY-ONE

Devolution: An Assessment

Jim Gallagher

‘Scottish solutions for Scottish problems’ was one of Donald Dewar’s characteristically downbeat arguments for devolution before 1999. Twenty years later, it is fair to ask what sort of Scottish solutions have appeared, and which of Scotland’s problems they have solved. This chapter will argue radical, distinctive Scottish solutions have been few: with some exceptions, change in Scotland has largely mirrored change elsewhere in the UK.

Three models, and two periods, of policymaking

Public policymaking is an art, not a science, but there are, broadly, three possible descriptions of how it is done. The first might be called politics and administration: public policy is the implementation of political promises made to the electorate. The 1997 Blair government’s ‘pledge card’ with its very specific promises followed through in government is an example. The second might be described as technocratic, rational policymaking: evidence is assembled of problems, solutions are devised and adopted, and implementation carried through. A third way of looking at public policy is one of negotiated adjustment and compromise between different interests, mediated through the political and administrative process, to reach outcomes acceptable to those affected. In the real world, of course, governments mix all three at different times. In post-devolution Scotland, consultation and negotiation have been a constant.