

**DESIGNING NATIONAL IDENTITY:
RECENT CAPITOLS IN THE POST-COLONIAL WORLD**

by

Lawrence J. Vale

Bachelor of Arts
Amherst College
Amherst, Massachusetts
1981

Doctor of Philosophy
University of Oxford
Oxford, England
1985

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Signature of
Author _____

Lawrence J. Vale
Department of Architecture
May 10, 1988

Certified by _____

Julian Beinart
Professor of Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by _____

Julian Beinart
Chairman, Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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Designing National Identity: Recent Capitols in the Post-Colonial World

by
Lawrence J. Vale

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ABSTRACT

While all buildings are a product of social and cultural conditions, the architecture of national capitols raises especially complicated questions about power and identity. The architecture of a national capitol, as the seat of government within a national capital, is often a continuation of politics by other means.

Part One provides an overview of the "capital city" as a concept, drawing a distinction between "evolved" capitols and "designed" capitols. It investigates the social and geopolitical reasons that underlie the choice of location of several designed capitols built during the last two hundred years. In analyzing each city, the focus is on the relationship between the "capitol" and the rest of the capital. This discussion concludes with an analysis of two ongoing projects-- Abuja, Nigeria and Dodoma, Tanzania-- where the design of new capitols is intimately connected to the search for a post-colonial "national identity."

Part Two begins with this concept of "national identity," and stresses that what is put forth by government leaders and their architects as "national" most often contains significant biases towards preserving or advancing the hegemony of a politically ascendant group. In cases where an entire new capital is not commissioned, much of these biases can get channeled into the design of a new capitol complex instead. "National Identity," when given architectural representation in a building designed to house a national legislature, is a product of these preferences. Moreover, what is termed "national identity" is also closely tied to both "international" identity and to the personal identities of the architects and sponsoring politicians. These issues are discussed in relation to four recently-completed capitol complexes, in Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Each national assembly building is a monumental edifice for a fledgling institution. Each has been designed to symbolize a highly plural post-colonial state, but reveals both subnational and supranational strains.

Part Three compares and contrasts the spatial and iconographical treatment of cultural pluralism and democratic institutions in each of the four case studies, stressing the limitations of buildings that are either too literal or too abstract. It emphasizes that designers should recognize that these buildings play an ever-changing political role, and that they be conscious of the gap between their clients' (and their own) hegemonic preferences and the more inclusive promises implied by a building that is called a "national" assembly. It stresses that designers be aware of the ways that architectural idealizations may be used not to anticipate some more perfect future order but to mask the severe abuses of power in the present. It concludes with a discussion about how to improve the design of capitols, and offers suggestions for further research.

Thesis Supervisor: Julian Beinart
Title: Professor of Architecture

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PART ONE
CAPITAL AND CAPITOL

CHAPTER ONE

CAPITAL AND CAPITOL: AN INTRODUCTION

While it by now almost commonplace to speak of certain buildings as reflecting a "national identity," it is far from clear what this may mean. Two issues require clarification: what is it that constitutes "national" identity and what role does (or can) architecture play in defining this character? The post-colonial parliament building provides an excellent vehicle for exploring these questions, since it is the one building type where the issue of identity is explicitly present, both for the client government and for the architectural designer.

Dozens of Third World states have gained their independence in the years since the Second World War. Not all of these, however, have had the appropriate combination of political and financial resources necessary to mark this independence with the design and construction of a new capital city or a new parliament building. On one hand, the commission of a new capital city-- or even just a new parliamentary district within or adjacent to an existing capital-- is often simply too costly even to be seriously contemplated. On the other hand, there is the temptation to expropriate and re-use the often opulent edifices of the colonial *ancien regime*. To be sure, in many cases, these two factors have been intimately connected. In some instances, however, the government leaders of newly independent states have spent lavishly on new facilities despite the overall poverty of their country or the availability of transformable colonial structures. The decision to build a new place for government is always a significant one; the decisions about where and how to house it are more telling still.

Designing the place for national government in the post-colonial city involves far more than architecture. Parliament buildings are located not only in relation to other surrounding buildings but also in relation to a city and in relation to the country as a whole. These larger questions of siting are hardly matters left to architects alone. Rather, the location of parliament buildings is a product of many social and cultural forces. To a very great extent, parliament building placement is an exercise in political power, a spatial declaration of political control.

For those post-colonial states which have attempted to plan new parliamentary complexes, the buildings have tended to be located in one of two ways. In some cases (such as Brazil, Pakistan, Belize, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi and the Ivory Coast) the government has sponsored the construction of an entirely new capital city. In other instances (such as Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Kuwait), the new parliamentary complexes have been created within or adjacent to the existing capital.

It is this latter group, in which the construction of a new capital has been distilled to its programmatic and symbolic essence, that constitutes the major focus of this thesis. These complexes, designed to house the means of government and to communicate this government visually to those who are governed, are necessarily infused with symbolism. As architecture and as urban design, these buildings are revealing cultural products. Examination of these parliamentary complexes provides an opportunity to assess certain architectural devices that seem peculiar to the capital city without having to contend with the multitude of social and political factors that necessarily complicate matters if one attempts to grapple with the post-colonial capital city as a whole. With this somewhat more bounded objective in mind, I

seek to define and discuss the relationship between a designed capital city and its symbolic center, the capitol.

What is a Capitol?

"Capitol" is an odd word, even to those living in the fifty-one United States cities that have buildings bearing this name. Often confused with "capital" -- meaning a city housing the administration of state or national government-- capitol-with-an-"o" usually refers to the building housing that government's lawmakers. It is an old word, centuries more ancient than the domed edifices of Boston or Washington. And, as is often the case with words having a long evolution, the early meanings retain a core of relevance.

According to the etymologists of the OED, "capitol" originally connoted "a citadel on a hill". Rome's Capitoline Hill, site of the ancient Temple of Jupiter (within which the Roman Senate sometimes convened), provides us with a clue to both political and topographical origins for the word. Moreover, the notion of "citadel" suggests roots that lurk even deeper in the past. The word "citadel," derived from the Italian *cittadella*--little city, is an imperfect translation of the Greek word *akropolis* --upper city. The ancient citadel, as an architecturally dominant mini-city within a city, combines both these notions. While it is a long way from the Athenian massif to a hillock above the Potomac, one must not easily dismiss the connections.

Though the gap between an ancient citadel and a modern capital city may seem immense, important continuities remain. A capital city, to a greater extent than most other cities, is expected to be a symbolic center. As such, it is not so distant from the primal motivations that inspired the first cities. According to Lewis Mumford, the "first germ of the city... is in the ceremonial

meeting place that serves as a goal for pilgrimage." This city, he continues, is:

a site to which family or clan groups are drawn back, at seasonable intervals, because it concentrates, in addition to any natural advantages it may have, certain 'spiritual' or supernatural powers, powers of higher potency and greater duration, of wider cosmic significance, than the ordinary processes of life. And though the human performances may be occasional and temporary, the structure that supports it, whether a paleolithic grotto or a Mayan ceremonial center with its lofty pyramid, will be endowed with a more lasting cosmic image.¹

Even though the goal of pilgrimage has more often been supplanted by the quest for patronage or the diffuse pleasures of tourism, some cities (many of them capitals) have not fully forsaken their claim to wider significance.

While capital cities have become almost unrecognizably larger and more complex, and autocratic political power has often been transformed to include varying degrees of democratic participation, certain cities retain their symbolic centrality and importance. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "At the political center of any complexly organized society... there is both a governing elite and a set of symbolic forms expressing the fact that it is in truth governing."² While these symbolic forms have surely changed in the intervening millenia, the need to signal the presence of the ruler to the ruled has not diminished. As Geertz continues,

No matter how democratically the members of the elite are chosen (usually not very) or how deeply divided among themselves they may be (usually much more than outsiders imagine), they justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories,

¹ Lewis Mumford, The City in History (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), p. 10.

² Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 125.

ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have either inherited or, in more revolutionary situations, invented. It is these-- crowns and coronations, limousines and conferences-- that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built. The gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship spring from liker impulses than might first appear.¹

While the activity of the center features a variety of rituals, nothing more directly "marks the center as center" or legitimizes a regime that claims to be democratically supported than the architecture and planning of the seat of government-- the capitol.

To the ancient Romans, the Capitol was not only the center of government but also the *caput mundi*, literally the "head" of the world.² This direct connection between the symbolic center of a city and the rest of the universe is, of course, hardly a claim made by Romans alone; cosmic conjunction is explicit in Chinese geomancy and in Indian mandala plans, and is implicit in less well-understood ceremonial centers across six continents.³ Some modern capital cities-- such as Athens, Jerusalem, Cairo and Moscow-- have grown up around ancient centers of power (though, of these four, only the Soviet Union continues to use its Kremlin as the locus of national political control [Fig. 1]). In most other cities which have developed over many centuries any surviving notion of a *caput mundi* functions much less overtly or dramatically. Still, though the urban umbilicals to the heavens have been

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

² Peter Murray, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp. 178-9. One story has it that the Roman capitolium got its name from the word *caput* after workmen digging the foundations for the Temple of Jupiter (consecrated 509 B.C.) found "a skull of immense size which was regarded as prophetic of the future greatness of the city" [Paul Norton, *Latrobe, Jefferson and the National Capitol* (New York: Garland, 1977), p. 264, note 4.].

³ Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 73-7.

weakened or cut in the centuries since capitals first unknowingly vied for cosmic centrality, earthbound articulations of power have remained robust.

The first city, according to Mumford, began with the coming together of shrine and stronghold in a single place.¹ As the centuries passed, this joining of spiritual and temporal power took on the characteristic form of the citadel, a precinct of power and privilege spatially dominant over the larger city.

In the citadel the new mark of the city is obvious: a change of scale, deliberately meant to awe and overpower the beholder. Though the mass of inhabitants might be poorly fed and overworked, no expense was spared to create temples and palaces whose sheer bulk and upward thrust would dominate the rest of the city. The heavy walls of hard-baked clay or solid stone would give to the ephemeral offices of state the assurance of stability and security, of unrelenting power and unshakeable authority. What we now call 'monumental architecture' is first of all the expression of power, and that power exhibits itself in the assemblage of costly building materials and of all the resources of art, as well as in a command of all manner of sacred adjuncts, great lions and bulls and eagles, with whose mighty virtues the head of state identifies his own frailer abilities. The purpose of this art was to produce respectful terror...²

The capitols of today continue to crown many a frail regime, and still tend to delineate the "head" of the city. Whether, in so doing, they induce terror (respectful or otherwise) or merely enhance the cause of irony is another question, one to which I will return. For now, I wish only to suggest that the designers of modern capitols often seek to regain or retain vestiges of the earlier notions of acropolis and citadel.

¹ Mumford, p. 64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

For centuries, it was conceivable for a capitol (in its various nascent forms) to exist almost independently from its surrounding city. In its walled precinct, the capitol appeared spatially separate, a ruler's refuge. As long as it was a sacred center, as well as an administrative and a military one, access was strictly limited to the priests and the privileged. In palaces and courts, temples and shrines, the concept of a "Forbidden City" extended far afield from China. In this view, capitol precedes capital or, as Mumford puts it, "the magnet comes before the container."¹ Magnetized by the presence of a monarch (or a religious institution), the capital container grew around this capitol center, designed for ritual and devoted to ceremony.

What is a Capital?

Capital cities may be categorized in many ways, but no one criterion for identification does justice to the complexity of forces that make cities. It is tempting to posit a clear distinction between cities that are "natural" capitals and those whose status as capital is "artificial". While there is surely some value in seeking criteria to distinguish a capital such as London from one such as Washington, D.C. these labels "natural" and "artificial" do not seem adequate to this task. Some capitals, which may appear "natural" -- such as Rome, Athens or Moscow-- have been redesignated as capitals only in the relatively recent past. Even modern capitals which appear to have a continuous history of administrative and symbolic centrality, are not necessarily a "natural" choice. Though London, for example, has existed since Roman times, and was even the Romans' largest outpost on the island, it was

¹ Mumford, p. 9.

not at that time designated as the capital. Nor did it displace Canterbury as the religious center of Britain for many centuries, if at all. In short, it is difficult to say when and how London became a "capital" city, rather than simply a large and influential one. Perhaps it wasn't truly a capital until it became the symbolic center of a "United Kingdom," a union that has never remained free from dispute.

While there was, of course, no L'Enfant hired to plan the whole of London in a single flourish, neither can the growth of London be attributable to purely "natural" forces. As human creations, all cities are "natural" in one sense, but this human nature is always tempered and directed by the force of reason. Cities are not the result of a biological inevitability; they arise out of choices. As the product of choices, cities are intellectual constructs as well as physical artifacts, and the two are closely related. There are a variety of reasons why cities are founded, and different kinds of reasons have had greater or lesser force in different epochs.

Of the many ways that geographers have tried to distinguish among cities, two distinctions-- closely related to each other-- seem useful at this point. One is between cities which have evolved into capitals and cities which have been expressly designed to serve this function. The evolved/designed distinction, while more accurately descriptive than the natural/artificial schism, fails to do justice to the fact that any decision to designate a city as a capital is an intentional move, an evolutionary break. If some cities appear to have always been capitals, this is true only through our own ignorance of their earlier history. Whether gradual or abrupt in its transformation, the Capital-ization of a city is guided by underlying physical, social, economic or political motives. Nonetheless, there does seem some value in distinguishing between those capitals that have evolved to a point

where they have been designated as capitals and those cities where designation as capital has necessitated an entirely new design, a master plan that is premised upon the city's role as a capital. To posit the importance of this distinction between evolved and designed capitals is not, however, to deny that some capital cities are both evolved and designed, at different stages in their growth. This changing nature of capital cities over time suggests the need for a second kind of measure.

Over the centuries, as cities have grown and forms of government have diversified, the nature of what it means to be a "capital" city has changed. Though we may call them both capitals, ancient Rome and modern Rome, for example, bear little resemblance to one another in terms of their overall form, their size or their political sphere of influence. Even over the course of a relatively short period of time, the role and jurisdiction of a capital may waver. The answer to the question "Capital of what?" or, more precisely perhaps, "Capital of whom?" is rarely fully resolved. While many distinctions could be made in an attempt to discuss the evolution of the capital city as an idea, the most pressing need here is for a distinction between the pre-modern and the modern capital.

In the modern age, by which I mean the two hundred years or so since the birth of the modern nationstate, the capital has taken on important new aspects. To an even greater degree than before, the modern capital is expected to be more than the seat of government. While it is true that all capitals, beginning with the earliest citadel, have had symbolic roles which fortified and magnified the presence of government, nothing is quite comparable to the manifold pressures of modern nationalism. To the avatars of modern nationalism the capital itself is to be the grandest symbol of the cause. Many modern capitals must act as the mediator among a collection of

peoples who, one way or another, have come to be recognized as a single sovereign state. In more distant times, selection of a capital may have been motivated by the presence of a shrine or a defensible fortress; in a modern age, new capitals are most often selected for reasons closely tied to political factions. Like the ancient citadel, constructed to combat enemies both from within and without, the modern capital is often a center of controversy rather than consensus.

The modern capital is more than the seat of government in another way as well. With the rise of parliamentary democracy has come an increase in the number of persons involved with government in all aspects, at every level. Though the notion of a government office building had existed at least since the time of the ancient Romans, the rapid burgeoning of the bureaucracy of government is largely a phenomenon of the last hundred years. While palaces had always been maintained as mini-cities, nearly self-sufficient, the idea of an entire city devoted to the organs of government administration is a modern idea. In earlier eras, when the apparatus of domestic rule depended more explicitly upon a large military presence, an extended civil administration was unnecessary and of only secondary importance. In the present age, where nearly every regime professes to be the bearer of democracy, it has become possible for an entire capital city to be devoted to the purposes of national administration, purposes which include the management of ceremony as well as the performance of more mundane tasks. A modern capital city for a large country is not only a source of pageantry but also the workplace for tens (even hundreds) of thousands of bureaucrats who staff the various executive ministries and departments, serve the needs of legislative representatives, high court justices and resident diplomats, run national libraries, archives and

museums, and toil away at an ever-burgeoning array of lobbying efforts, media coverage and support services. In recent years, in many places, the business of government has burst the bounds of the capitol to fill the capital as well.¹ With this transformation of the scale and structure of government, and often coincident with a resurgence of nationalism, comes the development of the modern capital city. In the most extreme cases, this modern capital is designed as if by a single hand and is intended to be a symbol of government power and "national identity."

Three Kinds of Modern Capital

What follows, then, is an attempt at a brief overview of examples of three different types of modern capital cities, emphasizing two things: the reason or reasons why the capital was founded and the spatial relation between the capitol and the capital. The first two varieties of capital, "Evolved Capitals" and "Evolved Capitals Renewed" are discussed in this chapter, while the third category, "Designed Capitals" is introduced here but becomes the subject of Chapter Two.

1. Evolved Capitals: London, Paris and Vienna

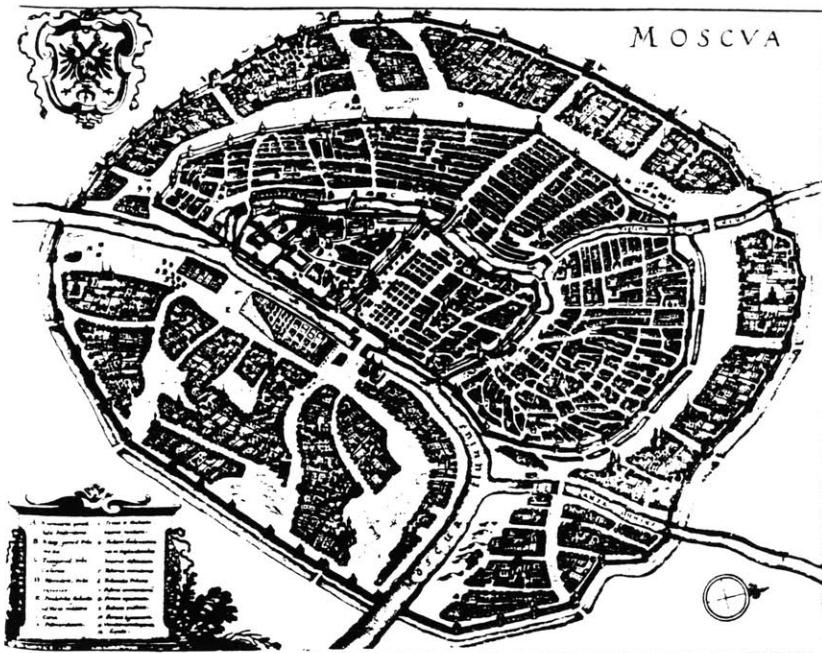
For capital cities with long and complex histories, no simple model of spatial organization is likely to be usefully descriptive. In all cases it is

¹ Even in the United States, where democratic institutions have long been in place, a dramatic increase in the size of the bureaucracy is evident. When Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1932, the White House staff numbered only about a dozen-- it now includes more than 300 persons; the Capitol Hill staff serving senators and representatives currently numbers 18,659, as compared with only 2,030 in 1947, and Executive departments have experienced similar increases (cited in James Reston, "Speakes: Product of the System," New York Times, 17 April 1988, p. E27).

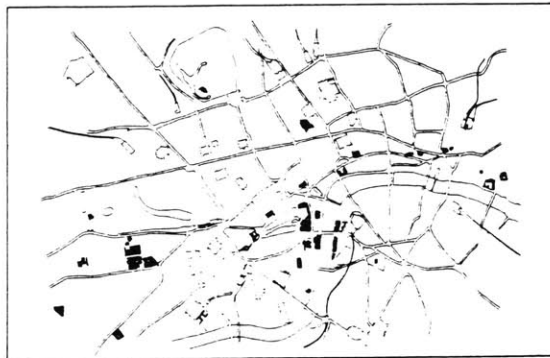
possible to trace the architectural locus of government, but in no case is it an easy matter to comment upon the relation of this place to the larger city or to interpret meaning from this juxtaposition. Most European capital cities do not have a single, readily identifiable, architectural center. They are polycentric, with a great variety of nodes, both sacred and secular [Figs. 2 and 3].

While the 19th century Houses of Parliament together with the rest of the Palace of Westminster may constitute one such node in London, for example, parliament must share prominence with Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral and the capital's true citadel, the Tower of London. This architectural power-sharing should come as no surprise, given that political power in Britain in the last thousand years has shifted dramatically among crown, church and parliament, and each of these forces retains its architectural presence in the London cityscape. What is missing, however, among these grand edifices is a monumental treatment of the contemporary center of British political power: the Prime Minister's residence is located with a minimum of ostentation, known merely by its Downing Street address.

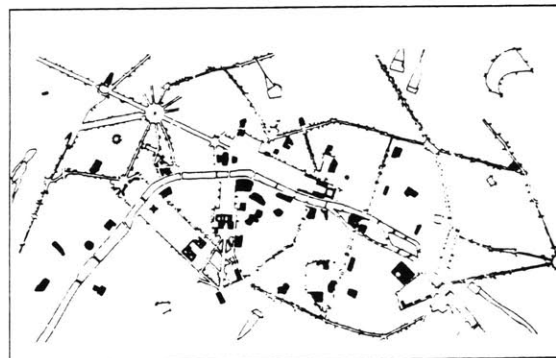
While the architectural iconography of modern Paris retains a medieval core on the Ile de la Cité, the Parisian spatial hierarchy is also quintessentially polycentric, with grand squares to commemorate military triumph and boulevards designed for imperial procession or imperious promenade. Its most elaborate palace long since converted into a museum, Paris provides no privileged place for the trappings of contemporary parliamentary democracy. Instead, many-headed Paris doffs its grand iron chapeau across the Seine.



1. 17th Century View of Moscow, Showing Concentric Growth out from Kremlin



2. London, Dispersion of Major Government and Civic Institutions and Monuments



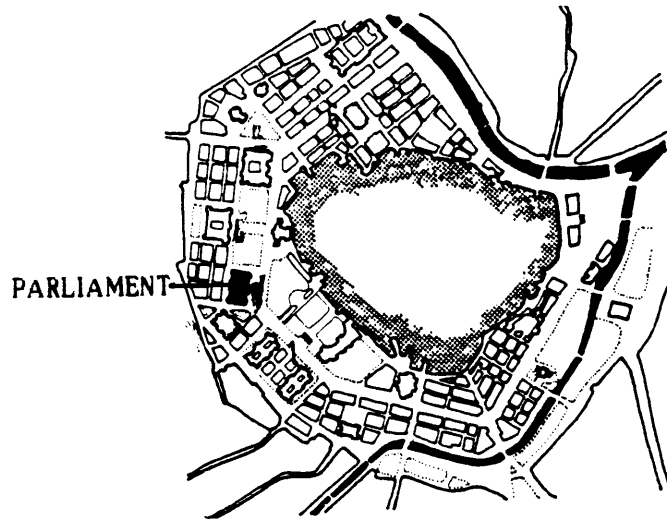
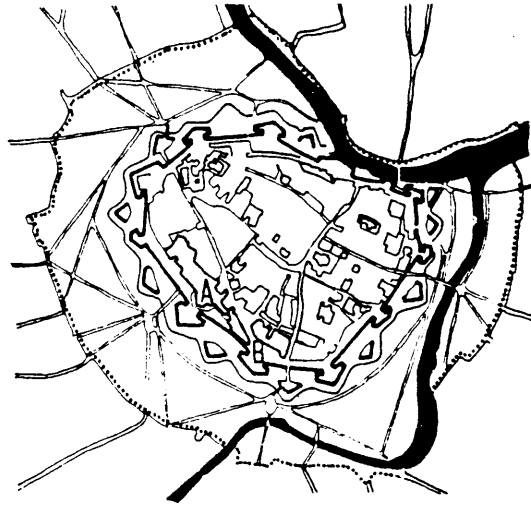
3. Paris, Dispersion of Major Government And Civic Institutions and Monuments

Vienna, of Neolithic origin and for seven centuries the seat of the Hapsburg empire, became a modern capital only in the late nineteenth century: the creation of the Ringstrasse epitomizes the transformation of a pre-modern into a modern capital. A half-circular boulevard fronted by civic institutions and parks, it was built, significantly, on land freed after the 1857 dismantling of the city's defensive walls and glacis [Fig. 4]. In Vienna, the citadel of the Hapsburgs was literally broken open to include a larger capitol, with greater public participation. Though initiated by a near-autocratic regime in the late 1850s, the buildings along the Ringstrasse were built in accordance with the wishes of a new and ascendant liberal ruling class that gained political power in subsequent decades. As Carl Schorske puts it:

Not palaces, garrisons, and churches, but centers of constitutional government and higher culture dominated the Ring. The art of building, used in the old city to express aristocratic grandeur and ecclesiastical pomp, now became the communal property of the citizenry, expressing the various aspects of the bourgeois cultural ideal in a series of so-called *Prachtbauten* (buildings of splendor).¹

Its last building completed in 1913 (just in time for the war that would bring an end to the imperial power that first inspired its creation), the Ring became home not only to separate facilities for the three primary branches of liberal government (executive, legislative and judicial), but also to a great variety of other "cultural" institutions. Not only was there a new portion added to the Hofburg Palace, a new Parliament building and a new Justice Palace, there was also, among other buildings, a new university, theater, city

¹ Carl Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (New York: Vintage, 1981), p. 31.



4. Vienna: Before and After Ringstrasse Institutions

hall, opera house, a pair of sizeable museums, and many palatial apartment complexes for the new elite. Though fin-de-siècle Vienna was hardly a harbinger of democracy, the large-scale construction of buildings for civic and cultural institutions provides a significant index of those buildings thought necessary for a modern liberal capital.

While Vienna's Ring renders it formally atypical from other capitals in almost every way, it does exemplify the political changes that underlie the development of the modern liberal capital. It suggests that the institutions of democratic government share common origins with other bourgeois institutions, and that it is possible to construct a new capitol sector within the boundaries of an existing capital. In Vienna, as in London and Paris, the political institutions of the capitol are set out as co-equal with other public institutions housing non-governmental functions. In contrast to most other modern capitals that came after it, in Vienna the institutions marking democratic government receive no special emphasis in the larger urban design. So too, the various Viennese new institutions are architecturally treated more or less equally, each subordinate to the horizontal movement of the boulevard itself (and all, perhaps, less prominent than the mass of the Hofburg Palace and the spire of St Stephens).

2. Evolved Capitals Renewed: Rome, Athens and Moscow

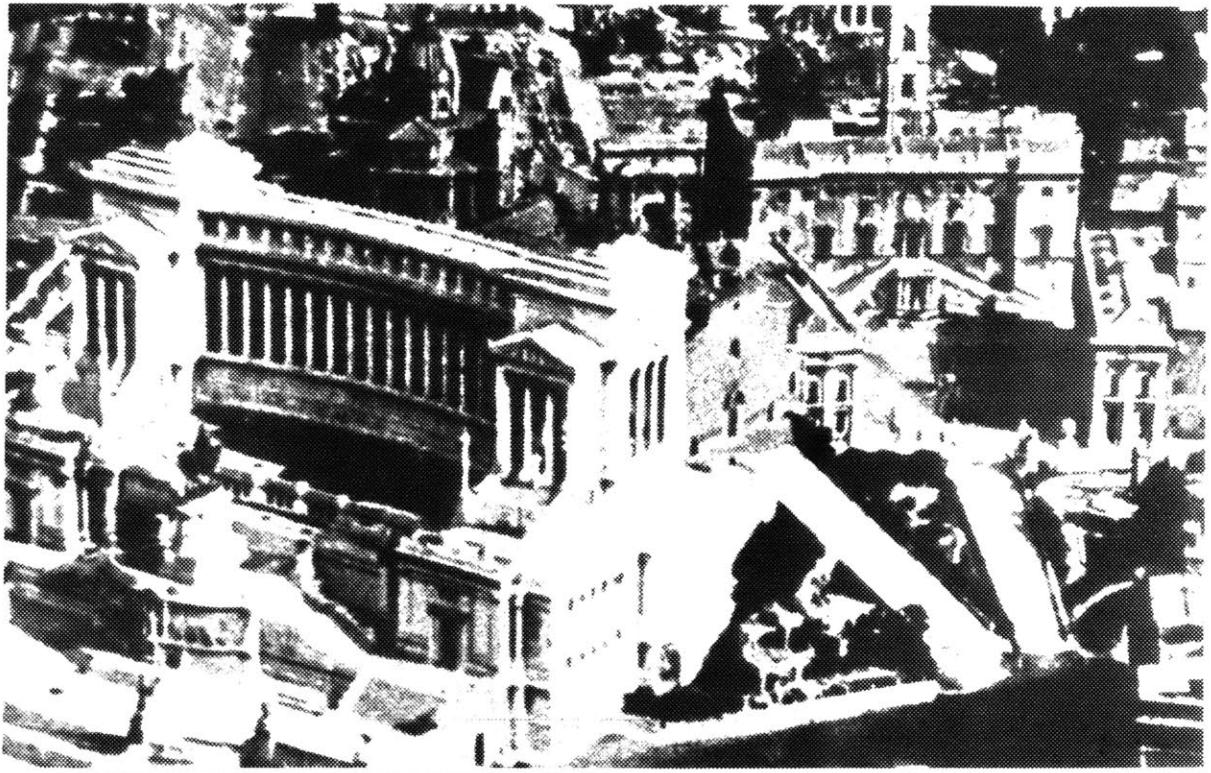
Sometimes, as in the case of Rome, Athens and Moscow, cities have actually been both pre-modern and modern capitals, at different periods in their growth. Rome, though designated the capital of a united Italy since 1870, still looks more like the capital of Catholicism than the capital of a modern state. It is the dome of St. Peter's and its carefully wrought

centrality within the larger composition of Vatican structures that marks this place, even more than the citadels of the ancients, as the model for subsequent attempts to design a capitol. By contrast, the ancient Capitoline Hill, revived as the symbolic center of Roman government following the 16th century design of Michelangelo's Campidoglio, now sits helplessly, an architectural paraplegic. Though the Senatorial head retains its famous ovoid countenance, an arm is crushed by the looming pile of the Victor Emanuel Monument, legs are amputated by the insensate swath of a Mussolini boulevard [Figs. 5 and 6]. The result, according to Robert Venturi, is that the capitol "loses any meaningful relation" to the city plan.¹

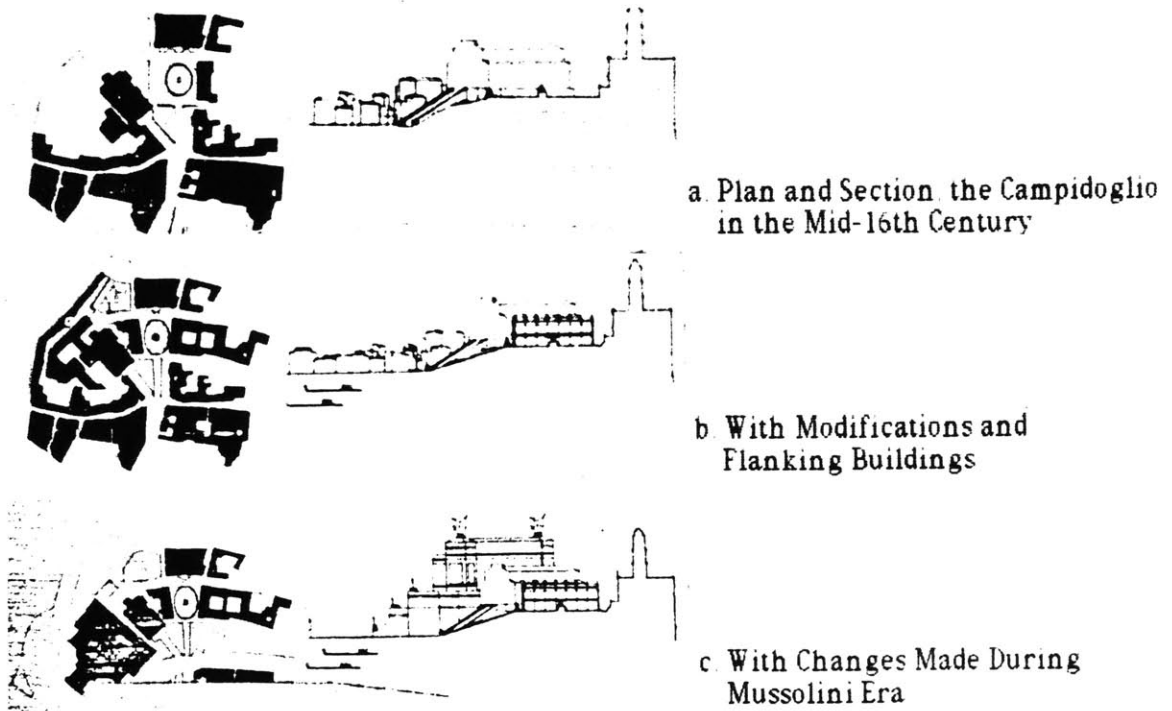
What Venturi points to in his criticism of the urban treatment of the Capitoline buildings is that the appreciation of their importance is inseparable from their placement within the larger city. The civic grandeur of the Campidoglio depends greatly upon its position as an acropolitan destination, a open high place reached after ascent through narrow passages. Denied this spatial sequence, its meaning is profoundly altered. Afflicted with a carbuncle more monstrous than anything threatening princely London, the symbols of political megalomania have left the *caput mundi* almost unrecognizably defaced.

It is not surprising, however, that a place with as long and turbulent a history as Rome should fail to have its Capitol retain its initial pre-eminence. One must remember that the lineage between the Rome that was a capital of an ancient empire and the Rome that is capital of a modern Italian state is in no way continuous. For centuries, Rome was the center of a city-state, one

¹ See Robert Venturi, "The Campidoglio: A Case Study," in Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, A View from the Campidoglio: Selected Essays 1953-1984 (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 12-13.



5. Victor Emanuel Monument Overwhelming the Campidoglio



6. Changing Urban Setting Around the Campidoglio

among many that often exhibited mutual animosity. Its position as national capital is a phenomenon of the late nineteenth century, following the unification of Italy. Rome's selection as capital, intended as a direct recall of earlier glories, was also an attempt to find a compromise site acceptable to factions from both the north and south. Thus, even though a single city was chosen capital more than once, the circumstances of choice were utterly different.

No less intermittent in its glories than the Eternal City is Athens which, although resplendent in the age of Pericles, subsequently suffered through two millenia of repeated acts of warfare, invasion and occupation. When the Greeks eventually gained independence from the Turks in 1833 and chose Athens as the new capital, there was almost no Athens left to so designate. In 1827, the city had been entirely evacuated and, at independence, the ancient capital housed only about four thousand people, living "in the straggle of little houses on the north slope below the Acropolis."¹ Only one stone building stood more than one story high, and was appropriated for the use of the newly-imported king until such time as a palace could be built. Like Rome, then, the existence of Athens as the capital of a modern nationstate is the result of a relatively recent act of will, inspired by the presence of the past.

As for Moscow, the tale of glory and decline is less tumultuous, but the result is much the same. Peter the Great's grand move west, was the move of a monarch and his court; two hundred years later, when the capital migrated back to Moscow, the move was of an entirely different order. It was the move of a revolutionary government and its attendant bureaucracy

¹ Blake Ehrlich, "Athens: The City Plan," Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 14, p. 299.

to reclaim the historical heartland as a way to gain a more central hold over a modern nationstate. Pre-18th century Moscow was the capital of Russia and the center of the Russian Orthodox Church; post-revolutionary Moscow was the capital of the U.S.S.R., and symbolized Russian control over the rest of the non-Russian Soviet republics. Designed concentrically around the Kremlin, Moscow epitomizes the power of the capitol to dominate the capital.

3. Evolutionary Breaks: Designing a New Capital

The motives for designating a city as a capital are not easily separated into discrete categories. There are, however, identifiable and instructive characteristics. Capitals do not merely exist; they are the various products of human will and historical circumstance. The existence of a particular form of capital in a particular location at a particular time is dependent upon a delicate and shifting balance among many kinds of contending forces. A capital may be located for reasons of climate (which could push it into the interior or towards an area of great natural beauty) or geopolitical strategy (which could dictate that it be near-- or away from-- a sensitive border). In addition, it may be chosen for its impact on regional development (which could require great distance between it and other existing cities) or it may be envisioned as purely an administrative enclave (which could rely on the nearby presence of established social and cultural networks). Capital placement may be the result of autocratic decree (which could seem motivated by personal idiosyncrasy) or external imposition, (which could locate a capital chiefly for the convenience of an overseas power). A capital may be established as a kind of binding center to mediate among rival regional or ethnic factions, or it may be sited explicitly to favor the claims of

one group over others. So too, the designation of a capital may be part of an attempt to revive some period of past glory or to disassociate a place from more recent historical events. And, finally, a capital may be selected to maximize international publicity, or it may be chosen for more purely domestic and regional reasons. The choice of a capital city is, nearly always, the product of compromise among many of these competing motives, especially the ones which seem most mutually contradictory.

With capitals that are designed as well as designated, political will is underscored by a physical plan. A new capital city, designed according to the priorities of those who hold power, involves not only a new center of government but also a new "container" in which this center of government must be located. The spatial resolution of this capitol/capital relationship is always immensely revealing about the political relationship between the governors and the governed. While many, if not most, of the "evolved" capitals have large sectors that have been "designed," it is the largest of these design interventions that are the most useful indications of social/spatial fit and misfit.

The idea of a designed city (at least in the West) probably has its origins in the colonial outposts of ancient Greece and Rome. Here, cities were carefully planned according to established principles, and were intended as architectural statements about the superior civilization at the center of an empire. Like the subsequent Spanish colonization of Central and South America according to the "Laws of the Indies," however, planned colonial cities cannot fully be considered as "capitals." As long as a city is an imposed presence, an administrative outpost of an alien government, it cannot take on the symbolic attributes of an indigenously created center. From Miletus to British New Delhi, the limitation is the same.

Though the designed capital city is descended from colonially imposed cities of the past, its lineage may be traced to another important typology-- the palace and its gardens. For centuries, most largescale attempts at urban design were sponsored by the wealth of the court or the church, and were intended as extensions of the royal or priestly realm into the public domain. From the Versailles of Louis XIV to the Rome of Pope Sixtus V, political power was extended horizontally across the landscape. No longer confined by the walls of a citadel, power went public. By the sixteenth century, at least in Europe, the palace had begun to extend across the city and out into the countryside. As Mumford puts it, "Baroque city building, in the formal sense, was an embodiment of the prevalent drama and ritual that shaped itself in the court: in effect, a collective embellishment of the ways and gestures of the palace."¹ Even after the age of royal residence cities, like the "suburban" capital at Versailles, had passed, remnants of palatial Baroque order continued to be set into the fabric of European capitals. In Paris, Madrid, Vienna and Berlin, in Wren's unexecuted plan for London after the great fire, and, most audaciously, in Peter the Great's founding of St. Petersburg on the swampy northwestern fringe of his empire, grand processional axes, long imposing facades, enormous squares and converging diagonals provided a common design repertoire for the European capital city. When, in the inspired work of Major Pierre L'Enfant, these tools of Baroque order were combined with the primal symbolism of the capitol and applied in the service of democracy, the world gained its first modern designed capital.

¹ Mumford, p. 375.

CHAPTER TWO

DESIGNED CAPITALS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will attempt to outline the development of the modern designed capital by discussing several examples of this phenomenon in chronological sequence. While I make no pretense of this as a complete overview of all such capitals, the examples of Washington, D.C., Canberra, New Delhi, Chandigarh, Brasilia, Abuja and Dodoma do raise a broad variety of issues about power and identity, and serve as a useful prelude to the more in-depth discussion of designed capitols in Part Two. In examining the plans of these seven capitals, I emphasize the reasons why each was founded and analyze the placement of the capitol within the larger city. Using decisions made with regard to architecture and planning, I seek to elucidate the the larger aims and biases that underlie these momentous partnerships between government leaders and designers.

Within this larger attempt to investigate the fit between capitals and political ideas and ideals that inspire them, each case suggests a different emphasis, and has a different reason for inclusion here. Washington, I argue, was the first modern designed capital, the first case where a new capital city was explicitly designed to house a new form of government. As such, it is a kind of benchmark against which the design of future capitals for governments professing democracy may be assessed. Canberra's plan, while in many ways a derivative of Washington's, provides a useful counterpoint in that its axial focus is given over to a public park rather than a parliament

building. New Delhi was designed as an administrative seat for a colonial empire and, as such, is a useful foil for understanding the subsequent usage of a capital for promoting indigenous identity. Chandigarh, though only a provincial capital, was a seminal attempt to use modern architecture and planning to create a capital capable of symbolizing progress and conveying "national identity" in a post-colonial context. Brasília, equally seminal, constitutes the first time that the abstraction of modern architecture was applied to the national capital of a major country. Abuja (Nigeria) and Dodoma (Tanzania), planned in the 1970s, are two largely-unrealized examples of current thinking (one is collapsing capitalist, the other sinking socialist) about designed post-colonial capitals, and are used to introduce issues about pluralism-- and the difficulty of symbolizing it-- that will become central to the discussion in Parts Two and Three.

Washington, D.C.: The First Modern Designed Capital

Planned in the aftermath of the attainment of United States independence and the ratification of a federal constitution, Washington is the first post-colonial designed capital. Given the enormity of the political change, from control by the colonial deputies of a European monarchy to a grand experiment in constitutional democracy, the physical design of the new city surely seems less than revolutionary. As Mumford comments:

Despite L'Enfant's firm republican convictions, the design he set forth for the new capital was in every respect what the architects and servants of despotism had originally conceived. He could only carry over into the new age the static image that had been dictated by centralized coercion and control. The sole feature that was lacking was the original sixteenth century fortifications, since there was no apparent need for military defence. As it happened, this was an embarrassing

oversight, for such works alone might have saved the new public buildings in Washington from their destruction by British raiders in the War of 1812. Apart from that, the plan was an exemplary adaptation of the standard baroque principles to a new situation.¹

Though there is great continuity in L'Enfant's application of "standard baroque principles," Mumford neglects to point out the most important ways that the "new situation" brought new meaning to such principles. While the diagonals and axes may be redolent of the cities and gardens of imperial Europe, Washington, D.C. is a more democratically engendered product. In the choice of its site and in the nature and juxtaposition of its monumental buildings, Washington, D.C. is a notable attempt-- only partially successful-- to free capital design from its association with autocratic control [Figs. 7 and 8].

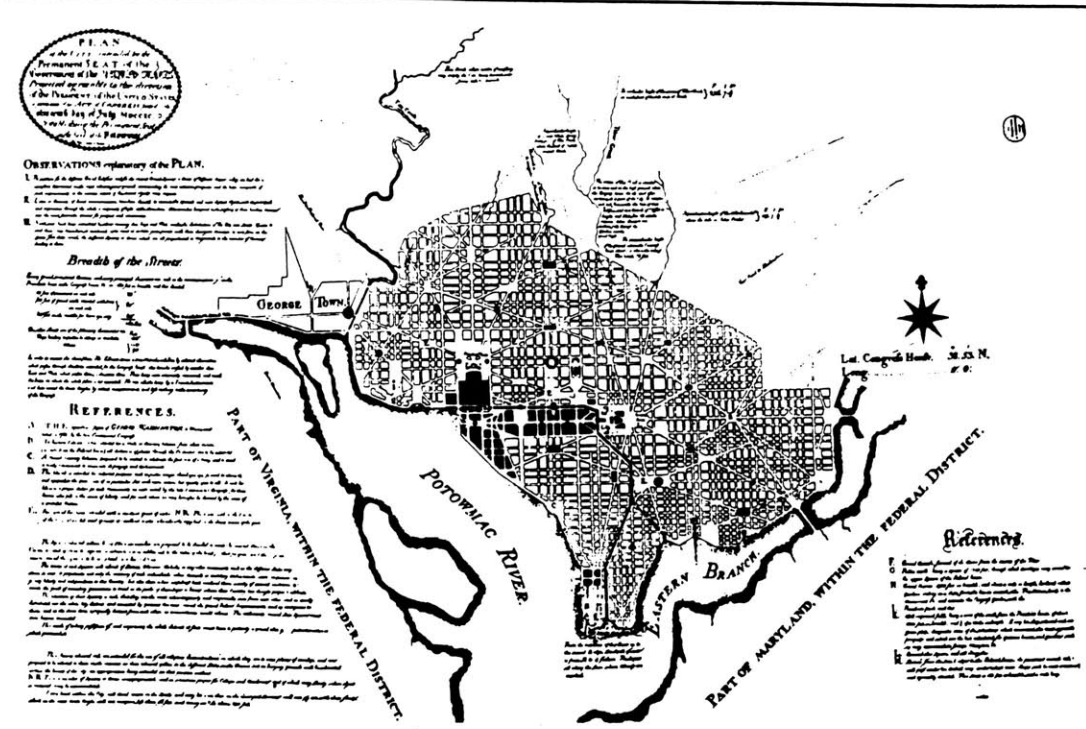
Like St. Petersburg, Washington, D.C. was located in a swampy wilderness, well away from any existing center of power. Unlike its Russian precursor, however, its site is the product of compromise, rather than the direct outcome of a ruler's decree. Washington is not the first capital of the United States but, in fact, is the ninth home of the peripatetic legislature.² In addition to these, at one point in 1783 the Congress actually approved tandem capitals, one to be located in Delaware, one in Virginia.³ A 1791 New York newspaper editorial comments on the indecision:

Where will Congress find a resting place?--they have led a kind of vagrant life ever since 1774, when they first met to oppose Great-Britain. Every place they have taken to reside in has been made too hot

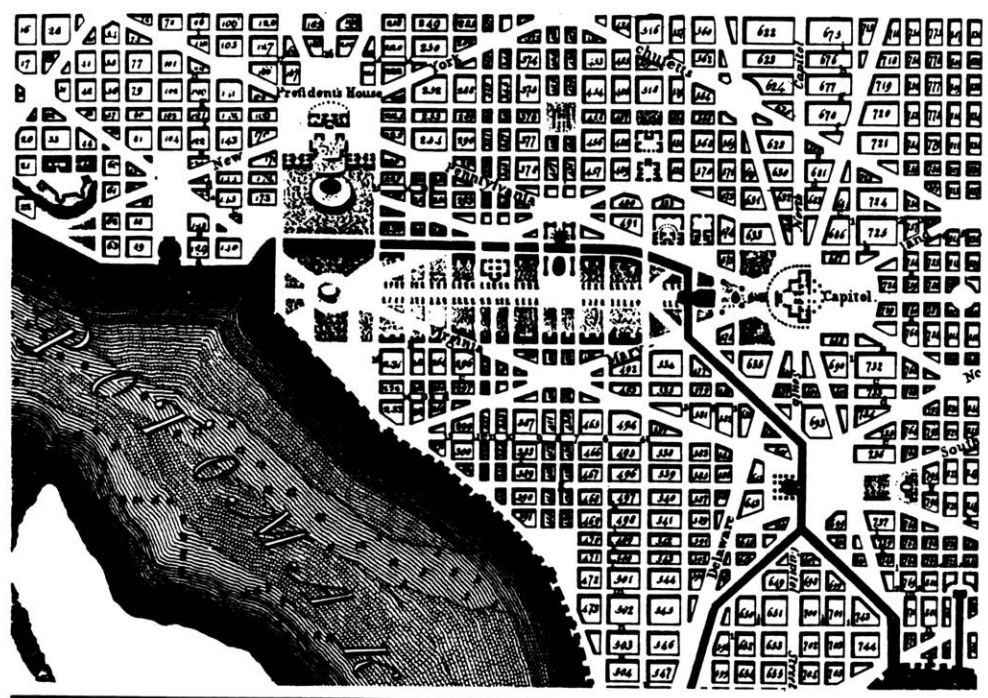
¹ Mumford, pp. 403-04.

² See Robert Fortenbaugh, Nine Capitals of the U.S. (York, Pennsylvania: Maple Press, 1948). (The others were New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, York (Pennsylvania), Lancaster, Princeton, Annapolis, and Trenton.)

³ Lois Craig, ed. The Federal Presence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), p. 15.



7. Washington, D.C.: L'Enfant Plan of 1791



8. Capitol and President's House (Portion of 1792 Ellicott Engraving)

to hold them; either the enemy would not let them stay, or people made a clamour because they were too far north or too far south, and oblige them to remove....We pity the poor congress-men, thus kicked and cuffed about from post to pillar-- where can they find a home?¹

Washington, D.C.'s location was thus the result of protracted post-revolutionary battle to define a symbolic center for the newly united collection of disparate ex-colonies. And, with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the new center became eccentric almost immediately.

There were serious proposals to move the capital periodically put forth until as late as 1870, though the only true challenge to its centrality (other than the British attack of 1814) came with the Civil War. It is, of course, no coincidence that Washington was located so close to the brink of the sectional division. What is noteworthy is the symbolic role of the Capitol in the reunification of the country. The long saga of the Capitol building design is well known, as it involved most of the prominent architects of the day over a period of nearly seventy years, and need not be reiterated here. Some points are worth recalling, however. Built in stages-- first the two wings and only afterwards the domed center-- even the construction sequence bespoke its role as the central symbol of the "United" States. As George Washington told the Commissioners in charge of the design competition: "It may be relied on, it is the progress of that building that is to inspire or depress the public confidence."² With work on the building interrupted by the war of 1812, Jefferson wrote to architect Benjamin Latrobe:

I shall live in hope that the the day will come when an opportunity will be given you of finishing the middle building in a style worthy of the two wings, and worthy of the first temple dedicated to the sovereignty

¹ New York Advertiser, 27 January 1791, cited in Ibid., p. 16.

² Cited in Norton, p. 263, note 1..

of the people, embellishing with Athenian taste the course of a nation looking far beyond the range of Athenian destinies.¹

Fifty years later, however, the shrine to democracy was still not yet complete.

When the Civil War broke out, Thomas Ustick Walter's enlargement of Latrobe's central dome remained unfinished, unintentional but powerful commentary on the situation of the country it was to symbolize [Fig. 9]. In the words of Henry Adams, remembering his visit to the capital:

As in 1800 and 1850, so in 1860, the same rude colony was camped in the same forest, with the same unfinished Greek temples for workrooms, and sloughs for roads. The Government had an air of social instability and incompleteness that went far to support the right of secession in theory as in fact; but right or wrong, secession was likely to be easy where there was so little to secede from.²

President Lincoln, extending his penchant for architectural metaphor made famous in his 'House Divided' speech, saw great potential in the progress of the dome. "When the people see the dome rising," he commented, "it will be a sign that we intend the union to go on"³ [Fig.10].

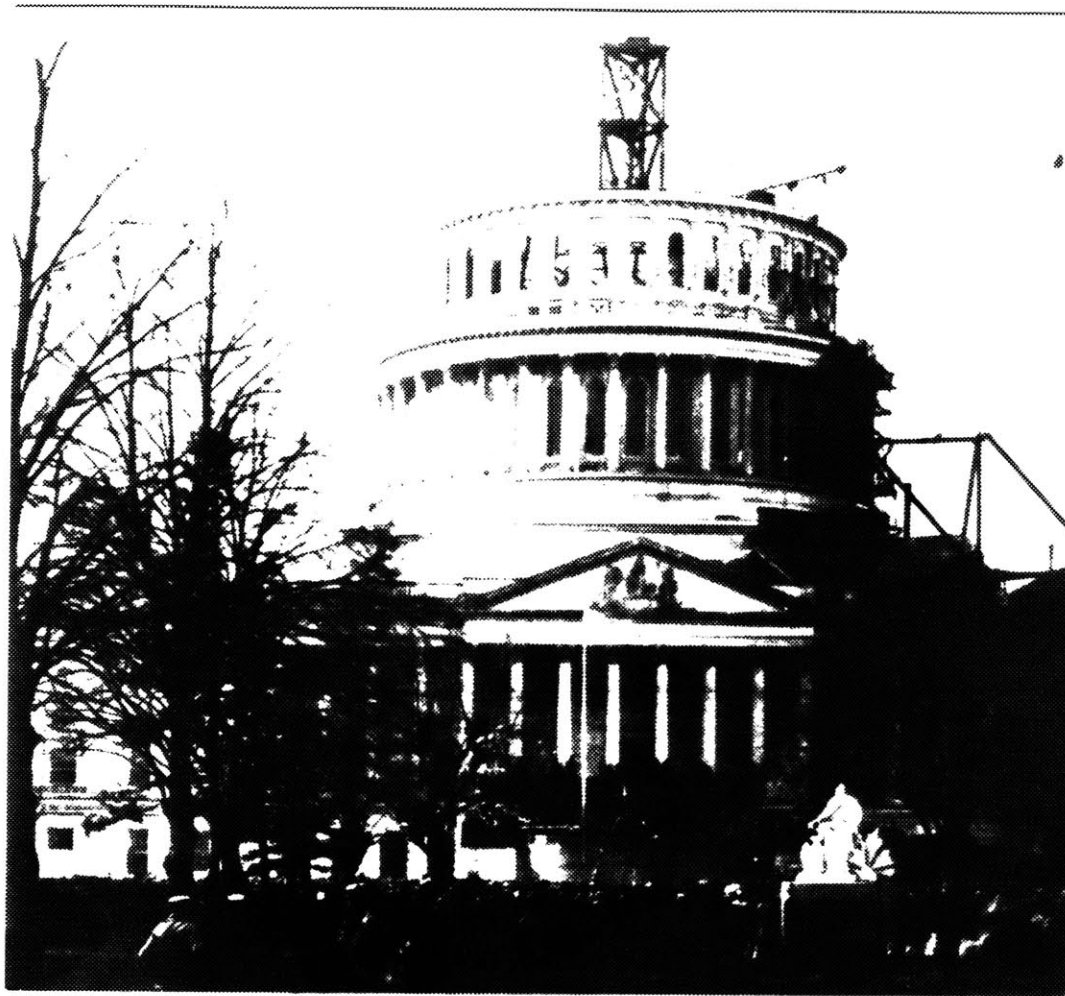
On December 2, 1863, amid ceremonial fanfare marked by a 35-gun salute, the lantern of Walter's imposing dome was topped out by the placement of Thomas Crawford's statue of "Freedom." Intended to boost the morale of northern troops, the pomp and symbolism of "Freedom" was not without its ironic side, given that Crawford's plaster model was cast in bronze by slave labor.⁴ Though I have found no evidence that this

¹ Jefferson, letter to Latrobe, July 12, 1812, cited in Craig, p. 38. For a full account of the role of Latrobe and Jefferson in the design and promotion of the Capitol, see the Norton dissertation.

² Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), p. 99.

³ Craig, p. 136.

⁴ Ibid., p. 137.



9. Unfinished Capitol Dome at Lincoln's Inauguration, 4 March 1861

10 Lincoln Ordering the Building of the House of Representatives Wing
(Painting located inside House of Representatives wing)



inconsistency was a matter of concern at the time, the symbolism of the Capitol statue's initial design was controversial in another way:

Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi noted that the figure wore a liberty cap of the kind worn by ancient Roman slaves who had been freed. He called this a provocation to the South. The harrassed sculptor substituted a feathered eagle for the cap, and from the ground today Freedom on her high perch looks rather like an Indian with a disheveled war bonnet.¹

Such a concern over the minutiae of symbolism seems unusual; the overall symbolism of the Capitol's design rested on much more loosely interpreted resonances.

Though his models were more often found in Republican Rome rather than Periclean Athens, Jefferson consistently looked to classical precedent for architectural and urbanistic inspiration. As Mumford commented: "Each age tends to flatter the part of the past that sends back its own image..."² In the case of Washington's earliest architects and planners, that reflected image necessarily underwent a dramatic transformation. Though no building in Washington was as literal in its recall of classical antiquity as the Virginia State Capitol (Jefferson's 1780 attempt to render the Roman Maison Carrée suitable for government offices), all forms of classical allusion faced two risks. Either the architecture would be transferred in such a general way that its intended recall of classical democracy would be indistinguishably diffused into reminders of classical empire and Renaissance courtly splendor, or it would be transferred so archaeologically that it would lack the capacity to meet the functional needs of modern government. In an 1807 letter to Jefferson, even the Grecophile Latrobe seemed aware of such dangers:

¹ Ibid., p. 137.

² Mumford, p. 199.

My principles of good taste are rigid in Grecian architecture. I am a bigoted Greek in the condemnation of the Roman architecture of Baalbec, Palmyra, and Spalato... Wherever, therefore the Grecian style can be copied without impropriety I love to be a mere, I would say a slavish copyist, but the forms & the distribution of the Roman & Greek buildings which remain, are in general, inapplicable to the objects & uses of our public buildings. Our religion requires a church wholly different from the temples, our legislative assemblies and our courts of justice, buildings of entirely different principles from their basilicas; and our amusements could not possibly be performed in their theatres & amphitheatres....¹

Jefferson, for his part, seemed less concerned with such "improprieties." He viewed this broad symbolic scheme for housing the work of a democratic republic in the forms of its ancient precursors as a novel way of staking the new country's presence and proclaiming its new freedoms to the entire world. "Its object," he wrote, "is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile them to the rest of the world, and procure them its praise."² Unfortunately, as the architectural preferences of subsequent rulers--from Napoleon to Hitler-- would reveal, the language of classicism may be manipulated for very different political ends.

Only the names and the functions of the buildings had changed; the planning principles had remained constant. This was still a language premised on the exaltation of social hierarchy. No new method for conveying the new circumstances of "government of the people, by the people and for the people" was attempted or sought after. As John Reys put it,

It was a supreme irony that the plan forms originally conceived to magnify the glories of despotic kings and emperors came to be applied as a national symbol of a country whose philosophical basis was so

¹ Latrobe, letter to Jefferson, 21 May 1807, cited in Craig, p. 37.

² Cited in Craig, p. 24.

firmly rooted in democratic equality.¹

Though Jefferson and his supporters sought to use architecture to invoke Greco-Roman democracy, L'Enfant and the architects of the Capitol alluded more to the Roman Vatican than to the Roman forum. Thus, the experiment in democracy initially spawned no parallel experiment in planning, and even less in architecture. Nonetheless, in the placement of the Capitol at the focal point of an entire urban composition, the designers of Washington established an important precedent for all future capital cities.

Designed Colonial Capitals

As a designed capital for an independent country, Washington, D.C. was at least a century ahead of most countries, most of which remained governed by colonial regimes until well into the twentieth century. In those countries where the native population remained numerically dominant, European planners tended to design carefully segregated cities, with a clear spatial separation between the living areas of colonizer and colonized. In contrast to capitals created in the aftermath of an independence movement, the siting and development of colonial capitals still served the interests of an overseas empire. The spatial politics of the colonial city (in which the urban forms of the British Commonwealth constitute only one category among many) is an enormous subject, one which is far too unwieldy to claim space here. In trying to understand the politics and symbolism of the location of

¹ John Reps, from Monumental Washington (1967), cited in Craig, p. 21. While Reps is surely correct to emphasize the curious persistence of an anachronistic plan type, he would seem to overstate the new government's commitment to equality. The United States Constitution of 1787, from its infamous 3/5ths clause defining the status of slaves to the institution of the electoral college as a check upon the power of the popular vote, was premised upon many principles that are neither egalitarian nor fully democratic.

capitals and capitols in post-colonial situations, however, some discussion of the colonial capital experience is undoubtedly necessary.

Somewhere in the middle ground between colonial status and full legal independence are the countries of the British Commonwealth. Of these, Canada, Australia and New Zealand may be separated out as special cases where the European colonizers, through various forms of segregation and extermination, became a majority. In most other places, such as India and South Africa, the colonizers remained a minority, ruling by superior force rather than by superior numbers.

Canberra

Canberra, designed to house the national government of a newly federated Australia, exemplifies a situation of social homogeneity and political continuity. With a dwindling aboriginal population pushed aside, the issues of contention among the settlers centered on economic and political matters rather than racial and ethnic strife. The divided loyalties of Commonwealth status yielded a more tempered nationalism. Canberra's choice as federal capital in 1913 required not only the approval of the Australian parliament, but also royal assent from overseas.

Understood by its promoters and its detractors alike to be the "Australian Washington," Canberra mimicked its American precursor in many ways. The choice of site, poised between the two major population centers of Sydney and Melbourne, comes as no surprise, though in fact it was the result of more than decade worth of parliamentary false starts and compromises.¹

¹ For a full account, see Roger Pegrum, The Bush Capital: How Australia Chose Canberra as its Federal City (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1983).

Though the capital site was selected after all the states of the Australian mainland (plus Tasmania) had agreed to federation, there was never any consideration of a more continentally central location [Figs. 11 and 12]. The main concern of all but the Sydney parliamentarians was simply to keep the capital away from Sydney, Australia's "Mother City." Section 125 of the 1899 "Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act" resolved this particular question for good, but provided little guidance on site selection:

The seat of government of the Commonwealth shall be determined by the Parliament, and shall be within territory which shall have been granted to or acquired by the Commonwealth, and shall be vested in and belong to the Commonwealth, and shall be in the State of New South Wales, and be distant not less than one hundred miles from Sydney.¹

As one historian of Canberra puts it:

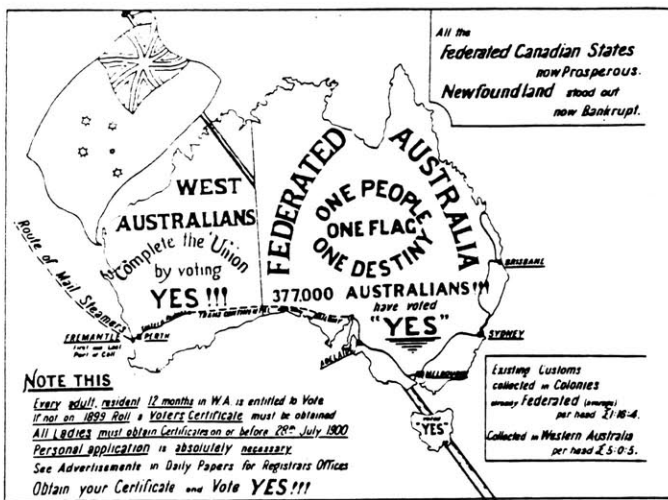
...it was part of the romantic makebelieve of the time to pretend that it was the spontaneous conception of aspiring national idealism. But the legend was a plaything of a tiny minority. The great majority of Australians knew well enough that the national capital had been conceived, not in generous national enthusiasm, but in the haggling of provincialisms.²

Known from the beginning as "The Bush Capital," it was clear that its position within that bush would never stray very far from Australia's southeast corner. Even so, it was located in an area so remote that, when selected, the capital district's horses, cattle and sheep each outnumbered its humans [Fig. 13].³

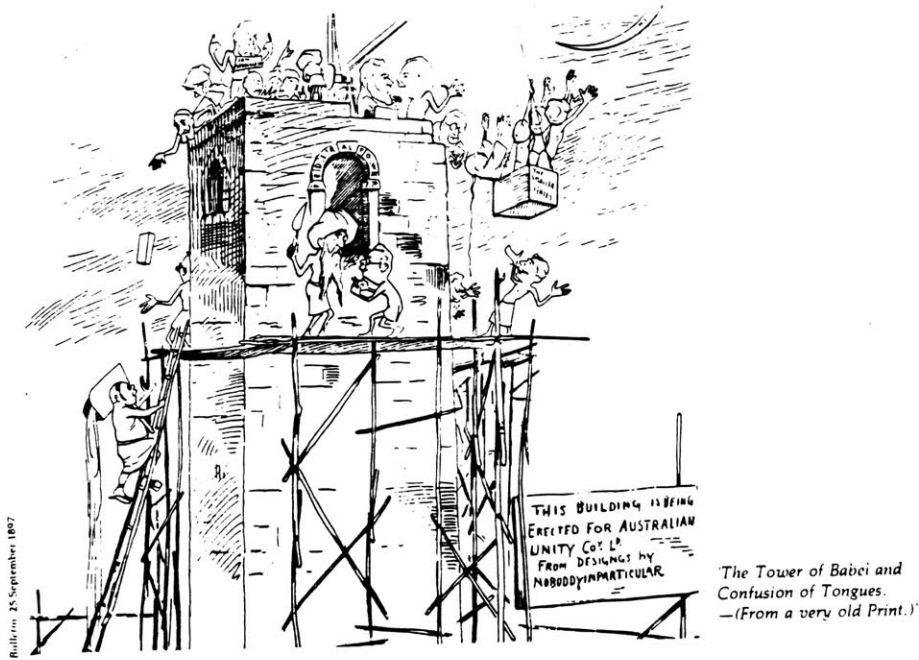
¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

² G.J.R. Linge, *Canberra: Site and City* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.



11. "One People, One Flag, One Destiny:" Australia in 1900



12. "This Building Erected for Australian Unity"

Even after a site was chosen, the name for the capital remained an open question. The public was invited to submit suggestions, and these provide a telling inventory of Australian feelings about the capital site and the process by which it came to be selected:

Those who had lived through the battle of the sites must have given a wry smile at the suggestion of Sydmebane, and there were a number of similar confections, the most euphonious of which was probably Sydmeperadbrisho. Wheatwoolgold, Kangaremu and Eucalypta headed a list of Australian animals, vegetables and minerals. Public reaction to fiscal policy produced Economy, Revenuelia, Gonebroke and Swindleville, and politics inspired Caucus City, Liberalism, Malleyking, Fisherburra and Cookaburra. Titanic and Great Scott referred to recent tragedies in the Atlantic and Antarctic, but might also have had something to say about Commonwealth-State relations. Anglophiles and classical scholars had put up Cromwell, Galdstone, Disraeli, Maxurba and Victoria Deferenda Defender....¹

On March 12, 1913, Lady Denman, wife of the Governor-General, announced the winner: "I name the capital of Australia, Canberra-- the accent is on the Can."² Canberra, "the mystic word that would be known all over the Empire a couple of hours later,"³ was said by some to be an aboriginal word for "woman's breasts."⁴ In any case, it provided an aboriginal name for a district whose last native Australian had died sixteen years before.

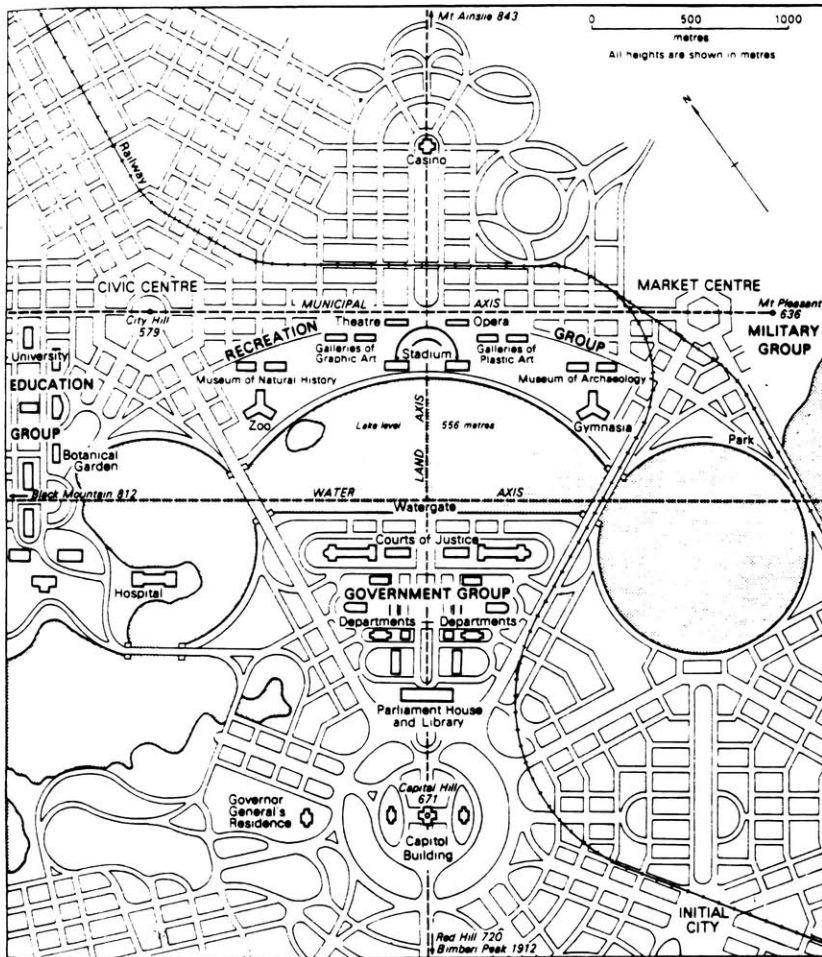
The master plan for the new capital, designed by the American Walter Burley Griffin, was selected after an international competition and, despite various compromises and delays, much of it has been implemented [Fig. 14].

¹ Pegrum, pp. 170-72.

² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.



14. Griffin's Plan for Canberra (1913 Version)

The Griffin plan sought to take maximum use of the rolling topography of what many believed to have once been the most beautiful sheep station in Australia. He sited the main ceremonial axis of the city to align visually with distant mountain peaks, and envisioned a cross axis formed by water. The most important government buildings, intended to symbolize the center of the nation, were to be built symmetrical about the land axis and contained in a triangle set off by the water axis and the two grand converging diagonal avenues that bridge it. This, Griffin felt, would enable the activities of government to take place in an "accessible but still quiet area."¹ As a reminder of Australia's imperial loyalties, the grand diagonal roads that insure this access would soon be named Kings and Commonwealth.

The apex of the triangle, the point where the diagonals and the central mall come together is called "Capital Hill," but was not intended by Griffin to be the site of the Parliament house. Though Capital Hill is the most prominent of the many hills that lie within the city boundaries, and Griffin envisioned these hills as the "elevated foundations for... buildings of dominating importance," he reserved the prime symbolic location for a public park and ceremonial meeting area. Though he confused matters somewhat by labelling this point the "Capitol Building," Griffin's Capitol was purely for administrative offices and public gathering. The "Parliament House" was to be placed on axis in front of Capital Hill, atop the lesser eminence known as Camp Hill.²

As in Washington, many factors conspired to delay the completion of this central legislative building; what took 65 years in the United States has

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

² Had Griffin been the designer of Washington, D.C. his proposed juxtaposition of the courts of justice above a 'water gate' might have found a more appropriate home.

taken 75 in Australia. Though Griffin made no detailed architectural proposals for the Parliament House, he suggested a "stepped pinnacle treatment in lieu of the inevitable dome," noting that such a form had been "the last word" in a number of ancient civilizations.¹ The first World War and assorted austerity measures delayed a design competition and, in lieu of a permanent building, the Australian government elected to commission a provisional Capitol on Griffin's land axis but below both Camp Hill and Capital Hill. This building, formally opened in 1927, signalled the transfer of Parliament to Canberra from Melbourne.²

The question of a permanent capitol remained pressing, however, as the space requirements of a modern bureaucracy rapidly outgrew the provisional quarters. The issue, though, was more than a matter of functional efficiency: it raised fundamental questions about the symbolism of Griffin's plan. For decades, Australian parliamentary committees debated where in the capital the permanent capitol should be sited. In the 1950s, following the recommendation of the British architect Lord Holford, it was decided to site the building in front of the existing provisional building, nearer to the edge of the water. The report of a Parliamentary committee reopened the question in the 1960s and, in 1968, the Senate voted for Capital Hill and the House of Representatives for Camp Hill. In 1969, the government decided on Camp Hill, and initiated plans for the development of the Parliamentary Triangle with this in mind. Yet, four years later, the issue of siting the Capitol was thrown open again and, as a 1973 editorial in the Canberra Times suggests, issues of symbolism remained at the fore:

¹ Ibid., pp. 161-62.

² Linge, p. 19.

The intellectual heirs of the age of armorial bearings and escutcheons find it intolerable that the national parliament should be built on any but the most physically dominant site within the hallowed Parliamentary Triangle conceived by Burley Griffin. Hence the almost pathological fear that a Parliament House built on the lesser Camp Hill could one day find itself looking up to a mere administrative building erected on the more prominent Capital Hill, and the imperative necessity to 'grab' the site now and 'stick our building on it while we can'. Apart from anything else, there is in this conception of what is fitting an element of pettifoggery as narrow as the proposal to limit to Australians only the competition for a design for the House.

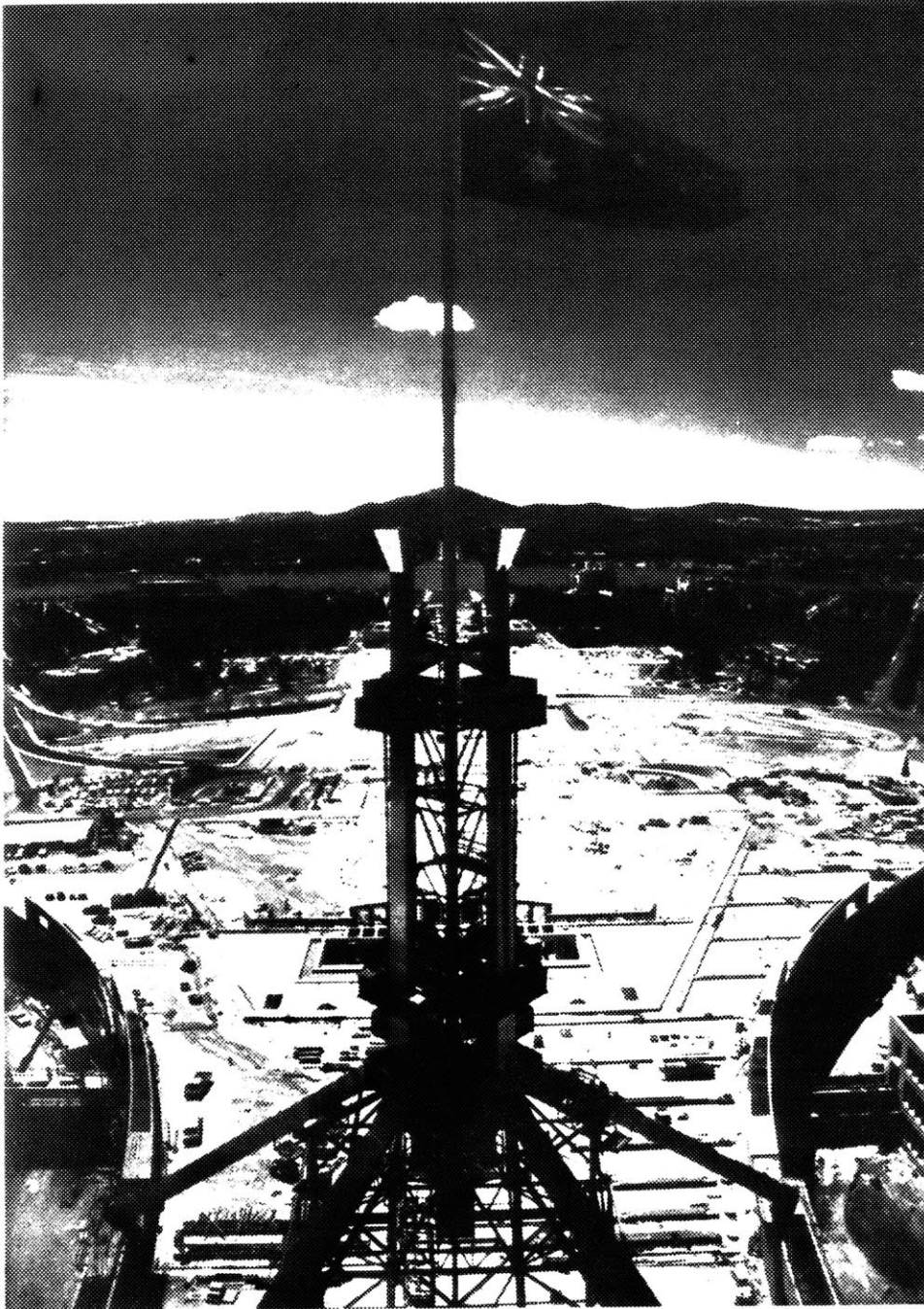
Pursuing this rich intellectual lode opened up by man's universal addiction to the use of symbols, some supporters of the Camp Hill site can be just as persuasive. Instead of isolating the Parliament in lonely splendor on Capital Hill, they advocate, with all the power this word conjures, the integration of the supreme law-making authority of the nation with the daily and multifarious concerns of the citizens. Parliament is concerned with people, not with separate pressure groups or abstractions.¹

In 1974, indicative of their assessment of suitable symbolism, both Houses concurred on the selection of Capital Hill for the Capitol. Following another competition, the building designed by Mitchell/Giurgola is scheduled for completion in 1988.²

Carved into the hillside, with most of the legislative functions located underground, it is an extraordinary departure from the usual iconography of a capitol. With its roof partially covered in grass and intended for direct public access from the green swath of the Mall below it, Griffin's original idea of Capital Hill as a parkland meeting place for the public may actually be partly realized. Though the idea of allowing the public to literally walk on top of parliamentary chambers seems a rather crude metaphor for popular sovereignty, the building certainly does manage to avoid the "inevitable

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

² Grant Marani and Anne Rieselbach, "Parliament House Update," *Progressive Architecture*, August 1987, pp. 80-5.



15. Flagpole Parliament, Canberra

dome." Replacing it, however, is yet another symbol that long ago attained the status of cliché: the flag. The colossal flag mast, rising hundreds of feet in stainless steel, provides a clear focus for the entire composition, but does so in the most neutral way imaginable. The Australian Tour Eiffel lacks both the grace and the technical bravado of the Parisian original. Whether it will become a galvanizing symbol or merely a galvanized one remains to be seen [Fig. 15].

New Delhi

When King-Emperor George V designated "Imperial Delhi" as the capital of British India in 1911, the possibility of Indian independence still seemed distant. With colonial and native populations socially and formally apart, the capital was intended to be a clear reminder of British hegemony, an architectural affirmation of the alleged superiority of Western civilization. Government buildings could be "Indianized" but the city remained an unmistakable outpost of empire.

The choice of the area around Delhi for the new capital must, however, be seen as a noteworthy attempt to appease a colonial population. In deciding to replace Calcutta, the British were moving away from a port city with easy access for international trade to a place with deep historical roots for the local population. The decision to build a new capital adjacent to Delhi was a complex political move, directly tied to tensions in Bengal. In leaving Calcutta, the British were also leaving an area of Hindu/Muslim unrest; the move to Delhi was to coincide with reunification of Bengal, with Calcutta to act as a provincial capital. Thus, though Calcutta retained many economic advantages for the colonial governors, there was an even greater political

advantage to be had in a move to the traditional imperial center. The area around Delhi had been the political and ceremonial center of many empires over the centuries, from the ancient Indraprastha to the Mughal Shahjahanabad. The British Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, declared that the move to Delhi should appeal to both Hindu and Muslim segments of the Indian population but, as Robert Irving points out:

Its Hindu heritage, however, was remote compared to its prominent role as an Islamic capital from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Its revived importance, therefore, appealed chiefly to Muslim sentiment and was intended to play an essential role in placating disgruntled East Bengal Muslims, now part of a reunited province dominated by a rich and well-educated Hindu elite in Calcutta.¹

The siting of new capital for British India, in contrast to both Washington or Canberra, involved not only sectional economic interests but an active and conscious decision to mediate among the claims of rival ethnic groups. In this sense, it is a precursor to the complex issues that underlie the siting of new capitals and capitols in highly factionalized post-colonial situations.

In 1911, however, the British could still view the selection of Delhi as not only an act of appeasement but also as a reminder of domination. The sheer capacity to move the seat of British India by royal decree would be taken as evidence of the Empire's continued vitality. Moreover, since the move was so closely identified with the personal wish of George V, no amount of unexpected costs or delays would be allowed to prevent the new capital's transfer at the intended scale. In planning the layout of the capital to be known as "Imperial Delhi," the King's Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham,

¹ Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 27.

communicated George V's view that the building to house the British Viceroy must be "conspicuous and commanding," not dominated by the structures of past empires or by features of the natural landscape: "We must now let [the Indian] see for the first time," he declared, "the power of Western science, art, and civilization."¹ The British Raj would take its place among many empires that had left their architectural legacy upon Delhi and, according to Town Planning Committee chairman George Swinton, it must "quietly dominate them all."² As the Committee's final report concluded, the placement of the government buildings would do more than form the heart of a new city: Government House and its flanking Secretariats would constitute "the keystone of the rule over the Empire of India"³ [Fig. 16].

Raisina Hill was selected as the focal point for a design of "quiet domination," and both Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker cited the Athenian acropolis and the Roman Capitol as inspirations, each having paid a visit to these ancient outcrops only weeks before embarking for India.⁴ Baker, who designed the Secretariats, insisted that these buildings share the acropolitian heights with the Lutyens-designed Viceroy's House, finding further precedent in the "stupendous platform" of Darius the Great at Persepolis.⁵ As Irving comments, "Baker envisaged his Secretariats as a worthy propyleum to Lutyens's Parthenon."⁶ The visitor would approach the raised trio of government buildings along the "King's Way" from the east, ascend past the plaza known as the "Great Place," and reach the wide steps,

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

² Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154-55.

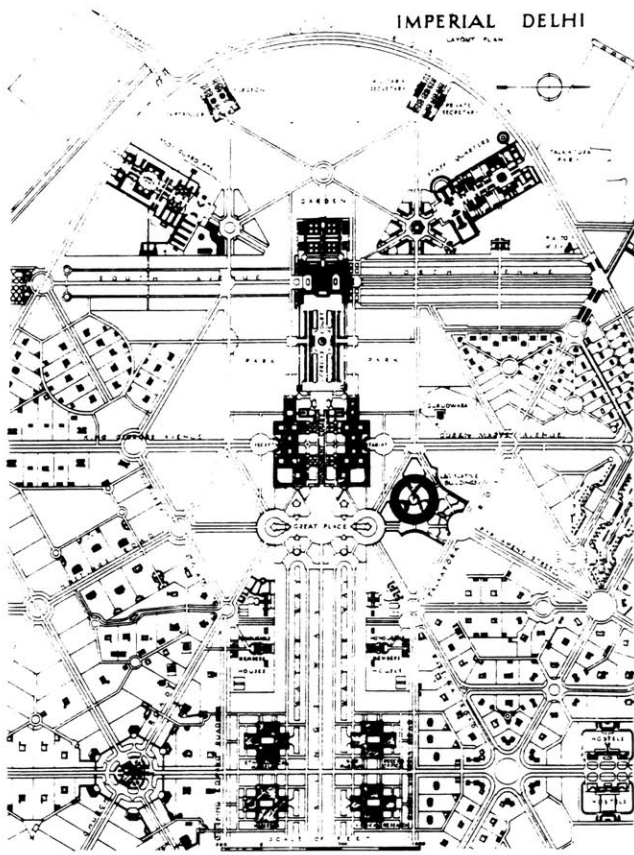
portico, and dome of Government House after passing between the massive Secretariats. To the architects, this spatial progression was deliberately symbolic: "The imagination is led from the machinery to the prime moving power itself."¹ Unfortunately, the spatial progression up the Raisina acropolis is severely weakened by the gradual disappearance of Government House from view by the steep rise of the hill, a fact that an angry Lutyens was to learn only after it proved too late to alter the gradient. "It is bad design," Lutyens complained, "to terminate an architectural vista and Avenue with a disappearing Target."² Though designed at a time when the it could still be said that the British Empire was a place where the "sun never set," the eclipse of this dome as it dipped below the western horizon did not augur well for the imperial future [Fig. 17].

Other parts of the Lutyens plan retain greater symbolic coherence. The principal parkway axis runs between the Raisina acropolis to the "All-India War Memorial Arch," and continues further east towards Indrapat, site of the oldest Delhi of all, Indraprastha. Branching off from the King's Way in a complex pattern of triangles and hexagons (reminiscent of both Washington and the contemporaneous Canberra³) are diagonals linking up those monuments from the past that Lutyens regarded as important. In this way,

¹ *Ibid.* p. 73.

² *Ibid.* p. 154. Perhaps looking for excuses, Baker (whom Lutyens held responsible for the blunder) emphasized that the approach to the Athenian acropolis and the Roman capitol each exhibit this same disappearance and reappearance of the major buildings. Others have suggested that Baker deliberately altered the gradient to enhance the prominence of his own buildings.

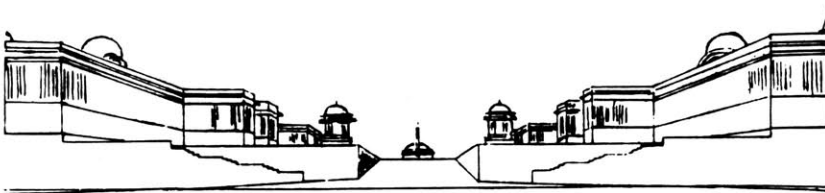
³ Griffin's selection as the planner of Canberra occurred just as the Town Planning Committee for Imperial Delhi were preparing their initial designs, and the Viceroy requested plans for Canberra from the Australian Governor-General. The Australian found it "interesting to note that those engaged in the building of the capital of one of the oldest of civilized countries are apparently not above accepting ideas from this, one of the youngest countries in the world" (cited in Irving, p. 87).



16. Plan of Imperial Delhi, Raisina Capitol Area



As Desired By Lutyens...



As Built...

17. The Disappearing Viceroy's House, New Delhi

the whole imperial history of Delhi was, symbolically, both conjoined and subjugated to the power of the British Raj. As Irving concludes:

Intended to express the achievements possible under British dominion, Imperial Delhi, as it was initially called, was also meant to be an appropriate backdrop for an autocracy as mighty as Rome of the Caesars. The capital's imperial flavor-- emphasized by processional avenues, imposing plazas, and impressive facades-- moved one critic to remark that the city suggested 'a setting for a perpetual Durbar.' Certainly the inclusion of King's Way and Queen's Way, triumphal avenues where a resplendent army could troop with awesome effect on the native spectator, was an inevitable part of the planning of the new city. Symbolically, these boulevards asserted the fact of British rule; practically, such wide avenues helped make authority without affectionate consent possible, expediting control in the event of disorder or uprising.¹

Whatever the degree of confidence in 1911, however, by the time the capital was completed twenty years later, British hegemony would already be widely challenged. It would seem no coincidence that Lutyens' bedtime reading, as he designed for the Raj, was Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.² As the architect noted in 1920, post-war architecture on the subcontinent was the British "swan song." As such, he wished that it might be "a good tune, well sung," a tribute to the dignity of both Britain and India.³

While this is not the place to assess Lutyens' talents at architectural synthesis between East and West, his effort is well worth noting. To an extent far greater than the designers of Washington and Canberra, Lutyens

¹ Ibid., p. 89.

² Ibid., p. 125.

³ Ibid., p. 125.

recognized the necessity of accommodating architectural design to the wishes of a diverse constituency. As Irving observes:

...[T]he question was not simply one of taste, but also of high politics. The Viceroy was quite clear on this point: he felt it would be a 'grave political blunder' to place a purely Western town on the Delhi plain. The public in India, he claimed, was very emphatic that the capital's principal buildings should have an Indian motif. He could not disregard this opinion, lest Indians justly complain he had ignored their tastes while asking them to underwrite the cost.¹

The new capital was not merely to be a site for British rule, but the place where Indians would learn, in time, to rule themselves. New Delhi-- unlike Calcutta-- was designed on the assumption of eventual Anglo-Indian joint administration. Yet the architectural provision for this eventuality was not made until well after construction of the city was underway. As a result, the "Council House" (as the present parliament house was then known) was given a site off to the side of the main axis of government, indicative of its existence as an appendage to the original plan. In this place, no matter how elaborate Baker's architectural treatment, at the scale of the city it remained a spatial reminder of Indian political subservience to the Viceregal acropolis of power.

With its legislative functions architecturally and topographically detached from the political and ceremonial center of its plan, the Indian capital reveals its colonial origins. Though Mahatma Gandhi, alert to the symbolism of capitols, characteristically talked about turning the Viceroy's House into a hospital after independence, his successors preferred to appropriate the buildings of the Raj for themselves. The Government House (known as the Viceroy's House after 1929) became the residence of India's President (a

¹ Ibid., p. 102.

largely ceremonial post), the Council House accommodated the Indian Parliament and the Secretariats remained home to an omnipresent bureaucracy. If, over time, the architectural associations of these buildings with the British Raj have dissipated, the juxtaposition of buildings nonetheless retains the British colonialist's view of the relationship between executive and parliamentary might. Though the government professes democracy, the city plan reinforces the long legacy of Delhi as an administrative center of empires.

Post-Colonial Designed Capitals: The First Generation

It is sometimes remarked that all philosophy may be construed as a footnote to Plato and Aristotle. To many architects and planners, Chandigarh and Brasília have this seminal status with regard to designed capital cities. Yet, as I have already argued, the genesis of the contemporary designed capitals has its roots much earlier-- as early, in fact, as the days of those erstwhile Greeks. In Chandigarh, and again in Brasília, the acropolitian origins of the capitol reemerge. In these places, and in many that have drawn inspiration from them, the application of modern architecture to the design of capital cities has only enhanced the privileged position of the capitol.

Chandigarh

Though Chandigarh was ostensibly intended to be a state capital for the Indian Punjab, its importance to India as a whole was inevitable from the very beginning [Fig.18]. If Imperial Delhi was to have been the capstone of



18. Map of India

British colonial rule, then Chandigarh was to be the symbol of independent India. In the aftermath of the partition that created Pakistan, the Punjab was itself divided and Lahore, its governmental, commercial and spiritual capital, no longer remained within India. Chandigarh, then, was intended as compensation to India for the loss of ancient Lahore. Its site was selected not only for its natural beauty and its access to transportation routes, but for its strategic distance from the border with hostile Pakistan. The planning of Chandigarh went forward against a background of political turmoil that would seem to be a microcosm of that facing all India. Not only were there millions of homeless Hindu refugees from Muslim Pakistan to contend with; there was also the everpresent tension between Hindu and Sikh, a schism which would eventually lead to a further partition of the bilingual Indian Punjab into two monolingual states in 1966. In short, though Chandigarh was described by Pandit Nehru as a "temple of the New India,"¹ there was enormous disunity among its worshippers.

In such circumstances, it would seem no coincidence that Nehru favored a place named for Chandi, the Hindu goddess of power, as an auspicious site for a new capital. After his first visit, he praised the site as "free from the existing encumbrances of old towns and old traditions" and extolled its potential to be "the first large expression of our creative genius flowering on our newly earned freedom."² With the constitutional machinery of the Punjabi state government in a shambles, the national government stepped in, passing necessary legislation and providing substantial financial subsidy

¹ Cited in William J.R. Curtis, Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 189.

² Ravi Kalia, Chandigarh: In Search of an Identity (Carbondale, IL: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1987), p. 12.

for the capital.¹ With the site selected, Nehru sought out the designers for his grand urban temple.

The long saga of the Chandigarh's design-- from the initial plans of Albert Mayer through the proposals of the tragically short-lived Matthew Nowicki to the domineering reign of Le Corbusier-- is well told elsewhere, and need not be repeated here.² I only wish to emphasize that each of these architects saw the importance of Chandigarh not only as an unrivalled opportunity to implement contemporary thinking about city planning; they also stressed the importance of Chandigarh as a symbol. Mayer put it most bluntly: "We are seeking symbols, to restore or to create pride and confidence in [the Indian] himself and in his country."³ In an April 1950 letter to his patron, Mayer expressed the breadth of his design agenda:

I feel in all solemnity that this [Chandigarh] will be a source of great stimulation to city building and re-planning in India. But I also feel that it will be the most complete synthesis and integration in the world to date of all that has been learned and talked of in planning over the last thirty years, but which no one has yet had the great luck to be allowed actually to create. Yet I feel we have been able to make it strongly Indian in feeling and function as well as modern.⁴

While the degree of Indian-ness of the resultant city has been a subject of much debate, I wish here to raise this question only with regard to the position of its capitol.

If the design of Chandigarh's capitol has any resonance with India, it is with the India of New Delhi's Raisina acropolis. What, in the hands of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

² In addition to Curtis and Kalia, see especially Stanislaus von Moos, Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), chapter 6, and Russell Walden, ed. The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), part five.

³ Kalia, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Lutyens and Baker was merely raised above the rest of the city, in Chandigarh becomes completely detached from it. Though reminiscent of certain ancient Chinese cities, this detachment is in marked contrast to the layout of traditional Indian cities, where the most important government functions were located in the heart of activity. In the plan of Chandigarh, the *caput mundi* takes on an especially anthropomorphic cast. As Jane Drew, responsible for the design of some of the housing sectors, put it: "The plan is almost biological in form. Its commanding head the capitol group, its heart the city commercial center, its hand the industrial area, its brain and intellectual centre in the parkland where are the museums, university, library, etc..."¹ Yet Ravi Kalia, in Chandigarh: In Search of an Identity, finds the plan to have significant historical resonance.

[By placing the 'thinking' function of the city analogous to that of the head in relationship to the body, Mayer was reaffirming the allegorical reference to the Indian caste structure in the story of Purusha (the Cosmic Man), in which his head represents the Brahmin (the priest-thinker), his arms represent the Kashtriya (the soldier), his thighs represent the Vaishya (commoner), and his feet represent the Sudra (slave).²

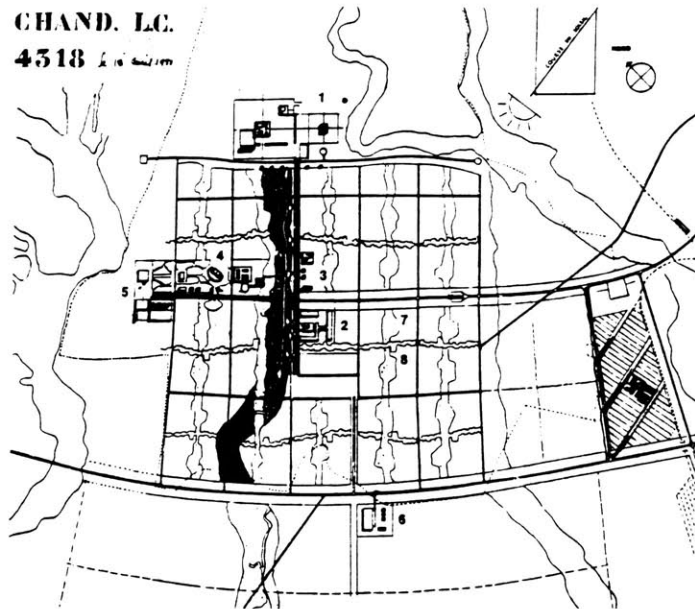
Whether any of this ever occurred to Mayer or how it could be construed as an appropriate city form for an emerging democracy, Kalia does not make clear. Nonetheless, the plan of Chandigarh must be seen as an unambiguous articulation of hierarchy and segregation [Figs. 19 and 20].

Though the Mayer plan underwent many transformations, the position of the capitol as its "head" remained unchallenged. Mayer, believing that the government functions should be "spiritually" detached, vetoed ideas to put it

¹ Ibid., p. 109.

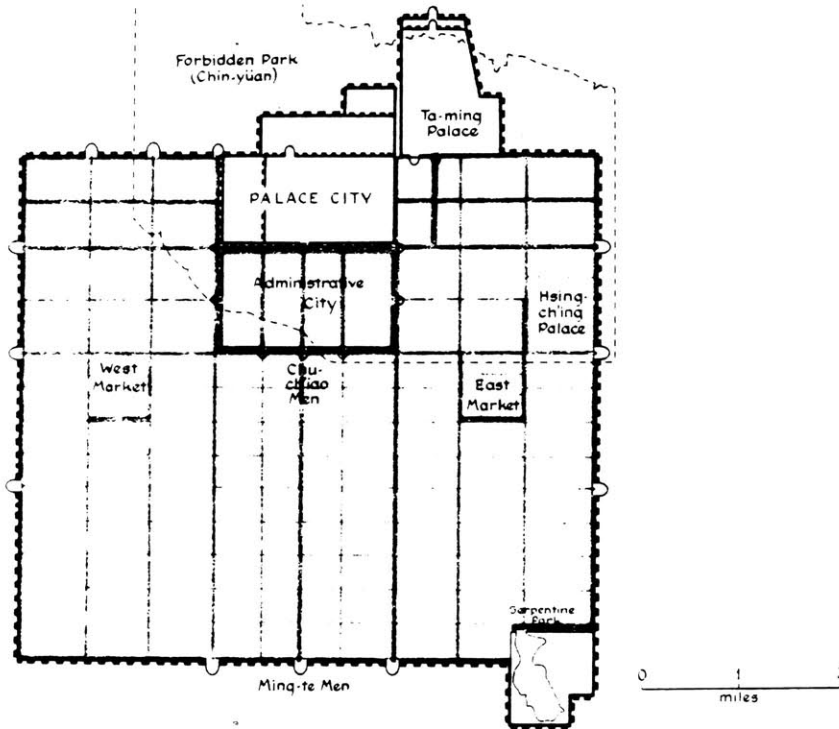
² Ibid., p. 59.

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1. Capitol complex
2. Central business district
3. Hotels, restaurants and visitors' center
4. Museums and stadium
5. University
6. Wholesale market
7. Park bands extending through residential areas
8. Shopping street (V4)

19. Chandigarh Plan, As Adapted by Le Corbusier



20. Plan of Chang'an (Xian), 700 A.D.

near other centers of employment and sited the "Capitol Complex" (as it is termed by most commentators) on a "dramatic" ridge to the north of the city, set off against the backdrop of hills. He further isolated the complex by placing it between two branches of the seasonally dry Sukhna Cho River, proposing to keep the river flowing through a system of dams, creating "a sort of glittering necklace encircling the group."¹ Within the capitol complex itself, Mayer also emphasized the need for appropriate symbolism. Though he recognized that the spatial requirements of the bureaucracy far exceeded those of the legislature, he felt strongly that, in a democracy, "spiritually and morally the hall of the people's representatives should dominate." He was acutely conscious of two instances where such symbolism had been distorted, one recent and nearby, the other still under construction in New York. He faulted both New Delhi "where the two Secretariat buildings dominate in size...because of their elevated location" and the United Nations headquarters "where the Secretariat of forty stories... dwarfs the Assembly building," and urged that Chandigarh have no tall buildings for bureaucracy.²

Matthew Nowicki, hired as Mayer's architectural assistant, proposed a novel way to let the profile of the Assembly predominate, while recognizing the greater spatial needs of the secretariat functions. Why not, he suggested, place "the legislative hall physically on top of the Secretariat structure, as a crowning shape above it." Mayer, however, rejected the idea calling it "too much of a tour de force."³ After Nowicki's death in a plane crash, the Indian government appointed Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret to take over the architectural implementation of Mayer's plan.

¹ Mayer, letter to Maxwell Fry, 31 January 1951, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 59.

² Kalia, p. 60.

³ Mayer, letter to Nowicki's brother Jacek, 21 August 1959, cited in Kalia, p. 66.

With Le Corbusier in charge of the Capitol design and exercising his usual influence over everything else, Mayer's role was almost immediately subordinated. Fry found Nowicki's sketches for the capitol buildings to be "rather romantically based on Indian idioms" and thought Mayer's site for the complex ill-chosen.

I studied the Mayer plan and found by projecting sections along major road lines that the Capitol buildings which he saw enlaced with water were rather like Lutyens' Viceregal Palace at New Delhi, largely eclipsed by the profile of the approach road.¹

Corbusier altered the position of the capitol complex to make certain of maximum visibility for his buildings, retaining the idea of "la tête," but placing it at an elevated level slightly to the northeast of the city.² He abandoned the idea of the water "necklace" as impractical and eliminated all housing from the vicinity of the government center as well.³ What resulted was a 220 acre enclave, "an acropolis of monuments" separated from the nearest housing by a canal and a boulevard, reached by way of a wide approach road that allowed the capitol complex to radiate its dominance for miles.⁴ Trees, pools, sunken roadways and an artificial horizon of manmade hills combine to block the view of lesser structures and activities, affirming the imperious presence of the Corbusian government citadel. In a sketchbook notation of November 1952, Corbusier emphasized the privileged position of the capitol in no uncertain terms: "Attention! [On the] city side,

¹ Maxwell Fry, "Le Corbusier at Chandigarh," in *Walden*, ed., p. 353.

² *Ibid.*, p. 354.

³ *Kalia*, p. 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

the capitol must be enclosed by a continuous glacis [consisting] of a horizontal embankment. (Hide all construction of the city.)"¹

On the north side of the capitol, facing the Himalaya rather than the city, Corbusier's attitude was completely different. In a sketchbook entry from February 1954 in which he described the buildings to the south as "l'ennemi," he also noted "that the artificial hills must close off the south, and not the north..."² On the Himalayan side, he insisted, "it is admirable [to] let the cultures and the flocks run right up against a parapet," though he worried that "goats will come gobble up everything."³ For Corbusier, the Chandigarh capitol was to be, in the words of the editor of his sketchbooks, the "last outpost of civilization before the Himalayas."⁴

Though the design of the individual buildings bears little resemblance to the work of Lutyens and Baker on the Raisina acropolis, it seems clear, as Stanislaus von Moos argues, that Corbusier intended his effort to be "the Indian answer to the New Delhi Capitol."⁵ In his preference for the axial vista leading to a privileged high place, Corbusier followed not only Lutyens but also L'Enfant, Haussmann and Griffin. In emphasizing the view beyond the privileged high place, however, he parts company with these earlier planners. Corbusier does far more than lead the eye of the visitor to the capitol, his architecture leads the eye through it to the dramatic landscape of the Indian Punjab. The capitol is both the home of government and the

¹ Le Corbusier, Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, Volume 2 (1950-1954), edited by Françoise de Franclieu (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), sketchbook F26, no. 826.

² Le Corbusier, Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, Volume 3 (1954-1957), edited by Françoise de Franclieu (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), sketchbook H31, no. 23, 14 February 1954.

³ Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, Volume 2, sketchbook G28, no. 951, 14 June 1953.

⁴ Françoise de Franclieu, in Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, Volume 4 (1957-1965) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), introduction to sketchbook P59.

⁵ von Moos, p. 259.

place from which the rural parts of the territory that is governed may be surveyed.

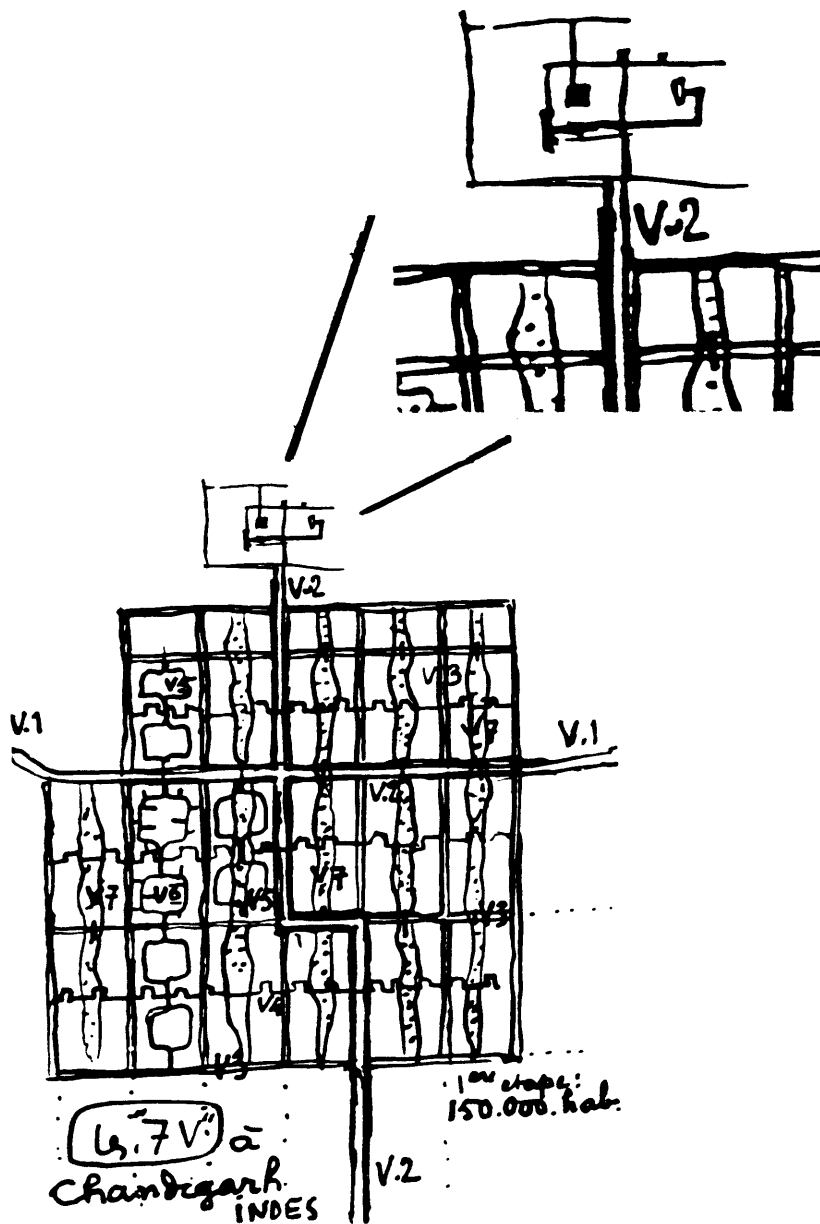
In his layout of the buildings within the capitol, Corbusier's work exhibits both remarkable continuity with Lutyens and significant departures. Though much of Corbusier's Capitol plan was prefigured in his own work, especially his designs for the League of Nations headquarters and the Mundaneum, it seems significant that Corb, like Lutyens, placed the "Governor's Palace"-- and not the Assembly-- in the premiere position. As Stanislaus von Moos comments:

Through all the stages of its development...the complex remained visually dominated by the Governor's Palace. This building, drastically overscaled in the initial stages of its planning, was designed to "crown the Capitol" similarly to the way Lutyens's Viceroy's House crowned the city of New Delhi.¹

In the Corbusian view of political power, the executive still reigned supreme [Fig. 21]. Ironically, it would be through the exercise of this very power that the Capitol would take on a less-imperial form. At the urging of Nehru, sensitive to this decidedly undemocratic bit of architectural juxtaposition, the Governor's Palace was never built.

Though nearly every commentator on the Chandigarh capitol has stressed the primacy of the Governor's Palace over the other buildings, it seems likely that this was not Corbusier's intention. While it is true that the Governor's Palace presented both the highest and most active silhouette of Corbusier's government quartet, the architect simultaneously used a variety of architectural devices to diminish its apparent centrality. In his detailed analysis of the Governor's Palace, Alexander Gorlin concurs with von Moos,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

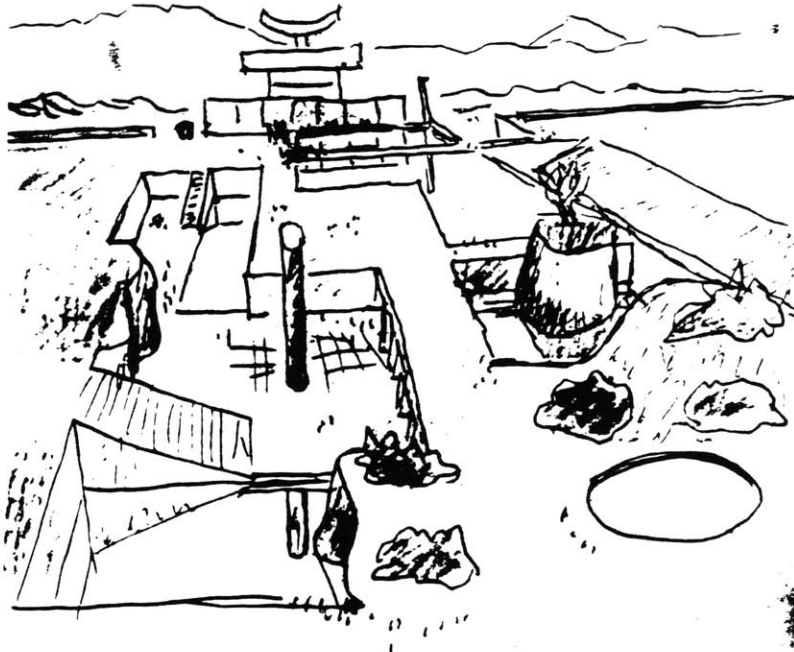


21. Early Sketch Showing Corbusier's Axial Approach to Governor's Palace

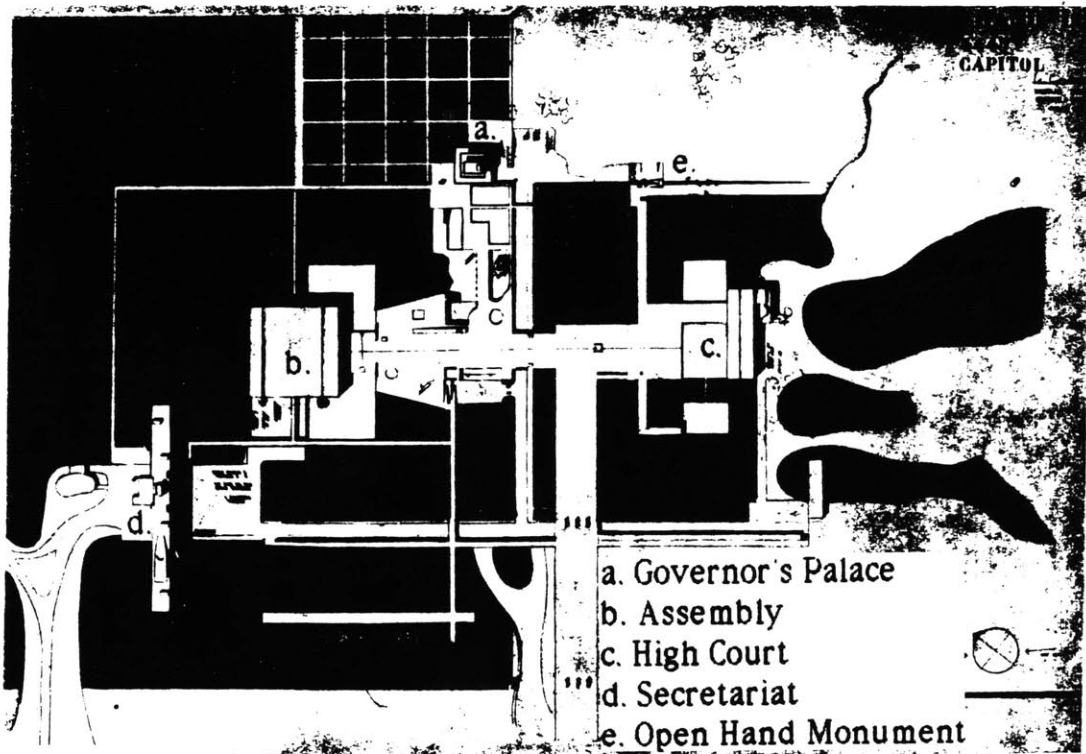
describing this building as "the apex of the capital city" and noting that the "crown of the capital" appellation is Corbusier's own indication of the building's importance.¹ Seen alone in Corbusier's one-point perspective sketch where the roofline of the building eclipses even the mountain range beyond, the Palace appears both central and decidedly crown-like [Fig. 22]. In the model and site plan, however, it appears far less prominently enthroned [Fig. 23]. Not only would it would have been partially hidden by the artificial mounds placed to block out the city, it is also the building placed furthest back, reached on foot only after traversing a complex and non-axial approach. By car, it could be reached only from the side. The non-direct approach, according to Gorlin, replaced the "deep space" of the Beaux Arts processional axis with a device intended to decrease the perceptual distance to the building, and tie it more closely into the plaza that links the Assembly and High Court. Far from deliberate subordination of the rest of the design to the centrality of the Governor's Palace, Le Corbusier feared that this building would be "lost in the background" and, revising his initial axial sketches, took steps to mitigate the problem.² Whereas Lutyens designed the Governor's Palace as the single focus of a long perspective (and even managed, however unintentionally, to build it at the vanishing point), Le Corbusier's Governor's Palace was to be one building among many, a participant in a complex system of plazas and framed views. Significantly, when the Palace was dropped from the scheme, the need for a pavilion in that particular place did not disappear. Le Corbusier sought to replace the Governor with a Museum of Knowledge. Thus, the placement of the

¹ Alexander Gorlin, "An Analysis of the Governor's Palace of Chandigarh," *Oppositions* 18?, p. 161. The Corbusier comment may be found in his *Oeuvre Complète 1952-1957*, ed. W. Boesiger (Zurich: Girsberger, 1957), p. 102.

² Gorlin, pp. 161 and 166.



22. Corbusier Sketch of Approach to the Chandigarh Capitol's "Crown"



23. Plan of Capitol Complex, Chandigarh

Governor's Palace was more than a symbol of political relationships. To Le Corbusier, it was also a necessary formal element, transcending programmatic function, in a rich composition.

Whatever the formal qualities, what remained remained without the Governor's Palace was a different political ideogram, with Assembly and High Court facing each other across a pedestrian-defying expanse of plazas. The elongated slab of the Secretariat was lodged further off-center than the other two buildings, thereby acknowledging and accepting its secondary symbolic status. Moreover, because it was placed parallel to the approach road, its bulk was minimized, at least when viewed from a distance. Each building is an extraordinary architectural achievement, both in relation to Corbusier's earlier work and as an attempt to devise a new symbolism for government buildings that attempts to be both modern and evocative of Indian climate and traditions. Though it may be that no subsequent architect designing in a new capital has marshalled an equivalent richness of imagery, many have imitated his idea of the capitol complex. It is this idea, born in antiquity and revived whenever new capital cities have been designed, that received its first modern architectural treatment at Chandigarh.

Brasília

If the creation of a new capital for the Indian Punjab was demanded by immediate political conditions resulting from partition, the creation of Brasília was the outcome of just the opposite situation-- a perennial longing for Brazilian geopolitical integration. Though Brazil had been legally independent from Portugal since 1822, Brasília may still be considered a post-colonial capital. Colonial urban patterns persisted long after independence. With the fifth largest land area in the world, eighty percent of the Brazilian population still lives within two hundred miles of the coast, a legacy of the colonial days when cities were located to serve as ports for the export of raw materials to Europe.¹ The capital, located in Salvador during the 16th-18th centuries and in Rio de Janeiro thereafter, had always remained tied to the Atlantic. By contrast, the vast interior remained largely unknown. When visited at all, it was explored chiefly by Jesuit missionaries in search of converts, cattlemen in search of pasture, and by *bandeirantes* (the Brazilian counterpart of *conquistadores*) in search of Indian slaves, gold and precious stones.² It would take the advent of Brasília for this centripetal pattern of migration to be instituted more permanently [Fig 24].

Though construction of the inland capital did not begin until the late 1950s, the transfer was said to be an issue as early as 1761, and was mentioned in a newspaper editorial as early as 1813:

This location, quite central, where the capital of the Empire ought to be located, seems to us to be indicated as the very elevated region of her

¹ Though late-developing São Paulo is not an Atlantic port, it is nonetheless a primary source for the export of coffee. See Alex Shoumatoff, The Capital of Hope: Brasília and Its People (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987 [original 1980]) p. 12.

² Shoumatoff, p. 13.



24. Frontier Capital: Brasilia

territory, whence would descend the orders [of the government], just as there descends the waters which go to the Tocantins River to the north, the Plate to the south, and the São Francisco to the east.¹

With remarkable precision, this passage describes the area-- with streams leading to three great river systems-- that would be chosen for the Federal District 150 years later. The new capital would represent a watershed for Brazilian development, literally as well as figuratively.

For a long time, however, the inland capital remained a dream. In 1823, José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, known as the "Patriarch of Independence," submitted a document to the Constituent Assembly proposing an interior capital to be called "Brasília" (or, alternatively, "Petrópolis," after independent Brazil's first Emperor, Pedro I). Fearing the military vulnerability of Rio, he sought a safer alternative. Yet, also at the heart of the desire to transfer the capital was a deeply felt need to assert control over the sprawling new empire, by moving to claim its demographic -- if not geographic-- center. Nothing happened to give effect to this idea during the nineteenth century but, following the establishment of the Brazilian Republic in 1889, a provision in the 1891 Constitution raised the question anew. An 1892 expedition demarcated a district for the proposed city and, in 1922 to commemorate the independence centennial, a foundation stone was laid. Though the constitutional provision was reiterated in the new constitutions of 1934 and 1946, and exploration and site selection took place between 1948-1955, there was still little evidence that the new capital would progress beyond its single stone.²

¹ Furtado de Mendonça, cited in Shoumatoff, p. 60.

² David G. Epstein, Brasília: Plan and Reality (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 42-46.

In 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek, campaigning for President on a law-and-order platform calling for strict compliance with the Constitution, pledged to build Brasília. In a country where public officials are closely identified with the public works they commission, the President who was elected with only about one third of the total vote, saw an opportunity for immortality. In a land where Presidents were permitted only a single five-year term, he knew that immortality would have to be developed very quickly. As Alex Shoumatoff puts it:

Juscelino was determined that his name should go down in history as the founder of the new capital; and to defeat the resistance that would inevitably arise, it would be necessary to make the move irreversable by the time his five-year term in office was complete.¹

Finding Rio overcrowded, European-oriented, prone to political ferment and saddled with an indolent bureaucracy, Kubitschek hoped that a physical move could engender a change in mentality as well. He saw himself as the spiritual heir to Peter the Great but, whereas his Russian precursor had sought to build a "window on the West," the Brazilian fenestration would face Brazil's own interior.² In his memoir, Why I Built Brasília, Kubitschek wrote that "During our entire history, from the Discovery to my regime, we lived, to use the observation of our first historian, Friar Vincent of Salvador, 'scratching the sand of the beach, like crabs.'"³ In moving the crustaceans of government inland, the President dubbed by the press as the "Brazilian

¹ Shoumatoff, p. 39.

² Ibid., p. 22.

³ Ibid., p. 30.

Pharoah"¹ saw Brasília as part of a larger push for rapid development, consolidating "fifty years in five."² As Brasília's planner, Lúcio Costa, puts it:

Brasília was really Kubitschek's creation. To modernize the country he launched a series of measures; he opened new iron mines, built up the Navy, attracted foreign industry, especially automotive. He constructed an arch of which Brasília was the keystone, keeping all the others in place.³

"With what now seems shrewd political insight," Norma Evenson comments, "Kubitschek seems to have sensed that the Brazilian people were ready for an adventure, and that popular imagination would respond to such a grand gesture more readily than to pedestrian and 'practical' enterprises."⁴ And, indeed, one look at the automobile-inspired expanses of Costa's city confirms that Brasília is anything but pedestrian.⁵

Costa's "Pilot Plan" for the city, selected in 1957 after an international competition, took up the Kubitschek challenge to initiate accelerated development. As a diagram (and Costa's proposal was really no more than this) the city plan conveyed multiple images of flight. Whether one saw it as a bird, an airplane or a dragonfly, it instilled a sense of rapid forward motion very much in keeping with the slogans of the ambitious President. Lest his "Pilot" Plan's metaphoric potential be lost on anyone, Costa added an extra hint, labelling the two sides of the Residential Axis, "North Wing" and South Wing" [Fig. 25].

¹ Norma Evenson, "Brasilia: 'Yesterday's City of Tomorrow,'" in H. Wentworth Eldredge, ed. World Capitals: Toward Guided Urbanization (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 475.

² Cited in Epstein, p. 38.

³ Shoumatoff, p. 38.

⁴ Evenson, "Brasilia..." p. 476.

⁵ Costa himself advocated an elaborate pedestrian system, but this aspect-- to his great frustration--was not realized.

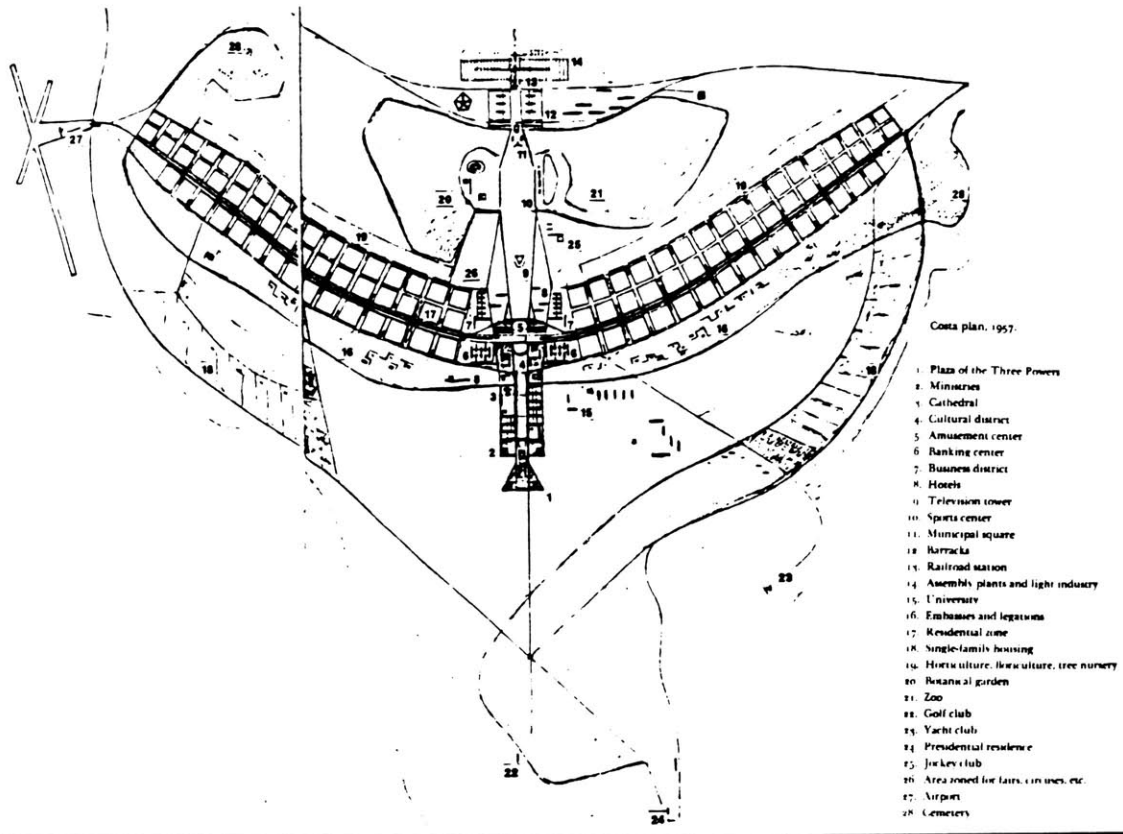
Calling Brasília "not the result of regional planning, but the cause," Costa described its foundation as "a deliberate act of conquest, a gesture of pioneers acting in the spirit of their colonial traditions."¹ Given that Brazilian "colonial traditions" included such diverse endeavors as mass extermination and enslavement of the indigenous population and the exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of foreigners, Costa's words have more than their intended resonance. The colonial phenomenon that his drawings invoke, however, is the conquest of the missionary. The plan, he wrote, "was born of that initial gesture which anyone would make when pointing to a given place, or taking possession of it: the drawing of two axes crossing each other at right angles, in the sign of the Cross"² [Fig. 26]. In Brazil, home to the world's largest population of Roman Catholics, such a gesture surely connotes more than the secularity of the ancient *cardo* and *decumanus*. One commentator has gone so far as to suggest that the plan represents not only a cross but a crucifix, and further relates this choice to the prophetic dreams of Father (later Saint) Giuseppe Bosco who, while in Italy in 1883, described his visions of the inland South American city and its lake,³ an "inconceivable richness" that "will happen in the third generation."⁴ The first masonry structure that went up in Brasília was his shrine. However tempting it may be to search for deeper Catholic overtones in Costa's plan, the distinction between a crossing and a Cross probably means nothing in terms of the way Brasília is now perceived, though the imagery may well have contributed to

¹ Cited in Evenson, "Brasília....," p. 481.

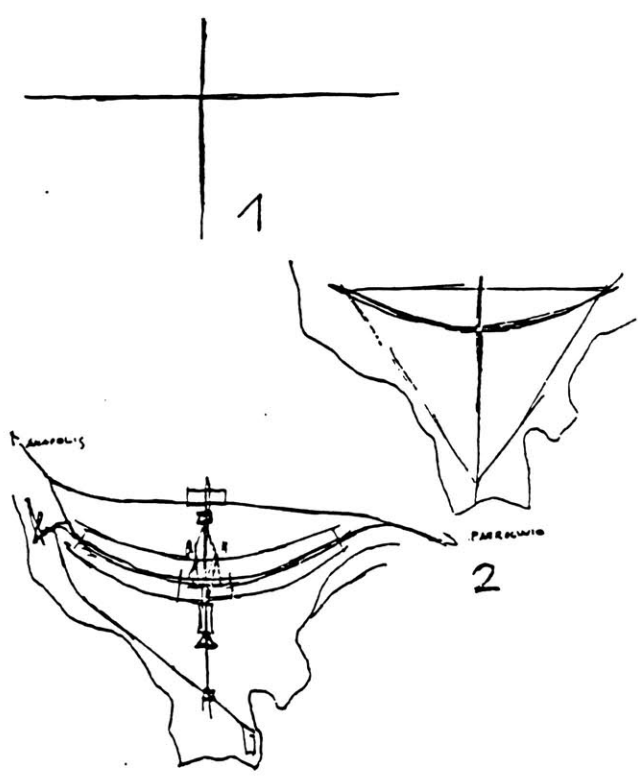
² Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 481.

³ See L. Arturo Espejo, Rationalité et formes d'occupation de l'espace: le projet de Brasília (Paris: Editions Anthrops, 1984).

⁴ Cited in Shoumatoff, p. 19.



25. Costa Plan of 1957



26. Preliminary Studies for Costa Plan

the direct appeal of the drawing as a competition entry.¹ In Costa's plan, the sign of the Cross marks neither church nor capitol; his "Monumental Axis" and his "Residential Axis" come together at a massive traffic interchange. Raised on the Athens Charter, the new Jesuits spread the gospel of modern autos and modern architecture.

In Costa's plan, as in all of the designed capitals that preceded it, the focus of the city is its capitol, located not at the point of crossing but at the culmination of the major axis. This capitol complex, designated in Brasília as the Three Powers Plaza (Praça dos Três Poderes), contains the buildings for the three branches of national government-- the Congress (legislative halls and secretariat), the Plateau Palace (executive offices) and the Supreme Court-- as well as a museum devoted to Brasília's history. The museum, a windowless building whose flat facade is broken by an enormous head of Juscelino Kubitschek, houses the texts of his speeches, carved into the walls in enormous letters.² All of these buildings were designed by Oscar Niemeyer, who had been associated with Kubitschek since 1940 and who had served on the jury that selected Costa's plan. Niemeyer, like Costa, was a Brazilian disciple of Le Corbusier and, though I have found no evidence of any direct inspiration from Chandigarh, the Brasília capitol design draws heavily upon the United Nations headquarters, a project which engaged the services of both Niemeyer and Corb.

¹ It may be noted, however, that of the six jurors it was the three non-Brazilians (Stamo Papadaki, André Sive, and William Holford) and Niemeyer who most strongly favored Costa's competition scheme. One Brazilian juror, - Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, who represented the Institute of Brazilian Architects, refused to sign the verdict and submitted a separate report (see Norma Evenson, Two Brazilian Capitals: Architecture and Urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 121-22.

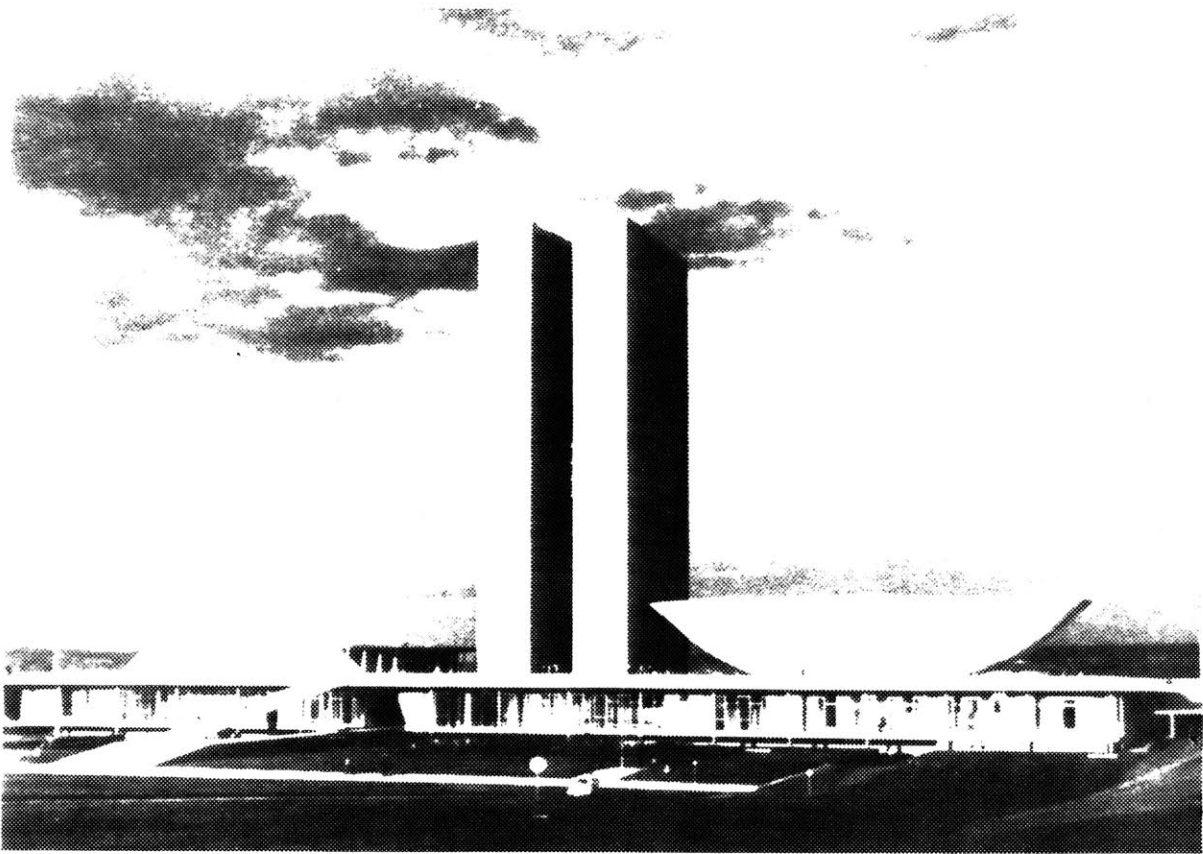
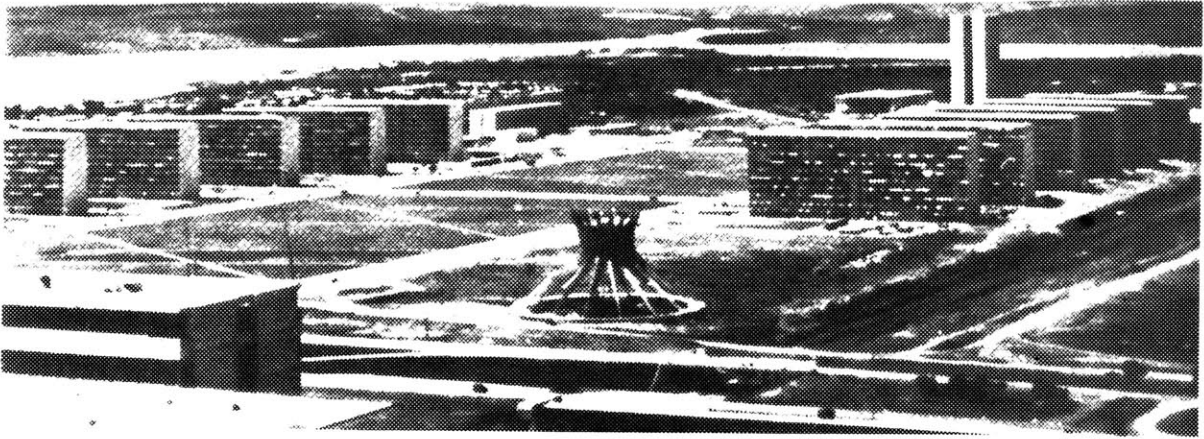
² Epstein, p. 55.

As in the "world parliament" for New York, the dominant element of the Brasília capitol is its skyscraper secretariat. In Brasília, the slender slab of the UN tower has been given a siamese twin, umbilically joined by a walkway. The symbolic dominance of the bureaucracy over the Assembly, so vehemently and repeatedly decried by Lewis Mumford with regard to the UN,¹ is repeated on the Brazilian plateau. Yet, in the Brasília capitol, unlike the UN, the dome-and-bowl Assembly chambers also stand out as distinctive shapes; though the quirky twin towers may dominate, the Assembly chambers also remain part of this central and distinctly memorable image of Brasília² [Fig. 27].

Niemeyer's capitol complex provides another new twist. Through elaborate regrading, the portion of the "Monumental Axis" that is flanked by ministry buildings is made flat, enabling the capitol complex, oriented transversely at the end of the Axis, to rise abruptly above it. The pedestrian, wishing to reach the government buildings, is confronted by a glass acropolis, surmountable by a concrete ramp. Once up the ramp and past the propylaeum of the paired Secretariat, the pedestrian reaches the Three Powers Plaza. In Brasília, unlike Washington or New Delhi, the end of the axis is not the end of the capitol. Instead, as at Chandigarh, the ultimate destination is not a single building but a plaza with a panoramic view of the landscape beyond. And, as at Le Corbusier's capitol, once presented with the plaza and the drama of the distant view into the landscape, much of the rest of the city of Brasília is blocked from sight. From the Three Powers Plaza,

¹ See Lawrence J. Vale, "Designing Global Harmony: Lewis Mumford and the United Nations Headquarters," included in a book of essays on Mumford (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

² In the placement of the legislative chambers on the roof of a long low building containing offices and support facilities, Niemeyer's work may well have been influenced by Nowicki's unexecuted design for Chandigarh.



27. Ministries Flanking Mall Axis and Ramp Approach to the Plaza of the Three Powers

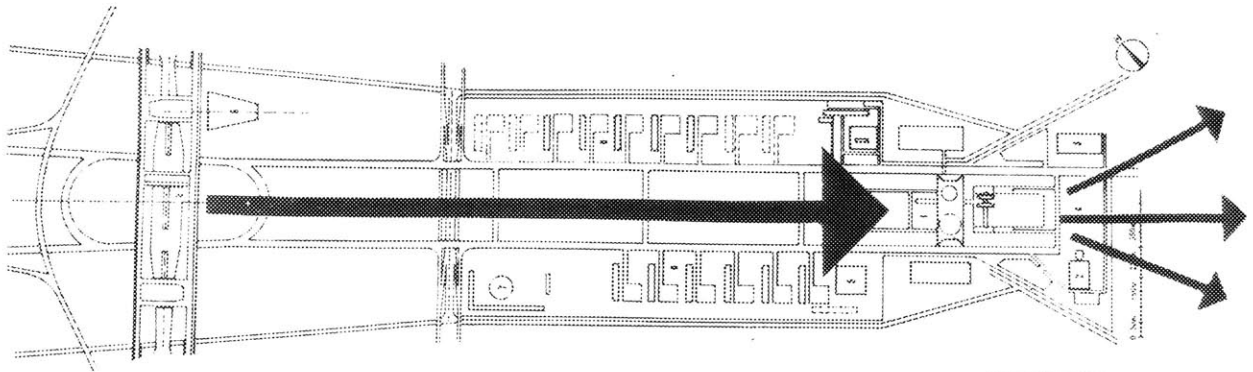
open wide to embrace the clouds and the view of Lake Paranoá, the city center is barely visible. Kubitschek's head gazes not towards the city he inspired but towards the open landscape and his Presidential Palace on the lake¹ [Figs. 28 and 29].

Even in the name "Monumental Axis," Costa made clear his desire for a clear architectural hierarchy, emphasizing the presence of government. The cross-axial Pilot Plan insured maximum visibility for the highest structures on the Monumental Axis: the 28-story Secretariat slabs and the TV tower. Each, in its own way, was an appropriate symbol of government administration, though neither would satisfy a Lewis Mumford. Evenson suggests that the jury selecting Costa's plan for Brasília felt that Rio lacked "a ceremonial focus." Because "government buildings were more or less integrated with the commercial buildings of the city," she writes, there was no adequate consciousness of the city as a "capital."² Costa's capital consciousness was undeniable. "The *monument*, in the case of a capital," he wrote in 1962, "is not an afterthought, that can be left for later, as in the modern little English cities, the *monument* here is intrinsic to the thing itself, and opposed to the...city which one wishes discreetly inscribed into the landscape, the capital city must be imposed and command [the landscape]."³ And, as is the case in other designed capitals, it is politically very revealing to note which buildings command the landscape most insistently.

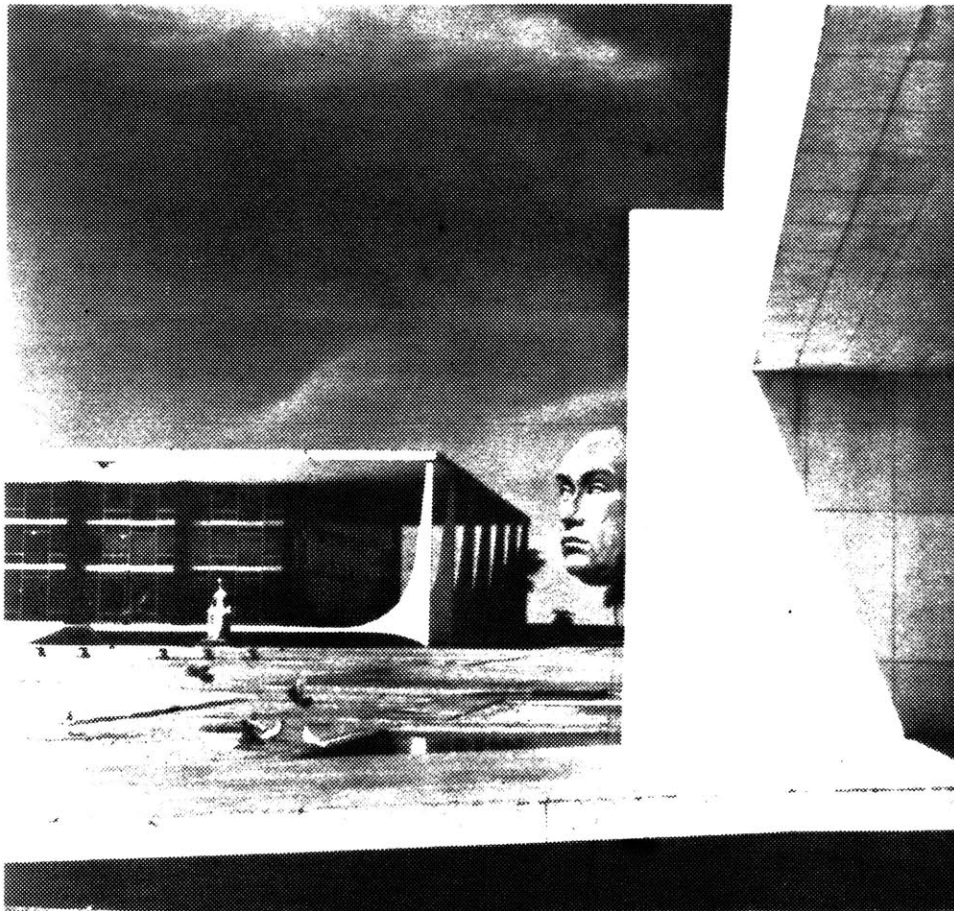
¹ The inscription accompanying the sculpted head reads in translation: "To President Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira, who tamed the wilderness and raised Brasília with audacity, energy and confidence, the homage of the pioneers who helped in the great adventure" [cited in Norma Evenson, *Two Brazilian Capitals...*, p. 199, note 21.]

² Evenson, "Brasília..." p. 478.

³ Cited in Epstein, p. 51. Epstein notes that the diminutive *cidadezinhas* translated as "little cities," is employed "in quite a pejorative sense."



28. Monumental Axis, But Open to the Landscape



29. Kubitschek Surveying the Countryside

It is not, of course, the whole of Brasília which commands the landscape, but chiefly the buildings of the Monumental Axis and, especially, the monuments of the capitol complex. On reaching the capitol complex, however, the relationship of building to landscape is reversed. From the Plaza of the Three Powers, however, it is the landscape which commands the buildings. In the thousand-foot expanse that separates the Planalto Palace from the Supreme Court, there is a fourth power-- the Plaza itself. As Niemeyer describes it, the forms of the government "palaces" are inextricably tied to his goals for the plaza:

...[W]hen thinking out the forms for those Palaces, I also bore in mind the kind of mood they would impart to the Plaza of the Three Powers. It should not seem, as I saw it, cold and technical, ruled by the classical, hard and already obvious purity of straight lines. On the contrary, I visualized it with a richness of forms, dreams and poetry, like the mysterious paintings of Carzou, new forms, startling visitors by their lightness and creative liberty; forms that were not anchored to the earth rigidly and statically, but uplifted the Palaces as though to suspend them, white and ethereal, in the endless nights of the highlands...¹

Costa, too, stressed the importance of the triangular plaza in his triangular plan and, like Niemeyer, emphasized the formal relationships among buildings more than the political relationships among branches of government.

The highlights in the outline plan of the city are the public buildings which house the fundamental powers. These are three, and they are autonomous: therefore the equilateral triangle-- associated with the very earliest architecture in the world-- is the elementary frame best suited to express them....At each angle of the triangular plaza-- the Plaza of the Three Powers, as it might be called-- stands one of the

¹ Cited in Evenson, Two Capitals..., p. 204.

three buildings: the Government Palace and the Supreme Court at the base; the Congress Building at the tip.¹

Equilateral triangles, though do not make for equilateral politics. In the political ideogram for Brasília, though little effort was made to diminish the appearance of the Secretariat in relation to the Assembly chambers (the Senate meets under the dome, the House of Representatives in the bowl), legislative functions do predominate.

There is surely some irony in this, given the all-powerful executive needed to make Brasília a reality during one man's five-year term. Israel Pinheiro, President of the New Town Corporation (NOVACAP), made clear the relationship between executive and legislature. Asked to explain how he managed to obtain all necessary funds to move forward without getting bogged down by parliamentary committees, he responded: "We have fixed a D-Day-- April 21, 1960. The town must be ready then. I have said to Parliament, 'If you criticize me, you do not get your town.'"² Costa put it even more succinctly: "We have to finish in five years or the forest will come back."³

Kubitschek's team met this deadline, and the city was inaugurated with ten months still remaining in the President's term. It is this accelerated timetable and abbreviated period of Presidential tenure which may well have greatly affected the symbolic juxtaposition of the buildings. Perhaps because he realized that he would not remain as President long enough to set up his office at the Three Powers Plaza, Kubitschek established his own presence in other ways. Rather than leave a prominent building in the capitol complex for his presidential successors, Kubitschek marked the

¹ Evenson, "Brasília....," p. 483.

² Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 488.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

executive presence on the Brazilian *caput mundi* with his own head, suitably enlarged.

Equally indicative of the place of the executive within the "three powers" was Kubitschek's ability to build his own residence before anything else. What appears on Costa's Pilot Plan almost as an afterthought, a numbered notation located on the faded periphery of his drawing, was in fact designed first, independent of the plan, and became Brasília's most elaborate structure, the Dawn Palace. "I chose the name myself," Kubitschek explained, "What else will Brasília be...if not the dawn of a new day for Brazil?"¹

It is this quality of being "new" and modern that, perhaps, remains at the heart of Brasília's symbolism, more than the design of any one particular building. It may well be, as Evenson has observed, that few Brazilians will take much note of the symbolic juxtaposition of the structures, though surely they are made aware of the architectural presence of the Congress in an unprecedented way. As Evenson comments, "The government complex photographs effectively and is not without its own sense of poetic drama. The National Assembly, moreover, easily recognizable and frequently reproduced throughout the country, has provided Brazil with its first truly national architectural symbol."² It is a symbolism based entirely on future aspirations, a modern tableau set out for a society still enamored by the prospects of mechanization. Writing in the early 1970s, Evenson observed that:

Brasilia tends to reflect a somewhat dated glorification of the machine; yet because Brazil is an unmechanized, relatively unindustrialized country, the facade of modern technology retains an appeal it may have

¹ Shoumatoff, p. 54.

² Evenson, "Brasilia...", p. 503.

lost elsewhere. The automobile in Brazil is not a commonplace possession; the romance of the machine is still a thrilling thing, and to have built an entire city to the scale of the motorcar is a source of great pride.¹

To the extent that Niemeyer's work exemplifies a Brazilian contribution to the International Style, it is in the lightness with which he employs curvilinear forms. His work on the Three Powers Plaza makes no overt reference to anything that is specifically Brazilian, though Niemeyer himself claims to have forged "a link with the old architecture of colonial Brazil, not by the obvious use of the elements common to those days, but by expressing the same plastic intention, the same love of curves and richly refined forms that is so telling a characteristic of the colonial style."² Though Niemeyer's curvilinear geometries may be said to resonate with the curves of the Brazilian baroque and art nouveau architecture of Rio, these highly abstracted forms are much more immediately related to other developments in modern architecture than they are to memories of past capitals or ongoing vernacular traditions. The sleek curvilinear forms may arguably have entered modern architecture in great profusion first in Brazil, but soon this style proliferated elsewhere, in work such as Harrison and Abramovitz's egg-shaped Albany Performing Arts Center and in buildings by Minoru Yamasaki, among many others. Brasília's modernity places the city at a specific moment in the history of architecture and urbanism, but it cultivates "Brazilian-ness" in only the most abstract of ways. Brasília is Brazilian because it is in Brazil, is named for Brazil and because its overall plan emphasizes the connection of the city to the larger landscape of its place. As

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

² Cited in Evenson, *Two Brazilian Capitals*, p. 197.

Evenson puts it, the "essential purpose" of Brasília is "...to exist where it is."¹ Nationalism is in the act, not in the forms.

As a frozen moment in the history of modern architecture, the monumental center of Brasília may well be unrivalled in its sheer totality of built form; as a political ideogram for Brazil, it is equally forward-looking. Brasília was an executively-directed project designed to demonstrate the power of the legislature, in symbol if not in fact. For people used to the rule of church and autocrat, a city which has as its centerpiece the mechanism for constitutional government (even if it is the administrative part that dominates) may represent a significant step forward. Yet, only four years after Brasília was inaugurated, Brazil suffered a military coup. It would be more than twenty years before a semblance of democracy would return. Until 1985, the bold architectural presence of the Congress, front and center, was entirely irrelevant. Since the return of an elected civilian President, there is more temptation to revive André Malraux's term "The Capital of Hope," but little reason to think that the politics of Brazil will soon emulate the democratic ideals of the capitol complex plan.

Post-Colonial Capitals: The Second Generation

Since the design of Chandigarh and Brasília, the leadership of many other countries has promoted many diverse attempts to design new capital cities. Few have devoted the money and resources that went into the seminal projects in India and Brazil; fewer still have employed well-known architects and planners. Yet, from Islamabad in Pakistan (selected for geopolitical

¹ Evenson, "Brasília...", p. 503.

reasons after partition) to Belmopan in Belize (designed after Hurricane Hattie decimated the coastal capital in 1961) to the Argentinian proposal to build its own version of Brasília in Patagonia,¹ new capitals continue to sprout up all over the world, especially in post-colonial Africa. The only thing they all seem to have in common is that all major stages of planning, design and construction have been directed by American, European or South African consultants and contractors. Mauritania and Botswana had to build new capitals because, after independence, the cities from which they had previously been administered ceased to be within their boundaries.² Malawi announced the transfer of its capital from Zomba to Lilongwe (close to the heartland of President Banda's ethnic group) in 1965, though the capital-- replete with its "capital hill"--was still without its planned parliament building³ twenty years later.³ The Ivory Coast has embarked on a move to Yamoussoukro (the home village of its President and founding father, Felix Houphouet-Boigny); neighboring Liberia plans a move out of Monrovia to a rural area as well.⁴

Of all the second generation capitals, two seem of particular relevance to the present discussion, each adding a different dimension. The most ambitious and monumental of the second generation of post-colonial

¹ See Kevin C. Kearns, "Belmopan: Perspective on a New Capital," The Geographical Review, v. 63, April 1973, pp. 147-69 and Sten Ake Nilsson, The New Capitals of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, trans. Elisabeth Andreasson (Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur, 1973) and Randall Hackley, "A Lovely Madness"--Argentina Builds New Capital in Patagonia," Jerusalem Post, 7 July 1987.

² See A.C.G. Best, "Gaborone: Problems and Prospects of a New Capital," Geographical Review, vol. 69, 1970, pp. 1-14. I have seen nothing published on the Mauritanian capital in English.

³ See Deborah Potts, "Capital Relocation in Africa: The Case of Lilongwe in Malawi," Geographical Journal, vol. 151, no. 2, July 1985, pp. 182-96.

⁴ See Allen Armstrong, "Ivory Coast: Another New Capital for Africa," Geography, vol. 70, 1985, pp. 72-74.

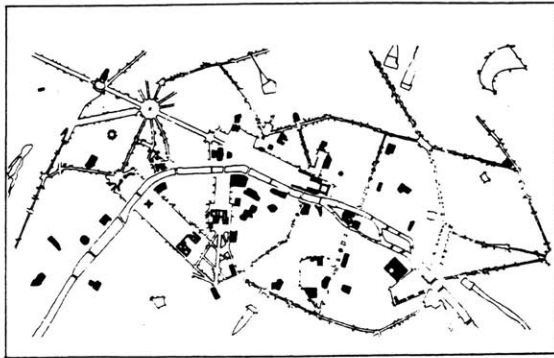
designed capitals is planned for Abuja, Nigeria. At the opposite extreme, in Tanzania, there is Dodoma, an intriguing attempt to design a non-monumental capital city according to socialist principles that, as such, would seem to be at odds with nearly everywhere else. While these two new capitals, like most of the others, remain far from completely realized, it is possible to examine their master plans to see how thinking about post-colonial capitals has developed or, more precisely, to see how much has remained the same.

Abuja

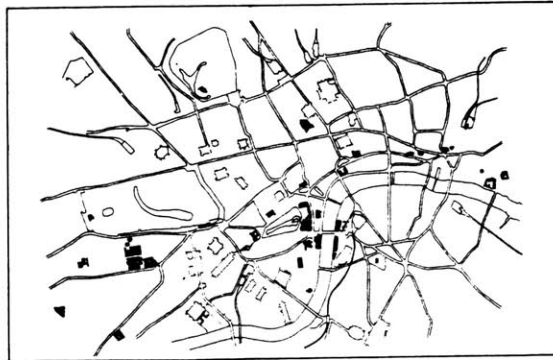
When the Nigerian government proposed, in 1975, to shift its capital from Lagos to Abuja, it was proposing the largest building venture of the twentieth century-- a city of 1.6 million people to be constructed in only 20 years. While the execution of this capital city plan lags well behind schedule, the project is still going forward. Rather than commenting upon its progress and setbacks, however, I wish to concentrate more on its origins and the intentions behind its "Central Area" or capitol complex.

Those who prepared the Master Plan for Abuja (published in 1979)¹ were clearly conscious of the first generation of post-independence capital city planning. They looked at the planning and development of such capitals as Brasilia and Chandigarh, and also at other new towns, especially those in England. So too, the planners pondered the examples of earlier Western capital cities such as Washington, D.C., Paris and London as possible sources

¹ The Master Plan for Abuja, the New Federal Capital of Nigeria (Lagos: Federal Capital Development Authority, 15 February 1979) Consultants for the plan were Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd.

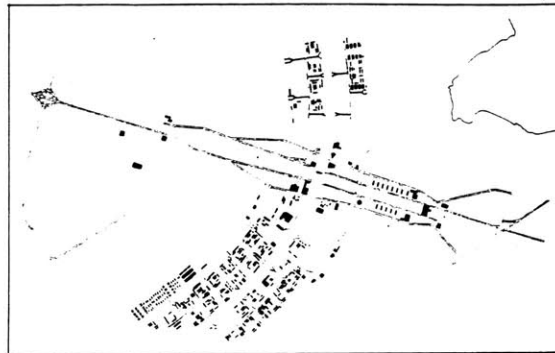


Paris

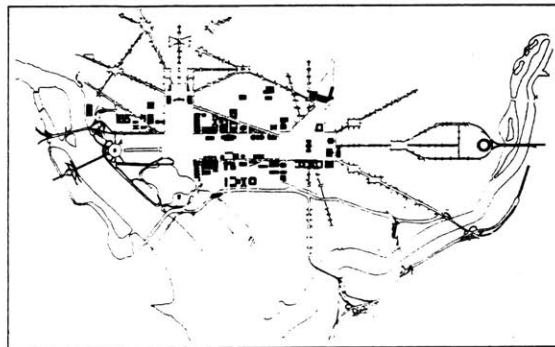


London

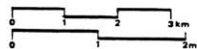
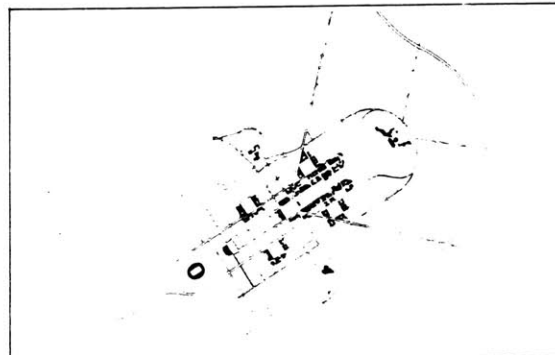
Brasilia



Washington



Abuja

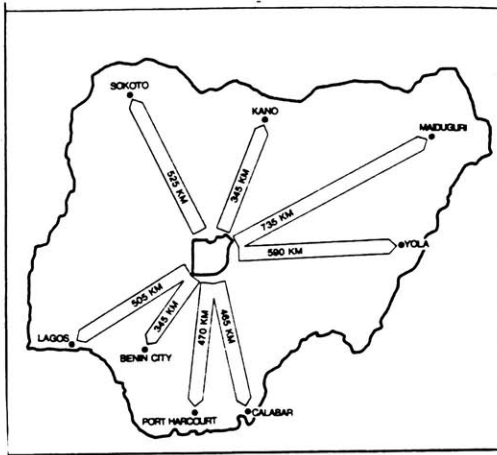


30. Capital "Centers" Compared: Scale and Distribution of Major Government and Civic Institutions and Monuments in Two "Evolved" Capitals and Three "Designed" Ones

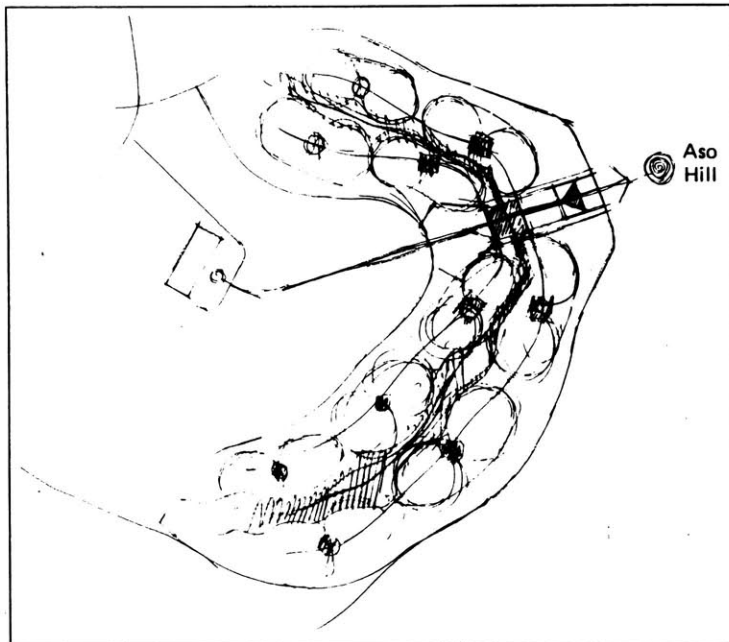
of form [Fig. 30]. Unlike the two European precursors, however, the new African capitals such as Abuja are intended to express the advent of post-colonial independence. The existence of Abuja cannot be understood apart from this history of European colonial presence. One aspect that distinguishes this second generation from the work of the first is a greater emphasis upon the production of "national identity," at least in the rhetoric that accompanies the plans. While Abuja shares with the Chandigarh and Brasília a commitment to rapid modernization, in Abuja this task is compounded by, among other things, the persistence of deep ethnic schisms within the country. While Chandigarh's designers encountered the problem of the divided and subdivided Punjab, Abuja's planners had to contend with the multiple divisions of an entire country. If the touchstone for the first pair of capitals was progress, the challenge for the second was not only progress but unity, closely tied to that slippery concept "national identity."

The Abuja plan not only signals a decision to move the national capital to a new city-- it implies a rejection of the existing capital of Lagos. In Nigeria, as in many other places, the decision to move the capital was a decision to leave a colonial port city in favor of a centrally located plateau. Abuja is located very close to the geographical heart of Nigeria, a matter of some significance. At one level, the move can be explained in terms of climate, for surely the upland plateau offered a welcome respite from the tropical heat of the coast. Yet, the move to claim the center goes more deeply than this. It implies an important recognition of national boundaries [Fig 31].

The radials drawn on the map depicted in the Master Plan are vectors of political control, gestures of inclusiveness and spatial promises of unity. While the decision to move the Nigerian capital into the interior is not quite so dramatic as the imposition of Brasilia into the Amazonian frontier, in each



31. Idealized Centrality of Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT)



32. Abuja: Another "Bird" Plan That May Not Fly

case the capital's centrality has much to do with the desire to develop the interior of the country and create the nexus for a modern transportation network [Fig. 32]. The centrality of the new capitals is an affirmation by the government that Nigeria, however artificial its existence may be in terms of internal or transnational group loyalties, should act as a unified and independent state. Topological centralism signals more than a retreat from the overgrown coastal metropolis; it is a spatial declaration of political equality among disparate and distant parts. It is an affirmation that the national government exists to serve (or to rule) all of its component states. Sited for metaphorical as well as actual elevation-- as in Brasilia-- the central highland capital becomes a kind of political watershed. It is the point from which central political power flows in all directions and, conversely, it becomes a point of pilgrimage.

Yet, topological centralism, like many other political maneuvers, can be deceptive. The shift of the colonial capital of British India from Calcutta to New Delhi confirms that such movement can often be in service of existing hegemonies. Even in cases where the capital shift occurs after decolonization, spatial choices are determined by political as well as geographical calculations. It is one thing to move out of an overcrowded and "tainted" colonial city; it is quite another thing to choose to move to the center of the country.

If one is looking to choose an appropriate climatological metaphor for Nigeria's Abuja, its centrality may well be viewed less as a "watershed" than as the eye of a hurricane. For a heterogeneous and factionalized population which has lived through 6 military coups and a 30-month civil war during its first 25 years of independence, Abuja itself is designed as a mediator. The radials that extend from Abuja towards the other cities of Nigeria,

symbolizing a transportation network that does not yet exist, connect not just points or cities, but perennially antagonistic groups of people. The schisms operate in various ways; there are tribal divisions among the Yoruba in the south, the Ibo in the east and the Hausa/Fulani in the north; there are religious differences between the predominantly Muslim north and the largely Christian and animist south; there are socio-economic differences between the south, more influenced by western-style development, and the less-developed north; and there are further tensions between the three largest tribal groups, known collectively as the Wazobians, and the 29% of Nigerians from minority groups.¹ The move to Abuja must therefore be understood in the context of these polarities; Abuja is closer to the northern Islamic powerbase of the most recent military regimes² and, conversely, acceptance of Abuja as the national capital must overcome the Yoruba southerner's resistance to losing the capital from Yoruba land.³ Thus, the polarities that are hinted at by the southwest skew of the former capital's placement do not disappear with the centripetal adjustment signalled by Abuja.

Abuja's central location, while partly an attempt to mediate between North and South, is also an attempt to site the capital in an area that is, to use the language of the site selection committee, "ethnically neutral."⁴ This committee's report, cited in the Master Plan, notes that while "Lagos is identified with predominantly one ethnic group," Abuja's "more central

¹ For a brief historical overview of such tensions, see Kole Omotoso, "The Search for National Unity," *West Africa*, 30 September 1985, pp. 2021-2.

² "Capital Folly of Nigeria," *Architect's Journal*, November 1985, p. 70. In addition, since the major access roads to Abuja come from Kaduna, this has given Northern-based contractors an advantage in obtaining work.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴ *Abuja Master Plan*, p. 27.

location would provide equal access to Nigeria's great diversity of cultural groups."¹ In service to this end, the site selection committee chose Abuja since, while its area was sparsely populated by a variety of Nigerian ethnic groups, it was not a place associated with control by any of the three major tribes. As such, Abuja is to be built "as a symbol of Nigeria's aspirations of unity and greatness."² Consequently, Abuja's designers were charged with the exceedingly difficult double task of planning to meet the needs of divergent cultural groups and with creating the image of Nigerian "unity".

In 1979, the Abuja Plan was published in conjunction with the return to civilian government after more than a decade of military rule. At the same time, a new Draft Constitution, based on that of the United States, was promulgated as a signal of renewed democratic commitment.³ Yet the heady days of the late 1970s, epitomized by the grandiosity of the Abuja venture, were not to last. Within four years, civilian President Shagari was ousted by a military coup, a widely supported effort to restore order and regenerate a devastated economy.⁴ The price of oil had tumbled and, with it, much of the revenue (if little of the hubris) that had inspired Abuja. At the time of the coup, Abuja was described-- with some justification-- as "synonymous with patronage and waste."⁵ Nonetheless, this military government-- and the one

¹ Ibid., p. 27.

² Ibid., p. 27.

³ For an analysis of Nigeria's American-style constitution, see James S. Read, "The New Constitution of Nigeria, 1979: 'The Washington Model'?" Journal of African Law v. 23, no. 2, 1979, pp. 131-74. Large parts of the Constitution are reprinted here. See also Claude S. Phillips, "Nigeria's New Political Institutions," Journal of Modern African Studies v. 18, no. 1, 1980, pp. 1-22.

⁴ See, for example, the editorial, "Change and Accountability," West Africa, 2 September 1985, p. 1787.

⁵ Major General Mamman Vatsa, cited in Mohammed Haruna, "Abuja: a Capital in Waiting," West Africa, 7 October 1985, p. 2090. This same General Vatsa later became Minister for the Federal Capital Territory, after having published a volume of poetry about Abuja. (see "Who's Who in the SMC," New African, March 1985, p. 53.) Vatsa's

that overthrew it in 1985-- both affirmed support for Abuja, and continued to provide it with one of Nigeria's largest ministerial budgets.¹

As Nigeria moves again towards the promise of a democratically elected civilian government by 1 October 1990,² the president, Major-General Ibrahim Babangida has created a "National Political Bureau" to "come up with suggestions as to how we can evolve a political system which can enable us to aspire to a predictable and stable political culture."³ According to one editorial, "the principal concern running through the current debate seems to be to find something that can survive rather than when."⁴ The most frequent label is "diarchy," where the military and civilians would share power;⁵ a variant on this is known as "cimilicy,"⁶ a term where some hint of the word "democracy" still manages to creep in. Abuja, however, was planned and designed not in a time of national search for a political system, but at a time of confidence that one-- based on the United States Constitution-- had already been found.

Abuja constitutes an on-going attempt to pursue "national identity" through urban planning. As such, it reveals much about the potential of city planning to reorient the spatial balance of power of a country. It is an attempt by the ruling party to consolidate power in the place where it is

assessment of Abuja's negative symbolism seems to be a common view in the mid-1980s. Political scientist Jonathan Moore, writing in 1984, describes the capital as "a symbol of waste, mismanagement and corruption" ("The Political History of Nigeria's New Capital," Journal of Modern African Studies, v. 22, no. 1 (1984), p. 168).

¹ Support for the new capital was not undisputed, however. In the 1979 election campaign Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with a Yoruba power base that included Lagos, maintained that, if elected, he would hire the Walt Disney Corporation to convert the Abuja site into an amusement park (cited in Moore, p. 173).

² "Nigeria: Civilian Rule in 1990," West Africa, 20 January 1986, p. 152.

³ Ibid., p. 152.

⁴ "Nigeria: Pondering the Future," West Africa, 1 April 1985, p. 603.

⁵ Ad'Obe Obe, "Nigeria: The Political Debate," West Africa, 14 April 1986, p. 769.

⁶ Ikenga Nuta, "Nigeria: The Diarchy Proposition," West Africa, 1 April 1985, p. 610.

most useful for nationwide control. In so doing, the attempt to build a new capital city also emphasizes the power of the existing political hierarchies. According to one 1984 analysis, Abuja may well contribute more to divisiveness than to unity:

...Abuja is widely perceived today as a Northern, not a Nigerian capital. Instead of healing the country, Abuja threatens to become a symbol of North-South discord, and this may well become perilous to the stability and growth of a united Nigeria.¹

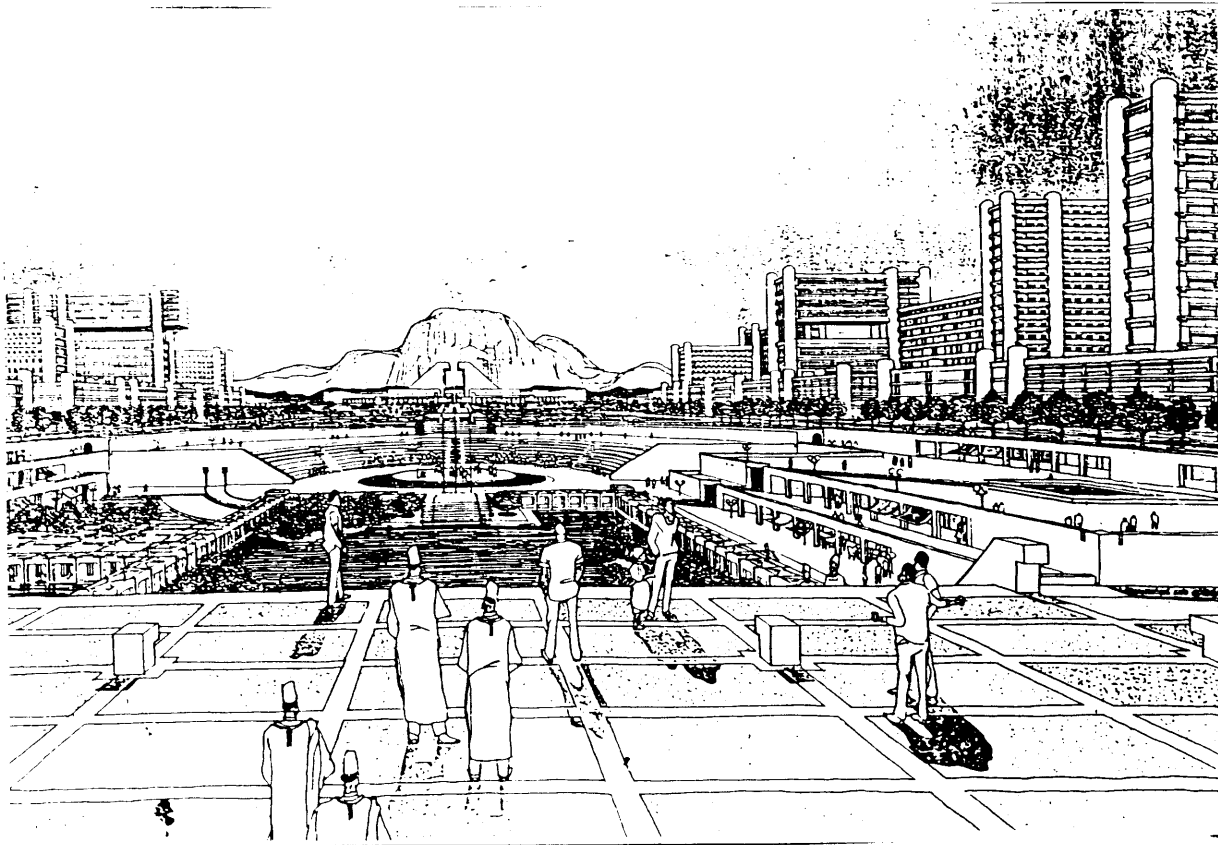
The plan for Abuja is a document of political idealism rather than uncertainty, though in its seeming confidence may be read something of the problems that were soon to come. To a large degree, the new Nigerian capital's plan was meant to provide a form and a forum for American-style democracy. The Master Plan for Abuja envisions a single-centered city, where all elements combine to focus attention upon the most important Federal Government buildings. In discussing "the plan for the seat of government," its authors note that:

The new Constitution indicates that the major elements to be housed in the New Federal Capital include the National Assembly, Legislative Offices, Executive Offices, the Judiciary and residences of the President and Vice President. Other national government facilities would be the Ministries and various commissions and parastatals. Any combination of these elements can be used-- through urban design-- to create the physical image of the National Government.²

The urban designers of the "Central Area" chose to combine these elements into a broad mall, lined with highrise ministries, axially focused upon the National Assembly building at its apex [Fig. 33]. The Mall, adapted in both form and scale from that of Washington, D.C. (presumably to go along with

¹ Moore, p. 175.

² Abuja Master Plan, pp. 102-3.

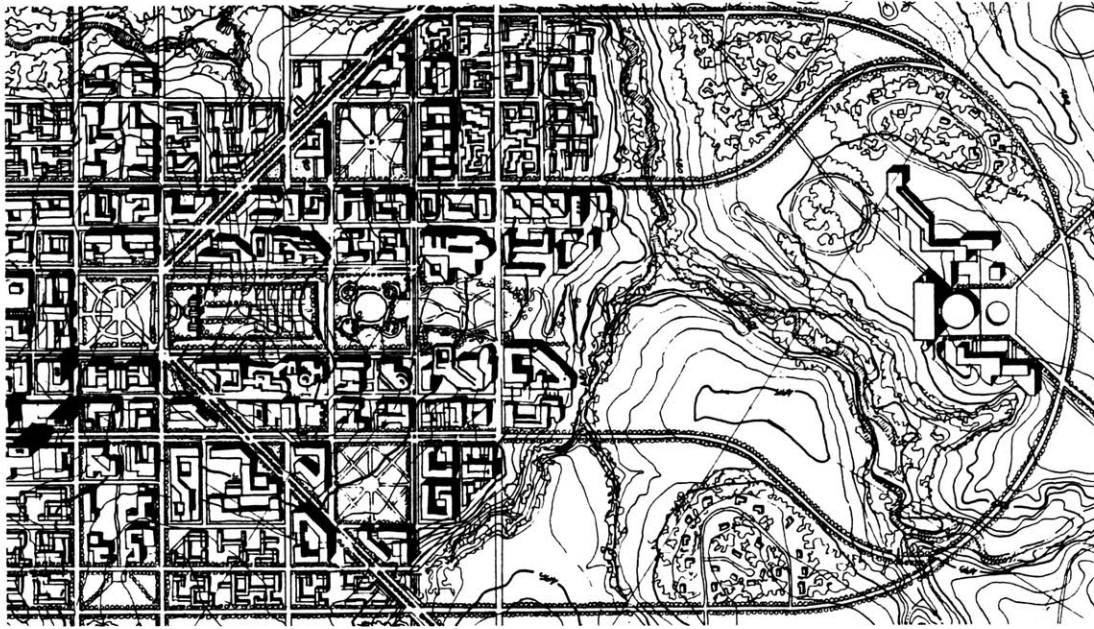


33. View of Abuja Mall, Toward Parliament and Aso Hill

the anticipated adoption of the American Constitution), reaches towards the dramatic rock outcrop of Aso Hill, located where Capitol Hill would be in Washington. The placement of the government buildings on axis with the Aso massif seems a clear attempt to gain strength by association, not unlike the Prudential Insurance company's appropriation of the Rock of Gibraltar image. But the abrupt 1300 foot rise of Nigeria's hill is far too craggy and steep to locate buildings atop it (though one senses that, if possible, the government would have done just this). Instead, the major government buildings are located on its lower slopes, grouped together as "The Three Arms Zone," a slightly more militaristic sounding update on Costa's "Plaza of the Three Powers" in Brasília.

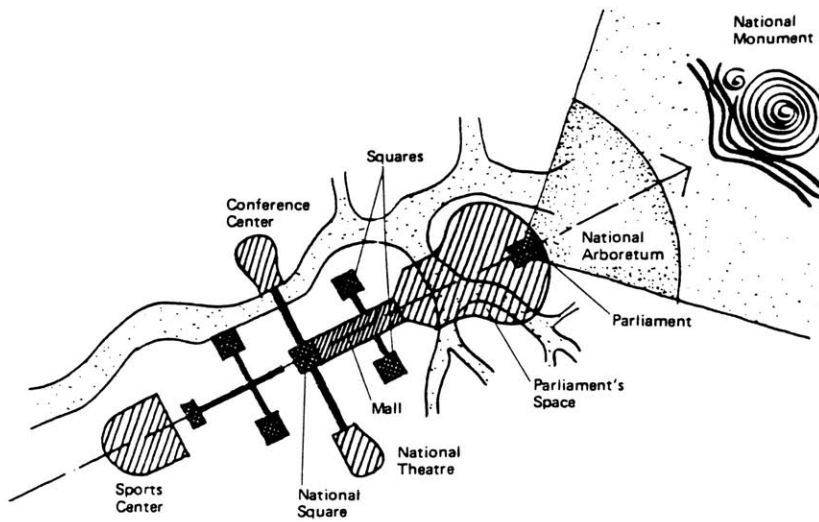
The difference between a "plaza" and a "zone" goes much further, however. Abuja's "Three Arms Zone" is not, as in Brasília, a place of public gathering from which the larger landscape may be viewed. Rather, as the drawing of the "Monumental Core" in the Master Plan makes clear, this is to be a separate zone for government, divided from the rest of the city by distance and by topography [Figs. 34 and 35]. Though a sketch of this central area shows a continuous arrow leading down the center of the Mall and through the Three Arms Zone to the Arboretum and Aso Hill beyond, this is not an axis that the public can traverse. In this respect, Abuja's plan is more reminiscent of Lutyens than of Mayer or Costa. Abuja's capitol complex is the terminus of an axis, like Lutyens' Viceroy's Palace, with extensive gardens behind.

In Abuja, according to architect Omar Take (a Principal in the firm of Kenzo Tange & URTEC, entrusted with refining the design of the Central Area), this prominent architectural trinity is a spatial translation of the American concept of federal government institutions: "Concerning the



The Monumental Core

34. "Monumental Core," Abuja Master Plan



35. The Arrow and the Error, Abuja Master Plan

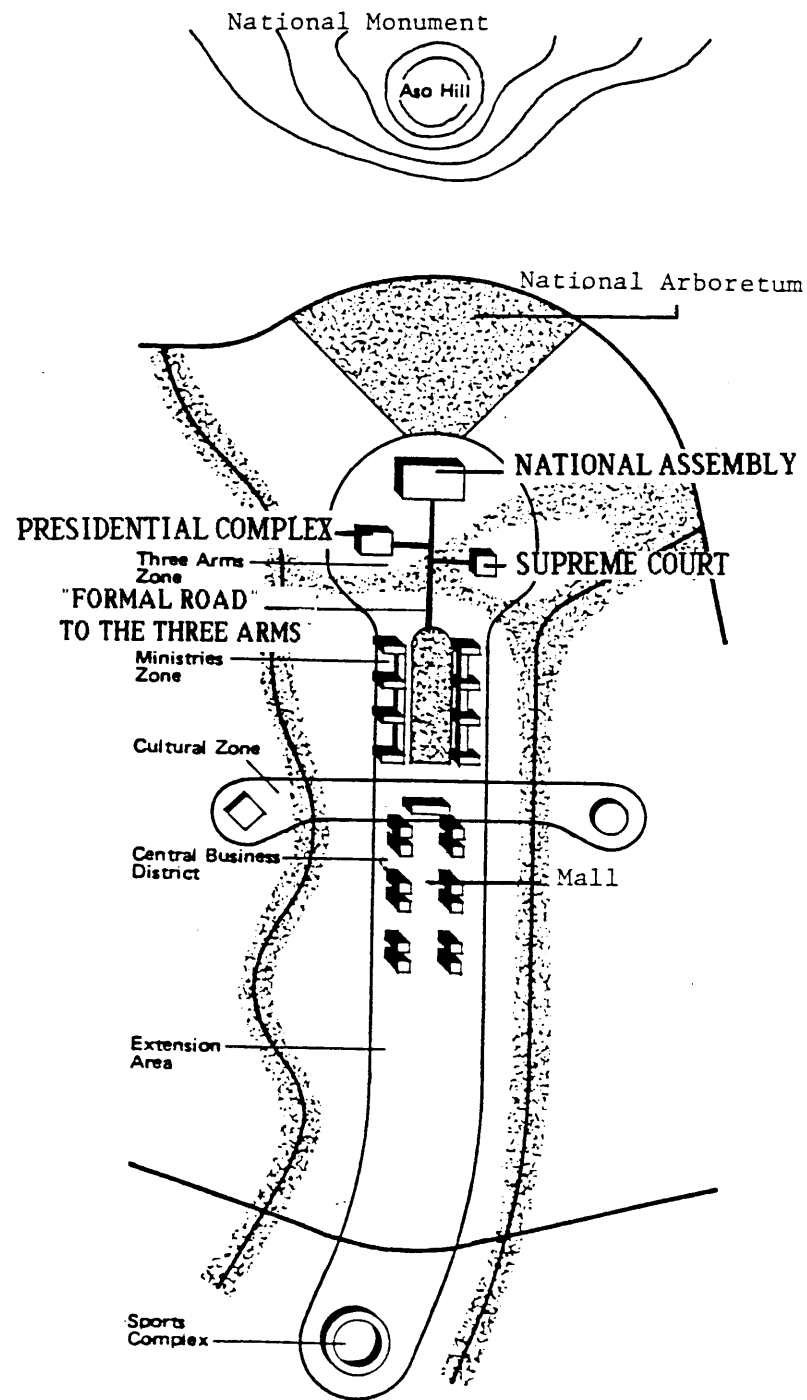
location of the three-powers complex, the constitution of Nigeria is a replica of the constitution of the United States, adopted by President Chagari (sic) when he established the democracy. This means that the three arms of government-- executive, legislative, and judiciary-- have the same symbolic significance that they have in the United States and should be shown together"¹ [Fig. 36]. What this architect forgets, of course, is that the relationship among these three branches of government under the American Constitution is defined precisely by the desirability of their separation rather than their "together"-ness. Of course, it was just this sense of the "separation of powers" that was lost on Nigeria's politicians, as well.

The original Abuja Master Plan envisioned two of these three powers-- the executive and the judicial-- as located on considerably less Olympian heights. They were to form two sides of the "National Square," to be located in the very heart of the "Central Area," near the lower end of the Mall axis, at the place where it joins a cross-axis lined with "cultural" facilities. The presidential residence is described as "facing"² the National Assembly, though in fact it was to face it across more than a mile of Mall and hillside. Undaunted, the authors of the Plan stressed that the president's residence on the National Square and the National Assembly on the hillside were "connected... visually."³ This kind of connection was not quite good enough, however. As Take explains: "In the Master Plan, the presidential palace was located at the central square, but nowadays for security reasons it is folly to

¹ Omar Take, "Abuja, the New Capital of Nigeria, and the Urban Design of Its Central Area," included in Continuity and Change: Design Strategies for Large-Scale Urban Development (Cambridge: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1984), p. 54.

² Abuja Master Plan, p. 9.

³ Ibid., p. 6.



36. Diagram of "Three Arms Zone," Abuja

expose any president to a national square."¹ Good advice, perhaps, but too late. Four months after Take spoke, President Shagari was ousted-- before he could take more permanent refuge in the "presidential palace" then being redesigned (in a significantly enlarged manner), to represent the executive fist among the Three Arms on the hillside.

In setting out the "Determinants of Form," the Abuja Master Plan emphasizes three issues: imageability, efficiency and flexibility.²

"Imageability" is defined as "the perception by the observer of a city's purpose, organization and symbolism."³ For its planners, an important part of the imageability of Abuja is the clear differentiation of its role as the seat of Federal Government from all its other purposes. According to the Master Plan, the aim is "to organize the principal elements of both the natural and the built environments to emphasize the symbolic aspects of the Government of Nigeria."⁴ While it may be that the strife-torn Nigerian government has many "symbolic aspects" that the designers were probably not charged with attempting to convey, the Plan is intended as an idealization of what might become. This is pursued by designing a single-centered city in which the government buildings are related to the dominant feature of the natural landscape. This goal of differentiation is upheld in other ways, as well: the aim is to create "identifiable units of organization" and "distinctive sectors with a character all their own" instead of the "endless superblocks of Brasilia and Chandigarh."⁵

¹ Take, p. 54.

² Abuja Master Plan, chapter 4.

³ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

The authors of the Master Plan expend a good deal of effort to elucidate how the plan for Abuja draws upon the form of traditional Nigerian cities. Noting that "a major shortcoming in past planning for Nigerian cities has been the failure to recognize and accommodate the indigenous patterns of urban organization and adaptation already present in the country," the planners undertook a study of 27 Nigerian cities (including all of the state capitals) to determine precedents for overall urban form, the role of central public spaces and the organization of residential areas.¹ In designing the Federal Capital, they were faced with the exceedingly difficult challenge of designing a city that "must simultaneously permit the different segments of the Nigerian population to maintain an important continuity with their social and cultural traditions while encouraging, where appropriate, amalgamation of the various streams of urban tradition and lifestyle into a new and common modern Nigerian context."²

Yet, while they found legitimate evidence of a "strong tradition of single center cities,"³ it is hard to reconcile the design of the Central Area with anything resembling Nigerian "tradition". Nonetheless, they tried to do just this. The National Square, surrounded (in the original plan) by the Presidential Residence, the Supreme Court, the National Museum and the Municipal Administrative Center, was envisaged as an updated version of traditional Nigerian cities which "were often characterized by defensive wall pierced by gates and radial roads leading to high density cores dominated by the residence of the Chief, Oba or Emir."⁴ In Abuja, however, there are no

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

defensive walls-- unless one counts the semi-impenetrable barrier of its multi-lane boulevards. Nor are there gates-- unless one counts the elaborate network of highway overpasses. Moreover, the "high density core" is transmuted into the void of the Square and the Mall, and the Emir has justifiably fled up the hill.

Undaunted by such seeming discrepancies, the planners insist on its relationship to Nigerian tradition. They set out three possibilities for the location of the "Major Symbolic elements with respect to the Central Area:" 1) within the Central Area itself, 2) on the edge of the central area and 3) outside the central area. Defending the treatment of the Abuja Central Area, they note that "traditional Nigerian capital cities exhibit characteristics of both options one and two," but conclude that "location of the major symbolic core in a downhill location would obstruct its visual connection to Aso Hill and could be construed as suggesting that buildings closer to the major vista and uphill are more prominent."¹ More to the point, perhaps, it could be construed as making downhill buildings more vulnerable. Defending the choice of the Mall as an organizing principle, the planners conclude that "the use of formal open spaces and the ~~the~~ relationship of major activities reflects a mixture of historic Nigerian practice blended with contemporary functionalism."² Yet, only a few pages later in this same Master Plan, the authors note that "in traditional Nigerian town planning, parks and gardens are in the private sector rather than the public sector."³ In claiming to have represented the "essence" of Nigerian tradition in the chosen option, however, the authors of the Master Plan somehow neglected to explain how

¹ Ibid., pp. 103-4.

² Ibid., p. 100.

³ Ibid., p. 128.

the tradition of the dominant axial vista fits in to the history of what they mysteriously term "traditional Nigerian urban design."¹

In defending the images of Washington and Brasília with the rhetoric of Nigeria, the authors of the Master Plan consistently reveal a powerful ambivalence. It is, perhaps, an unresolvable one for the design of an modern urban capital that is to be a symbol of a largely rural country. The urban/rural schism, combined with the tribal rivalries and the Muslim/Christian split, make "National Identity" a very slippery thing to define. Understandably, the professed goal of designing an "ethnically neutral" capital can easily be diffused and diluted into cultural irrelevance.

"Modernity" itself becomes the symbol, and Kenzo Tange's firm is surely well equipped to deliver it. It is not only the grand Mall that is desired, but also the neo-Metabolist office highrises that flank it and sprout even higher in the Central Business District, on the other side of the National Square. It is this that is at the heart of the drive for Abuja's "imageability". The other two categories set out in the Master Plan-- "efficiency" and "flexibility"-- are in service of the modern image. As long as the price of oil was high, Abuja's sponsors wanted the biggest and best of everything, and wanted it fast. The grade separations at all major highway junctions were to be the most technically sophisticated in the world, illustrative of a burgeoning romance with the private automobile.

The car, as it has so often been elsewhere, itself becomes a central symbol of prosperity. Abuja's plan, like many others, is one largely generated by the projections of traffic engineers. For Abuja, however, the designers from Tange's firm took the extraordinary step of planning not for 70% reliance on

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

public transportation and 30% on private autos as envisioned in the Master Plan, but for 70% of both. According to Take, "Opinions differ, but we think that human nature is such that people working in this capital will want the social status of a car. It might not happen, but in the event that it does, it is already taken care of."¹

Much of Abuja, in fact, is designed to accommodate the desires for such "social status." The National Assembly was envisioned to cover 20,000 square meters in the Master Plan, but the prospective tenants soon upped their space requirements by more than tenfold. Whereas the costs for the entire first phase of the city were estimated at \$600 million, this one building alone was costed out at \$500 million.² Clearly, it will not be built on such an extravagant scale. Less likely to be cut back, however, is the adjacent district of luxury villas. On the Master Plan, some of these are labeled as "Official Residences" and others are left untitled, but all are located between the National Assembly building and the 18-hole golf course. This residential sector, reminiscent of that planned for the shores of Brasília's Lake Paranoá, is but the most extreme example of the Plan's attempt to ensure residential segregation. Whether inspired by Paranoá or paranoia, Abuja is planned without regard for Nigeria's poor.

The largest split of all, however, occurs between those who will be able to pay the necessary rents and those who will not be able to afford to live in Abuja at all. Nonetheless, in an interview published in February 1987, Air Commodore Hamza Abdullahi, the Minister for the Federal Capital Territory, chooses to ignore the burgeoning slums that have grown up to house Abuja's construction workers and lower-level civil servants:

¹ Take, p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

It is impossible for slums to develop here in Abuja. Every inch of the city has been predetermined. The way and manner of the structure does not allow anybody to go out of this original plan. If we give you a plot, you have a boundary for the plot and you cannot exceed that. There is what is called our land-use plan and this is our bible. We follow it carefully.

There is absolutely no room for anybody to just start building sub-standard structures. It is impossible.¹

What the Air Commodore fails to point out, of course, is that Abuja has no slums because it exports them to points beyond the boundaries of its land-use plan. Like Brasilia and other capital cities before it, the contrast between the opulence of the center and the squalor of the fringe is as great an inequality as any known to man.² And this, too, is part of the Abuja Master Plan.

Dodoma

The Master Plan for the new Tanzanian capital at Dodoma, published in 1976 and prepared for the Capital Development Authority by the Toronto-based Project Planning Associates,³ envisioned a city of 400,000 persons by the year 2000, with 1.3 million expected by 2020. Though execution of this plan, with the capital center portion under the direction of Conklin Rossant (New York and Dodoma), lags well behind schedule due to lack of funds, the project is still going forward. As in Nigeria, the move of the capital

¹ "Abuja is Now a Reality," interview with Air Commodore Hamza Abdullahi, conducted by Okechewku Ifionu, African Concord, 5 February 1987, p. 17.

² For a description of the horrific conditions now existing in Nyanya Camp, outside of Abuja, see Okechukwu Ifionu, "Nyanya: Just the Place for a Holiday!" African Concord, 5 February 1987, p. 17.

³ National Capital Master Plan: Dodoma, Tanzania, prepared for the Capital Development Authority, United Republic of Tanzania Under the Agreement dated August 1, 1974 by Project Planning Associates, Toronto Canada, May 1976.

represents a departure from an overcrowded colonial port and an attempt to site the national government in the underdeveloped center of the country [Fig. 37].

While Dar es Salaam's deficiencies are certainly not as egregious as those of Lagos, the Dodoma Master Plan nonetheless detailed "growing problems," noting its "limited area for economical expansion, congested transportation facilities, substantial industrial growth and a surge of new population," all exacerbated by its "uncomfortable climate."¹ For the authors of the Dodoma plan, however, perhaps the most significant drawback of Dar es Salaam-- or at least the most ideologically significant one-- was its association with the "German Colonizers." The Master Plan, hardly a politically neutral document, notes that Dodoma and other inland sites were considered for a new capital as early as 1915, but "imperial strategy was thought to be more important than healthy and attractive living conditions, and Dar es Salaam remained the Capital."²

In creating a new capital at Dodoma, the designers were charged with creating a symbol of Tanzanian unity, an aspect of the capital-building task that seems somewhat less daunting than it does for the promoters of Abuja. Tanzanian tribal affiliations are much more fragmented than in Nigeria and political control is much more centralized, and under the control of Tanzania's one political party, the socialist CCM (Revolutionary Party of Tanzania). This party, known as TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) until its merger with Zanzibar's party in 1977, has been in power since independence. As such, though the decision to move the capital to Dodoma

¹ Dodoma Master Plan, p. 11.

² Ibid., p. 9.

was the result of a national referendum (with 70% in favor¹), the shift must be seen in relation to the socialist aims of this party.

The decision to move the capital into Tanzania's rural heartland is intimately tied to the government's version of an ideal socialist state. The move of the capital out of the congested and rapidly industrializing city of Dar es Salaam and into the sparsely populated central plateau is perfectly in keeping with the stated aims of the ruling party, as articulated most clearly by President Julius Nyerere in the "Arusha Declaration" of 1967. It is no coincidence that this Declaration is reprinted in full, as "Appendix A" of the Dodoma Master Plan.

The Declaration stresses the importance of "self-reliance" and "hard work" by the local population, rather than the passive receipt of international aid. It underscores that rural and agricultural development are to be the first priority, with industrial development only in support of these ends. For a government professing such aims, Dar es Salaam clearly conveyed the wrong image. As the Master Plan puts it, the old capital, as "a dominant focus of development," is "the antithesis of what Tanzania is aiming for, and is growing at a pace, which, if not checked, will damage the city as a humanist habitat and Tanzania as an egalitarian socialist state."² Dodoma, by contrast, would send the right political message. Its selection demonstrated that "a high priority is placed on widespread village and rural development where it is Government policy to maintain close and direct links with the rural population. Dodoma's position at the junction of six major surface routes ideally suits it to these needs."³ For the government of Tanzania and the

¹ "The Road to the New Capital," *Africa*, v. 120, August 1981, p. 89. This article points out that Dodoma is probably the world's first "elected" capital.

² *Dodoma Master Plan*, p.11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

planners of Dodoma, the new capital was to be an example of the ideal socialist city, one which "should demonstrate how city residents can maintain a close relationship to the land."¹ Thus, if Abuja's location may be said to mediate between ethnic groups, Dodoma's selection may be seen as an attempt to mediate between urban and rural populations.

In Tanzania during the early 1970s, Nyerere's plans for "ujamaa" villages (cooperative compounds based upon the traditional African extended family) were met with considerable enthusiasm and participation. Such hopefulness was not to last, however. While the ujamaa villagization program continued to develop a commendable record of partial success, the larger economy faltered. According to a 1985 analysis: "Up to 1977, when the rapid decline set in, the country's growth rate was a steady 5% per annum, external reserves were equal to a healthy five months of imports; there was an overall budget surplus and, no less important, a food surplus."² What went wrong, according to this account, included several external factors-- the effects of the break up of the East Africa Community, the massive increased costs of imported oil, machinery and fertiliser since 1973, the impact of serious drought since 1979, the deterioration in trade terms of 50% between 1977-1982 and the huge cost involved in the military operation to help oust Uganda's Idi Amin. Internally, the difficulties mounted as well, with serious miscalculations in fiscal and monetary policy decisions.³

In the broadest sense, whereas the designers of the Master Plan for Abuja sought to improve upon existing models of capital city planning, the planners of Dodoma are interested in a critique of capitalist city form. At the

¹ Ibid., p. 86.

² "Tanzania: Did Socialism Fail?" New African, May 1985, p. 25.

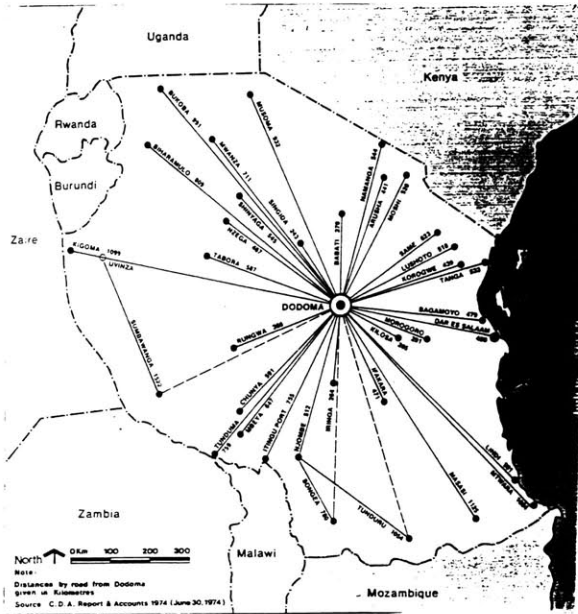
³ Ibid., p. 25.

most diagrammatic level, this basic difference may be seen by comparing Abuja's plan, which closely resembles Costa's cross-axial Brasília, with that of Dodoma, which appears as a polycentric cluster [Fig. 38]. The texts of the two Master Plans emphasize the seemingly divergent priorities of the two notions: the Abuja text focuses upon the design of "The Central Area"-- the location of government and commerce-- while the Dodoma text stresses the residential communities. While the rhetoric of both plans insists upon their contribution to "national identity," very different identities are sought.

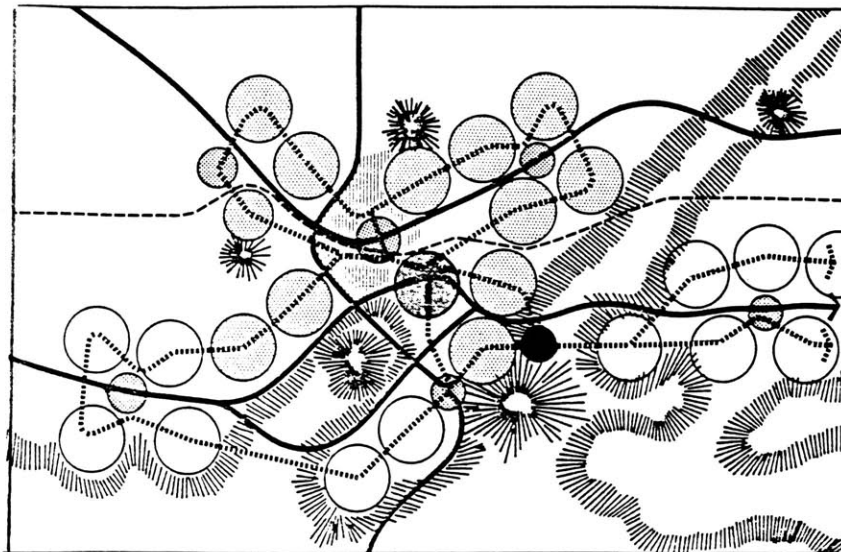
If my discussion of the Abuja Plan ended with a reference to the city's staggering inequalities, an analysis of the Dodoma Plan must begin at the opposite extreme: the commitment of its planners to create an egalitarian capital. While this plan, too, contains lengthy discussions about "capital image" and "urban centres," its tone is gentler, its scale is understated and its priorities emphasize issues of human habitation. In short, the Dodoma Master Plan is ambitious in its very modesty. It proposes nothing less than the first non-monumental capital city. While, as will be demonstrated, monumentality and hierarchy do not in any way truly disappear, it is nonetheless a significant achievement and a telling critique of capitalist capital city form.

The text of the Master Plan for Dodoma is prefaced by a statement by Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's leader from independence to 1985, which sets the unpretentious style of the whole document:

...[W]e are a poor country, building a new capital city in a nation committed to the principle of Ujamaa. We have to build in a manner which is within our means and which reflects our principles of human dignity and equality as well as our aspirations for our development....The town must be integrated into society as a whole; it



37. All Roads Lead to Dodoma?



- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| ○ RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY | ◆◆◆ BUSWAY | DODOMA |
| ● A CENTRE | ▨ EXISTING DODOMA | THE URBAN CONCEPT |
| ● B CENTRE | ○ RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY | |
| ● TANU AND PARLIAMENT COMPLEX | (beyond 350,000 population) | |
| — MAJOR ARTERIAL ROAD | ○ FUTURE URBAN EXPANSION | |
| | ○ MAJOR TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES | |

38. Dodoma Clusters

must be neither an ivory tower nor a new version of our existing towns.¹

Nyerere goes on to emphasize the need to use local materials and local building techniques, to build both inexpensively and solidly and to be certain that all facilities are accessible to the handicapped. Before concluding by commending the Master Plan "to the people of Tanzania," he articulates what he perceives to be its relationship to the principles of Tanzanian socialism outlined in the Arusha Declaration:

I believe this Plan, as it stands, is consistent with the ideology of Tanzania. Two very important examples can be given to show the way it reflects our philosophy. First, the Plan shows that Dodoma will be built as a series of connected communities, each having a population of about 28,000 people....The second fundamental point about this Master Plan is the way it gives priority to the building up of an efficient public transport service and to the physical movement of people on foot and by bicycle.²

As Nyerere intimates, what is distinctive about the Dodoma Plan is the extent to which it proposes a kind of mediation between city and country.

Most plans for new capital cities in developing countries do not address the problem of rapid urbanization of a predominantly rural population; for Dodoma, this is a fundamental point of departure. The Master Plan recognizes that most Tanzanians, 95% rural in 1975, are not accustomed to living in cities: "Traditionally, the Tanzanian people relate to small communities and wide rural areas; a dense urban environment is in many ways alien to national lifestyles and philosophies. The principle of self-reliance, as expressed in the Arusha Declaration, suggests that all families should live close to arable lands to enable them to grow at least part of their food requirements and, moreover, sociological considerations militate against

¹ Dodoma Master Plan, p. vii.

² Ibid., p. viii.

cities of closely packed buildings and large paved areas."¹ Housing areas, for Dodoma, are therefore envisioned as being much closer to their village prototypes than those envisioned, for example, in Abuja.

In maintaining that "The Arusha Declaration is ... essential to understand the framework within which the National Capital should be designed and built,"² the authors of the Master Plan relate their designs to four aspects of national development policy cited in the Declaration: 1) Land and Agriculture, 2) The People, 3) The Policy of Socialism and Self-Reliance and 4) Good Leadership.

In recognition of the first criterion, the planners cite the Arusha Declaration's charge to use land collectively and productively: "Land is the basis of human life and all Tanzanians should use it as a valuable investment for future development. It is to be used for the benefit of the Nation and not for the benefit of one individual or just a few people."³ Out of respect for the land, the planners reject "man-made geometrical forms" such as "grid iron and radial plans" as "inappropriate."⁴ While Dodoma, like Abuja, is to have an axial downtown Mall with some streets that meet at right angles, such orthogonality is the exception rather the rule. Nearly all of the city is to undulate and curve with the forms of the existing topography, in an attempt to minimize the wilfulness of the intervention. Related to this is a commitment to locate Dodoma's built areas on the land least suitable for agricultural purposes or water storage, part of a larger policy to maximize the availability of arable land and minimize any deleterious impact of the

¹ Ibid., p. 15.

² Ibid., p. 13.

³ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

new city upon the larger region.¹ "On a larger scale and at a more symbolic level," the authors of the Master Plan note, "the city was laid out so as to enable the open space of the landscape to flow through it. In this way, every community would be close to major parkland, hills or green space."² If Dodoma is to grow from an existing town of 50,000 to a city of 1.3 million by 2020, this rural feeling can be maintained only if the government manages to maintain its strict land-use controls, whereby the initial "cluster" development will be subsequently channeled in a linear way, towards the east. The authors of the Plan stress the close ties between family, land and community, and promise not only the ready accessibility of shared garden plots for partial subsistence farming within the city but also "private outdoor space on the ground" for "every family with children."³

As to the second National Development Policy objective, "The People," the authors of the Plan are considerably more vague and prone to jargon. Nonetheless, the Plan clearly comes down on the side of a kind of urban intimacy. Recalling the warning in the Arusha Declaration that "We must not forget that people who live in towns can possibly become the exploiters of those who live in the rural areas," the planners stress "the nature of the city as a forum" for all Tanzanians.⁴ While they acknowledge that (like Abuja) the "Capital Center" will have a "Grand Mall" as its "main focus,"⁵ this place is to have an utterly different character than its Nigerian counterpart.

Whereas in Abuja the width of the Mall seems to have been chosen to match the grand proportions of the buildings that flank it (and to mimic its

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

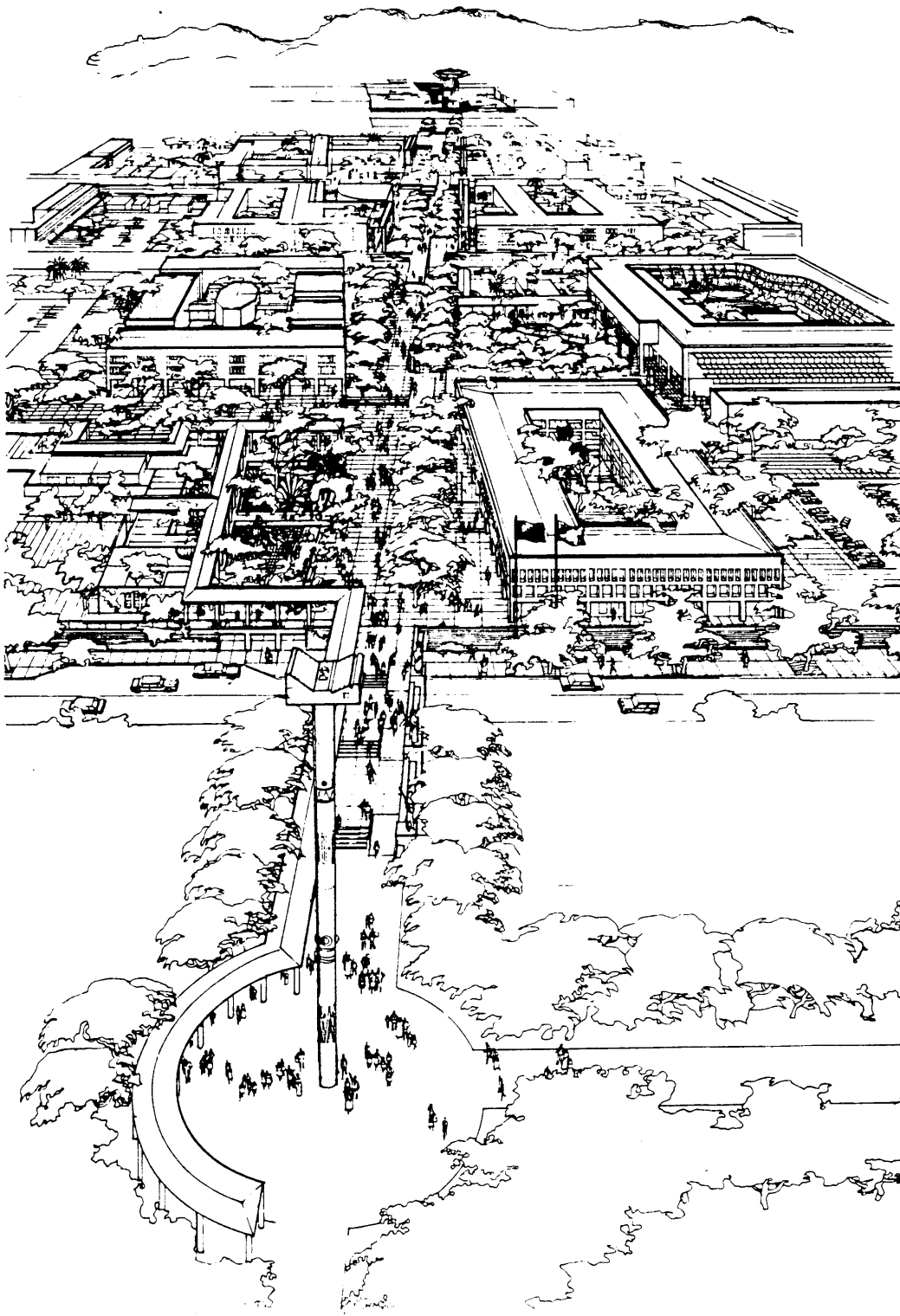
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

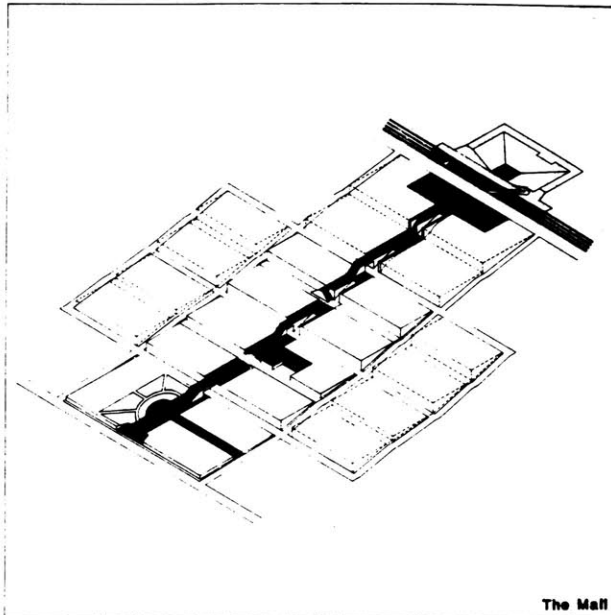
predecessors in Washington and Brasilia), the width of the Dodoma "Grand Mall" could easily fit within the width of many of Abuja's grand secondary streets. In the Dodoma Master Plan, and in the drawings for the "Capital Center" by consultants Conklin Rossant,¹ the inevitability of this megascale central area is challenged [Fig. 39]. As envisioned in the Master Plan, the Capital Center is to be "A major mall, an avenue for walking and meeting, with its important buildings carefully modulated and articulated to human scale."² The Conklin Rossant drawings for the Capital Center show an elaborate pedestrian path that traverses seven ascending terraces from the Uhuru ("freedom") plaza flanked by Museum of Social and Political History, the National Library and the Museum of Science and Industry to the city's major gathering place, "Ujamaa Square" [Figs. 40 and 41]. This square, to be marked by a large monument in the form of an abstracted acacia tree (such shade trees remain the traditional village place of gathering), is faced by the High Court building and the offices for economic planning. A bit further on, but still connected to this main pedestrian spine, is the site for Presidential offices [Fig. 42]. Throughout this capital center, instead of a mall flanked by highrise megastructures, there are by two and three story structures sized and oriented to require neither elevators nor air-conditioning. In the drawings at least, careful planting and terracing make the scale of the Capital Center seem almost unrecognizably different from the drawings submitted by the Tange firm for Abuja. Moreover, in contrast to other designed capitals, the planners of Dodoma envision a thorough intermixture of shopping, restaurants, apartments and cultural facilities with the various

¹ Capital Development Authority, Urban Design for the National Capital Centre, prepared by the Tanzania Capital Development Authority and Conklin & Rossant, June 1980.

² Dodoma Master Plan, pp. 70-1.



39. Perspective of Dodoma "National Capital Centre," Looking South

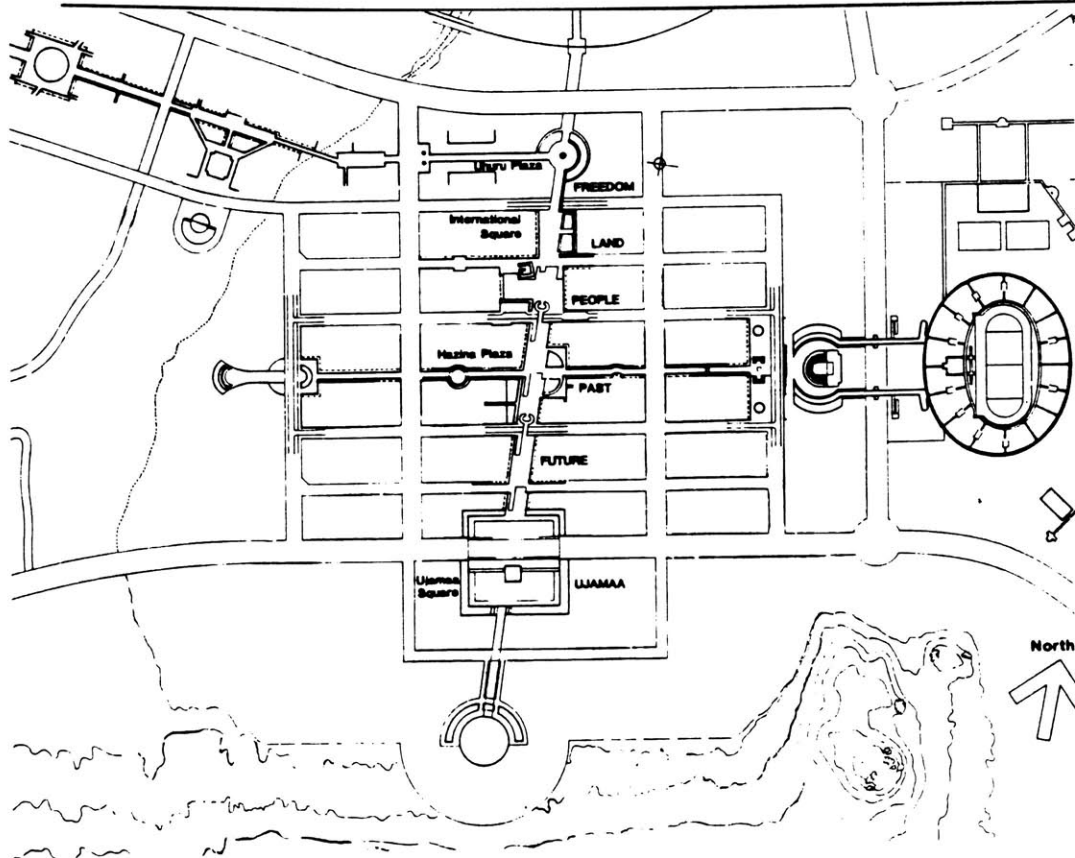


The Mall



40. Schematic Plan of Dodoma Stepped Terrace "Mall"

41. Looking South, Towards "Ujamaa Tree"



42. Pedestrian Pathways, Dodoma

government ministries [Fig. 43]. The Conklin Rossant plan describes the center of Dodoma as "an immense stairway symbolising Tanzania's progress upward and forward."¹

As for the third National Development Policy from the Arusha Declaration that the Dodoma planners attempted to incorporate into their design-- "the policy of socialism and self-reliance"-- one may find evidence of this in the Plan as well. According to the Master Plan, the basic housing community is to be the "TANU ten unit cell," a group of houses closely related around a shared outdoor meeting place [Fig. 44]. This "cell" is envisioned not only as a 50-person social unit but also as an economic and political one; it is to be the source of grass roots development in Tanzania.

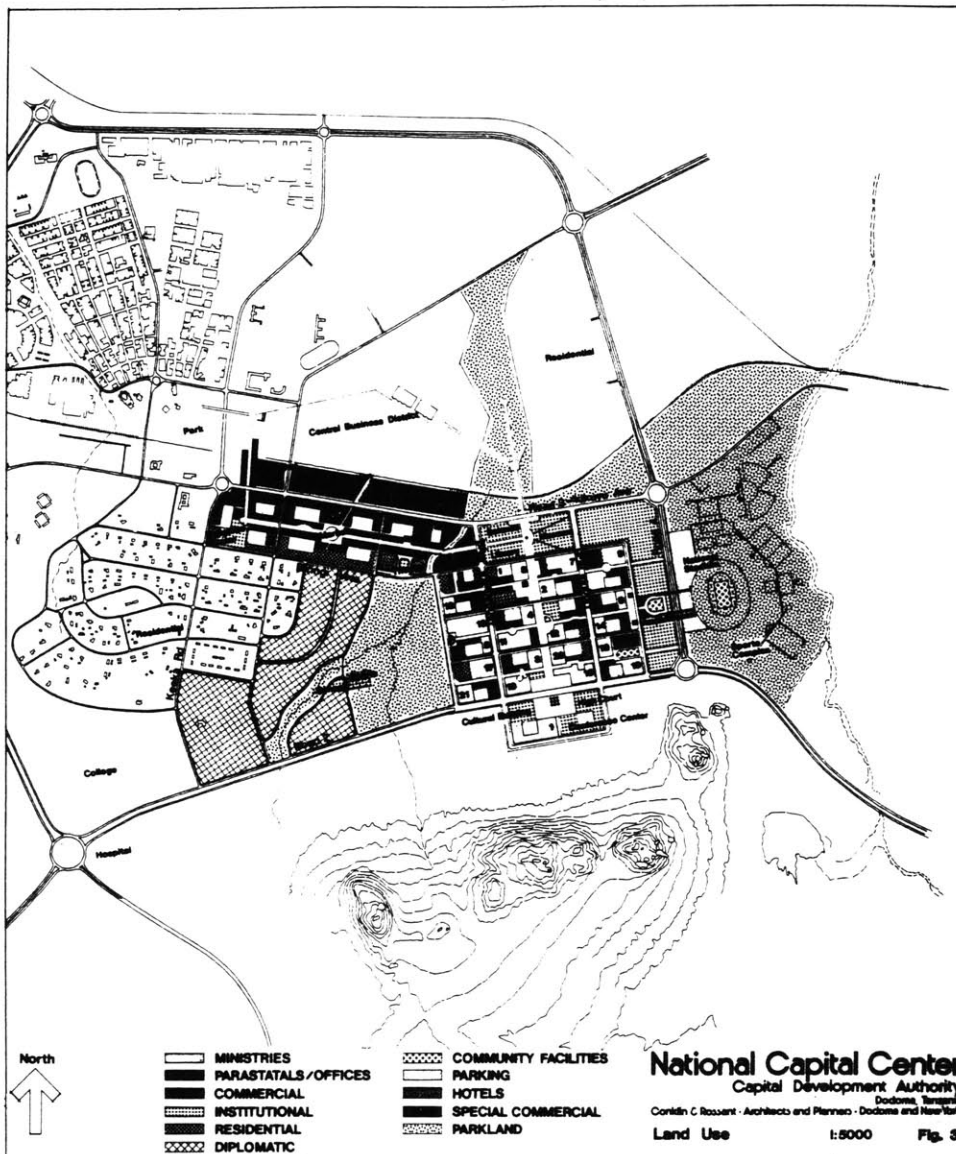
The authors of the Master Plan, surely well coached by their Tanzanian client/partners, emphasize that "Tanzania is a socialist state and as such it has an inherent responsibility to provide housing for all who need it."² The TANU ten unit cell, according to the Master Plan at least, would seem to be available regardless of "normal market forces" or the "ability to pay."³ At another point, the Plan's authors note that all communities "should include people of all income brackets and employment backgrounds. Land forms, rather than the size or type of housing will establish the character of all communities, and all will have equally pleasant open space patterns, though perhaps different in character. In this manner, it is expected that the avoidance of elitism, stressed in the Arusha Declaration, will be achieved."⁴ The Master Plan is simply not detailed enough to know just how many are to

¹ National Capital Centre Plan, p. ix.

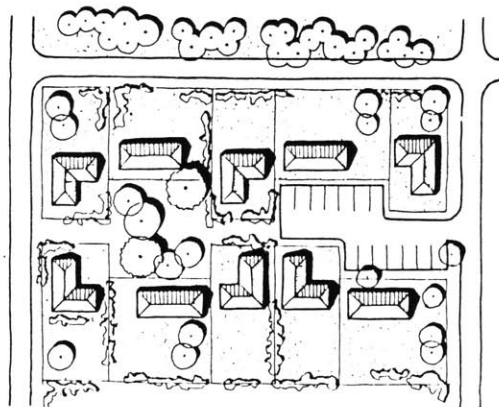
² Dodoma Master Plan, p. 63.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.



43. Diagram of Mixed-Use Capital Center, Dodoma

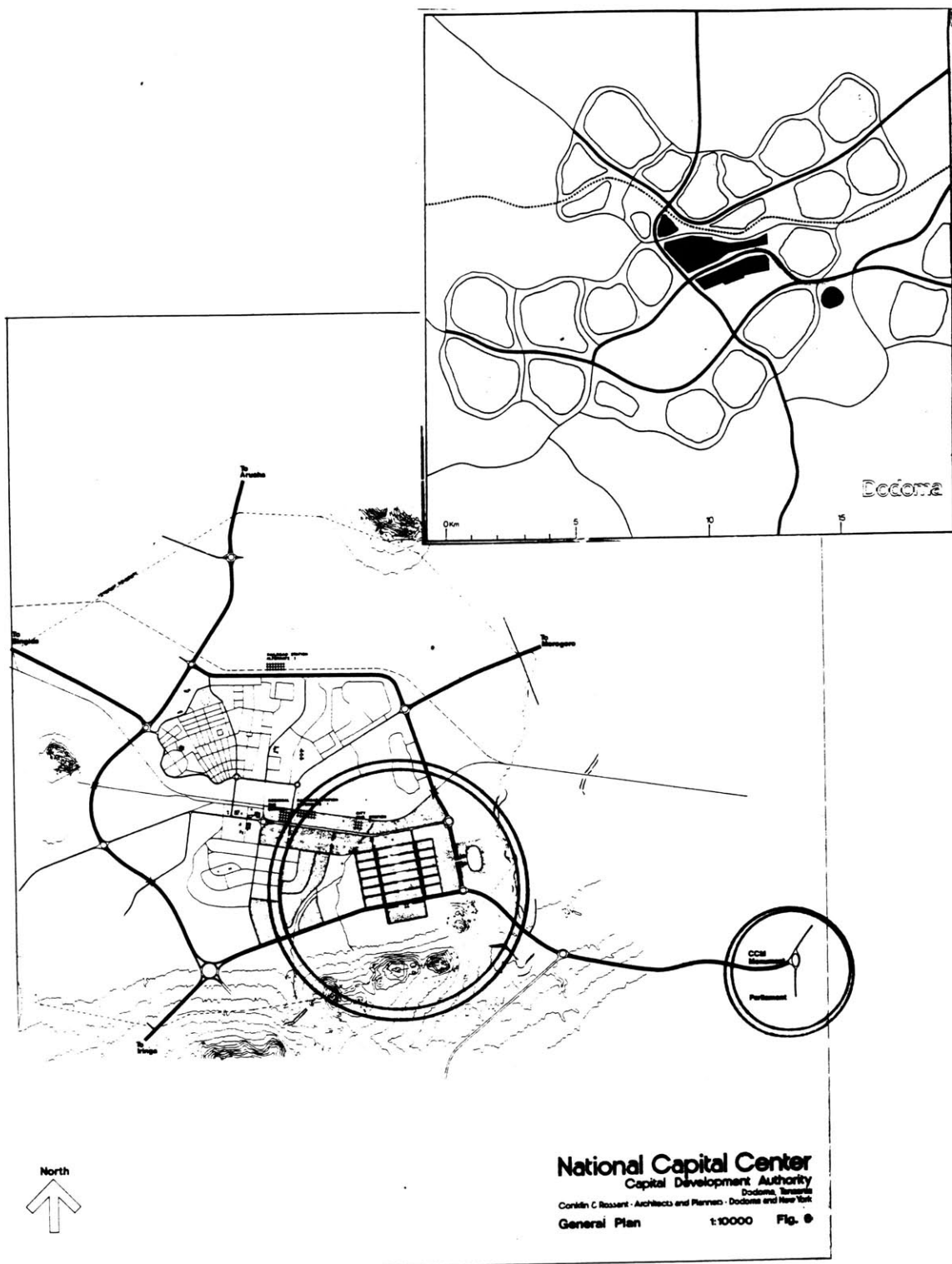


44. "TANU Ten Unit Cell"

receive a place in these clusters of socialist suburbia, though certainly the authors imply that it would include "all families with children."

Doubts and questions creep in when one turns to the Master Planners' attempt to translate the final Arusha Declaration National Development Policy-- "Good Leadership." To begin with, though the Dodoma Master Plan follows up mention of each of the first three Development Policies with separate sections on "land", "people" and "socialism," when it comes to "good leadership" there is no such section. Perhaps they assumed that, given the merits of the plan thus far, the merits of the leadership were abundant and therefore best left implicit. More likely, they realized that the spatial juxtapositions articulated in the plan between "the People" and their "good leaders" were not exactly in keeping with the socialist cause.

In both the Master Plan by Project Planning Associates and in the subsequent development of the Capital Center by Conklin Rossant, the major buildings for the party and parliamentary leadership are to be located well outside of the pedestrian Capital Center [Fig. 45]. Indeed, a separate set of Chinese consultants has been employed to design the buildings on "Parliament Hill." In the Master Plan, the High Court is located a mile away from the main square of the Capital Center, along a sinuous and tree-lined "Processional Way," and the Parliament and Party National Headquarters are located at the terminus of this Processional Way, another mile further on, atop a hilltop overlooking the rest of the city. In short, the Dodoma Master Plan makes no provision in the Capital Center for any of the government buildings usually considered most important to a national government. It shows the "People's Square" surrounded by the National Theater, the National Library and a hotel. In the Conklin Rossant development of the Capital Center portion of the Master Plan, however, this unusual



45. Parliament and Capital Center: Two Separate Realms

juxtaposition is reconsidered, but only to a very limited extent: the High Court and certain important executive offices are brought within the realm of this central sector and placed on "Ujamaa Square" but Party and Parliament remain isolated on the hill, subject to the designs of a different consultant. As in Abuja, the leadership takes hilltop refuge, despite the availability of the egalitarian plane of the "Ujamaa Square." Even for socialist leaders or, perhaps, especially for socialist leaders, this sort of "levelling" is not to be desired.

While the rhetoric of the Dodoma Master Plan insists that "the major building complexes" are located to "emphasize the unity of the leaders, their buildings, the land forms and the people,"¹ such unity is hardly what first comes to mind when one looks at the larger plan. Though there is no equivalent to the Abuja Plan's 18-hole ministerial golf course, the Tanzanian leadership has clearly repudiated its links with "the people." In Dodoma as elsewhere, the capitol is detached from the capital. In pondering this seeming contradiction to the otherwise remarkable effort to integrate leaders and people, one is left with two unacceptable alternatives: either the Tanzanians do not believe that the Parliament and Party headquarters constitute "major building complexes" or they do recognize their importance but wish to hide the true sources of political power. Given that the Chinese drawings for the hilltop Party and Parliament buildings envision a large complex of decidedly monumental buildings, there would seem to be a certain amount of calculated deception underlying even this most understated of capitals. While Dodoma lacks the axiality (and the historical

¹ Ibid., p. 71.

associations with axiality) present in Abuja, its parliamentary complex lacks none of Abuja's association of natural forms with political power.

While Abuja's "Three Arms Zone" is intended to be the culmination and focus of that city's urban design, Dodoma's parliamentary complex would dominate somewhat more surreptitiously. Perched at the top of a curving "Processional Way," the hierarchical separation between government and governed is maintained; big brother is well-placed to watch. Just as the capital cities themselves were moved to claim the central highlands of the country, so too the ruling politicians move to claim the central highlands of the city.

As long as Dodoma and Abuja remain essentially paper capitals, defined more by the hopes of their Master Plans than by any built realization, assessments must remain both partial and cautious. Yet, whatever the outcome, both plans are clear statements about the relationship between capital and capitol. In each case, as in Chandigarh and Brasilia, the capitol is detached from the capital, but visually prominent. Even in socialist Tanzania, there seems to be little attempt to intermix the most important functions of government with other institutions or with residential areas. In contrast to evolved capitals, where government buildings are located in many different quarters of the city, in the designed capitals there is a separate and privileged zone for government. Only in Dodoma is there a suggestion that the central portion of a capital city may be a series of pedestrian enclaves integrating many activities rather than a Mall of vast vistas or a plaza of heroic dimensions. Yet even here, the two buildings of greatest political consequence-- the Party headquarters and the parliament -- are to stand above the otherwise well-cultivated humility of the capital.

Capitol Versus Capital

With the discussion of Abuja and Dodoma, the account of the relationship between capital and capitol has come full circle. From ancient citadel to modern capital, the city has focused on the place of rule. Modern architectural manifestations of a ruler's concern for "national identity" have not always taken the form of new capital cities. As has been suggested most directly with regard to Abuja, planning a new capital city often revives the very same problems that the new construction hoped to leave behind in the old capital. While the premise of an "administrative city" implies an unusual majority of relatively wealthy "white collar" workers, the promise of this new city as a source of construction employment draws in poorer segments of the population as well. One solution, for many governments, has been to build not a new capital, but simply a new capitol.

Whereas in Nigeria and Tanzania, the leaders found it both desirable and, perhaps, possible to create new capitals distant from the colonial capitals of the past, the leadership of many other countries has preferred to stake out new enclaves in or near the existing capital. The decision to move a capital is not the only kind of decision; there are decisions not to move, as well. While a decision to stay put may be largely a result of an inability to pay for a new capital, it is also very likely that in most of these cases it is to the advantage of those in power to remain where they are. The projection of "national identity" is hardly limited to large-scale issues of urban planning and new city site selection; it is intimately tied to architecture as well. This is the subject of the next section, where the focus is upon new post-colonial capitols.

PART TWO

**FOUR POST-COLONIAL
DESIGNED CAPITOLS**

CHAPTER THREE

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE CAPITOL COMPLEX

Introduction

Though mention has already been made of several capitol complexes, discussion of them has, thus far, been rather cursory. In the first part of this thesis, I have been more concerned to demonstrate the development of patterns in the relationship between capital and capitol. I have emphasized the placement of government buildings in relation to the plan of their city, while saying relatively little about the design of the buildings themselves. In cases where a whole new capital city has been designed, it is these macro-symbolic design issues that seem most important. In such places, buildings are inseparable from the vistas that frame them. The capitol complex, as the major focal point of a large and complex design, often has the visual support structure of an entire city to undergird its spatial importance. In those cases where a government commissions a new capitol without also commissioning a new capital to frame it, however, the situation is significantly different.

Where the macro-symbolism of a new capital is lacking, government leaders (and the designers they employ) use other techniques to assert the importance of the capitol. Denied the opportunity to be the centerpiece of a new city, the newly-designed seat of government is located either on the outskirts of the existing city, at a place where a large parcel of land may be obtained, or else is located more centrally, on a much smaller site. In either case the old idea of the *caput mundi* suffers considerable distortion. The

post-colonial capitol complex is either a head without a body or it is microcephalic. In the latter instance, where a smaller capitol is inserted into the existing city fabric as part of a scheme of "urban renewal," the siting still lacks some of the contrived prominence that is possible only in a designed capital. The long history of conquerors building upon the most prominent ruins of the conquered-- so familiar in the saga of sacred places such as Jerusalem's Temple Mount-- has as yet no parallel in the design of post-colonial capitols.

Unable or unwilling to build an entire new city as a national symbol of post-colonial identity, this identity is made manifest in other ways. From Washington, D.C. to Abuja, the designed capital has been a diagram of political power, a physical expression of control and continuity. The architecture of capitols, like the planning of capitals, represents a continuation of politics by other means. At one level, this physical articulation of the political tenets and social priorities of the government is indicated by the juxtaposition of government buildings, in relation to the capital and in relation to each other. At another level, however, architecture itself carries political messages through the associations of its forms.

In the case of several of the most recently-completed national parliament buildings, there are clear attempts to apply indigenous architectural forms to the task of housing a post-colonial government. No longer content to rely on the deliberate cultural anonymity (or, alternatively, the deliberate Western hegemony) of high modernism epitomized by the term "international style," government leaders and their architects have produced design solutions that are more evocative of local traditions. There are, however, many different local traditions. The decisions as to which aspects of indigenous architectural form to elevate into a building that is meant to serve as the symbol of a

modern nationstate are never arbitrary. Intended as a kind of compensation for the absence of a spatially-supportive new capital city, parliament building architecture plays an important role in the symbolic expression of "national identity."

What is National Identity?

The process of decolonization involves far more than a political change of government; it entails a far-reaching alteration of social and cultural consciousness. Moreover, as Clifford Geertz observes, the battle against colonial rule is not at all equivalent to the "definition, creation, and solidification of a viable collective identity."¹ The nationalism that supported the drive for independence in the name of freedom and self-determination is not the same as the nationalism needed after the revolution to define the "self" that has been freed. In their relation to the institutions of the state, the two stages of nationalism may well be diametrically opposed. Crawford Young notes that the state which, before independence, had been "the foil against which unity was forged" is, after independence, "itself the main vehicle in the hands of the nationalist elite for the fulfillment of the mission."² For most political leaders, directing this post-independence nationalism remains a daunting task. As Geertz comments:

Most Tamils, Karens, Brahmins, Malays, Sikhs, Ibos, Muslims, Chinese, Nilotes, Bengalis or Ashantis found it a good deal easier to grasp the

¹ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 238.

² Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p. 71.

idea that they were not Englishmen than that they were Indians, Burmese, Malayans, Ghanaians, Pakistanis, Nigerians, or Sudanese.¹

After the "easy populism" of the independence movement, Geertz continues, the leadership of a new state must face the more difficult challenge of consolidating the identity of the "collective subject to whom the actions of the state can be internally connected."² In other words, national identity must be fostered internally-- within each individual and among the constituent groups of the new state -- rather than oppositionally.

This public statement of collective identity takes many forms and makes use of many different kinds of symbols for support. These symbols, whether in the guise of a constitution, a military parade or a parliament building, help to give value and significance to the activities of the state. As Geertz puts it:

The images, metaphors, and rhetorical turns from which national ideologies are built are essentially devices, cultural devices designed to render one or another aspect of the broad process of collective self-redefinition explicit, to cast essentialist pride or epochalist hope into specific symbolic forms, where more than dimly felt, they can be described, developed, celebrated and used.³

Objects and events, monuments and ceremonies, all contribute meaningful symbols to the production and consolidation of the "we."

The visible symbols of "national identity" take many forms. Flags come first to mind, along with images of those leaders responsible for creation of the state. These, in turn, are often associated with party emblems and other accepted logos and slogans of national government. Such are the images on coins and bills, often in combination with depictions of indigenous flora and

¹ Geertz, p. 239.

² Ibid., p. 240.

³ Ibid., p. 252.

fauna. Similarly, such images of "national identity" predominate on those postage stamps that collectors curiously term "non-commemoratives," presumably on the grounds that they do not commemorate one particular historical event.

Works of architecture assume a peculiar place in this assemblage of national symbols. It was not long after the Lincoln Memorial was built that it displaced the words ONE CENT from the center of the "tail" side of the American penny. Likewise, on the nickel, the head of Jefferson is backed by the image of his home at Monticello. These two buildings, along with a few others in and around Washington D.C., are not only associated with individual statesmen but have become infused with the symbolism of American democratic government itself. While there may be few clues in their neo-classical architectural language to suggest the inevitability of their association with a specifically American "national identity," such symbolic associations do remain powerful.

New post-colonial parliament buildings, since they are ostensibly built to serve and symbolize a nationstate as a whole, would seem obvious candidates for expressing "national identity." More often, however, since their siting and appearance is chosen by the leadership rather than by the populace as a whole, the resultant building is hardly representative of anything resembling a truly "national" identity. Architecture and planning are often used as tools for promoting something called "national identity," but many dimensions of this phenomenon remain unarticulated. National identity through architecture and planning can mean many different things and be pursued in many different ways.

Dimensions of "National Identity" in Architecture

When one reflects upon the architecture of a national assembly building it seems appropriate to consider exactly what it is that is being "assembled". Post-colonial parliament buildings, intended in part as visual evidence of the rightful existence of a new state, are designed with multiple simultaneous frames of reference. Yet, to the extent that these buildings are discussed at all, assessments are too frequently couched solely in formal terms. Or, if there is some attempt to interpret the form, the building is often reduced to a cultural symbol, detached from the social and economic forces that helped to produce it. Thus, to begin to assess the role of a parliament building in its culture, many forces must be considered; "national identity" does not come about easily and is always molded from what has come before it.

Conscious efforts on the part of government leaders and their architects at expressing "national identity" in a parliament building would seem to take place within at least three different frames of reference, each with its own implications for architectural form and cultural production. In addition to the set of issues regarding the spatial relationship between the capitol complex and the rest of the city, the symbolism of capitols is a product of 1) The sub-national group allegiances and preferences of the sponsoring regime, 2) The priorities of the architect's long-term design agenda and 3) The government's interest in pursuing "international identity" through modern architecture. In other words, what is passed off as a quest for "national identity" is in reality a product of the search for subnational, personal and supranational identity.

1. National vs. Subnational Identity

It is simplistic to regard national assembly buildings as an architectural manifestation of national distinctiveness. While it may be the case that some parliamentary architecture is meant to demonstrate some visibly unique aspect of the newly constituted state, something which will differentiate it from other neighboring states (particularly important, perhaps, if there are significant regional conflicts), "nationhood" is not easily represented. Though government leaders may view the design of a parliament building as an affirmation of the wisdom or necessity of statehood, as visual documentation of a distinct culture deserving of status in the international system of states, this "distinct culture" is rarely coterminous with the nation as a whole.

New states are rarely-- if ever-- culturally homogeneous, and "national identity" is rarely if ever equivalent to the liberation of a single and clearly bounded cultural group. Rather, much of twentieth century statemaking involves the mediation between factions; many "nations" may be forced to co-exist, peacefully or otherwise, within the bounds of a single "state". The borders of many post-colonial states are vestiges of an era where a colonial administration was in control, with varying degrees of brutality and varying degrees of effectiveness, over a multitude of groups having divergent interests and multifarious alliances. With the cessation of colonial administration and European political control, many of these regional and internescine hostilities became unleashed. Geertz writes of the "nationalism within nationalisms" and notes that virtually every state emerging from colonial rule has suffered from provincial or separatist strains, a direct and

sometimes "immediate threat to the new-wrought national identity in whose name the revolution was made."¹ Thus, Geertz concludes,

[I]n apparent paradox (though, in fact, it has been a nearly universal occurrence in the new states) the move toward national unity intensified group tensions within the society by raising settled cultural forms out of their particular contexts, expanding them into general allegiances, and politicizing them.²

To the leaders of such groups, the notion of a unitary "state" is either an anathema or an irrelevance. In many cases, the government of a post-colonial country has often received recognition by the United Nations long before it is accepted by the non-united groups within the country.

Another important factor limiting the perception of "national identity" among a newly-independent population is even more basic. Not only are most ex-colonial states divided into many mutually opposed groups, they also tend to be overwhelmingly rural places where the only community commanding active membership and loyalty is local rather than national or regional. Identity, according to Young, is "a subjective self-concept or social role" and, as such, it is "often variable, overlapping, and situational."³ To make his point, he describes a hypothetical tenant farmer in rural India, whose identity is composed of many such parts: he is a cultivator, a tenant, a member of a family and a member of a particular sub-caste and caste; alternatively he may identify himself as a speaker of a particular language, a follower of a religion, a resident of a region, or a supporter of a political faction. Only at the levels farthest removed from his daily life will he need

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³ Young, p. 65.

to think of himself as a rural person or, ultimately, as an Indian.¹ Especially since most supralocal identities were not well-developed prior to the arrival of colonial rule, their cultivation by post-colonial national leadership remains a difficult task. Under these circumstances, national identity, whether taken in architectural or any other terms, becomes increasingly artificial and subject to the dictates of those in power.

More often than not, the "national identity" that is communicated through the production of a parliament building highlights the identity of a dominant group within a plural society. The search for national identity in parliamentary architecture is, therefore, closely related to the political structure of the state. While there may be some well-intentioned search for a unifying national symbol, it is often the case that this choice of symbol, if examined more closely, reveals other, more structural, social and economic tensions.

In his seminal essay "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," Geertz usefully divides what he calls "primordial ties" into six categories.²

1. Assumed Blood Ties (ties based on untraceable quasi-kinship thought to be real, as among desert nomads)
2. Race (ties based on phenotypical features such as skin color, facial form, stature or hair type)
3. Language (ties based on the primary means of linguistic communication)

¹ Ibid., p. 38.

² Ibid., pp. 261-63. Young challenges Geertz's use of the term "primordial," and argues convincingly that the consciousness of these ties to larger groups is of relatively recent origin. Nonetheless, Geertz's categories seem a useful analytical tool for assessing the present situation (see Young, p. 65).

4. Region (ties based on topographical features, such as islands or intervening mountain ranges)

5. Religion (ties based on systems of belief)

6. Custom (ties based on patterns of behavior, especially important where one group believes itself to be the bearer of "civilization")

In the case of many highly plural post-colonial states, however, these six kinds of "ties" have come undone: they are often more notable for their divisiveness than their bonding.

The symbols of "national identity," whether architectural or otherwise, are derived from these six kinds of divisions. Some types of schisms are, of course, much more important in some places than in others, though a highly plural state such as India features a complex and interwoven pattern of allegiances that involves all six categories. Government leaders must necessarily make choices among contending groups and, consciously or not, symbolic structures such as parliament buildings are products of these preferences. While the rhetoric may be about "unity," the symbols chosen to represent this are often charged with highly divisive associations. As products of an elite having its own set of group preferences, capitols reveal a great deal about what Geertz terms the "cultural balance of power"¹ within a pluralistic state.

Geertz's schema of multiple group ties is made still more complex since most of these allegiances do not fit neatly within the boundaries of a single state. In many states, for example, the central division within the population is along lines of religion. Here, the issue is complicated by the fact that many religions operate transglobally. Thus, while the design of a parliament

¹ Ibid., p. 245.

building may adopt some of the iconography of the religious majority in that state, this may do little to assist the consolidation of a specifically "national" identity (as in a "pan-Islamic" context, for instance).

Closely related to Geertz's notion of "assumed blood ties" is the tendency for the national political leadership to want to assume architectural ties to some favored period of the past. Architecture may be used as an iconographical bridge between preferred epochs, joining the misty palisades of some golden age to the hazy shores of some future promise, while neatly spanning all troubled colonial waters. Any new parliament building should therefore be viewed in the context of that which preceded it, especially in relation to past capitol buildings and past capital cities. While national identity may be promoted through attempts to demonstrate architectural evidence of cultural uniqueness, such identity may be forged oppositionally as well. In the most obvious instances, the new building (and, in some cases, the new capital city) is seen as the alternative to the old quarters of the colonial guardian. Stylistic differentiation-- whether at the level of city form or architectural language-- may itself become a virtue. If, however, the old quarters cannot be surpassed in scale and grandeur, sometimes (as in New Delhi) they are appropriated.

This notion of appropriation suggests properly that the construction of parliament buildings is, above all, an act of power and a search for legitimacy. Most often, in the post-colonial period, this power has been invested not in a political system but in a single regime. The decision to proceed with the design and construction of a new capital city or a new parliament building (a decision which often implies the budget-straining commitment of a poor nation to pay for it) is a decision of a regime, not a "nation". The classic case is, of course, Kubitschek's Brasilia. In the case of

capitol complexes, where the smaller scale of construction usually permits a faster realization than is the case for a new capital city, the identification between a particular ruler and a building is often very close. The project, whether seen as a success or a debacle, becomes associated with that regime politically (and often iconographically). In some cases where there are large financial resources available, the occasion of a new parliament may become a means through which a contemporary regime may seek to recall the imagery and monumental presence of some distant yet historically related pre-colonial empire. In so doing, government leaders often manipulate Geertz's six "primordial ties" in the service of distinctly non-primordial ends.

While, in some instances, such an evocation of the past can be effectively used as a call for a new future, very often the misguided yearning for some lost "golden age" yields architecture as stultified as it is sentimental. In these cases, the execution of a parliament building is an inherently conservative act. There is a curious, even bewildering, disjuncture between the monumentality of most new national assembly buildings and the fledgling democracies they are ostensibly meant to signify. It may well be that such buildings are far more about the "fledgling" nature of the regime than they are about any sincere notion of "democracy". To a large degree, many post-colonial capitol complexes are, like ancient citadels, a refuge for rulers rather than a vehicle for the sharing of political power. In this way, a parliament complex may promote no "national" identity at all-- its purpose is to advance the power and independence of Government as an institution. When faced with a monumental parliament building, one cannot help but think that the line between national pride and governmental insecurity is a very fine one indeed.

2. National vs. Personal Identity

A second influence on the design of parliament buildings is architectural culture itself, the ways that a building is a product of the education, office practice and aspirations of its architects. To date, most internationally prominent architects in the "Third World" have been educated in the West or have received a Western-influenced architectural education closer to home. Moreover, with increased communications and the rapid dissemination of glossy periodicals, it is difficult for an architect designing a large public building in a developing country to avoid being aware of Western trends and preferences, especially since these may be his or her own as well. With such global architectural consciousness, a purely "local" design solution seems increasingly unlikely.

Another key aspect of international architectural culture is that the demands of large-scale capitol complexes in developing nations often exceed the capabilities of indigenous firms to implement them. Thus, even where a local architect may be found, it is often the case that-- as with new capital cities-- architectural, engineering and managerial expertise must be imported from abroad. It may well be that the need for this multinational cooperation, often entailing the use of building techniques unfamiliar to the architect or the construction team, may significantly affect the kind of design decisions that are made.

In some cases, the chance to design a parliament building may be treated by the architect chiefly as an opportunity to reiterate the ongoing formal preoccupations of a highly personal oeuvre, to such an extent that the more public issues of symbolism are not rigorously explored. In cases where the architect is unfamiliar with the social, political and cultural climate of the

client's country, such personal and internal preoccupations can easily promote design solutions that seem to be alien intrusions. In an age of autographed buildings, a national assembly building can become subject to the international personality cult of its architect. In these instances, the work is judged only as the artistic expression of a revered master, as if the capital were merely a museum acquiring a "major building" by a "major artist." The whole notion that the building may a product of and for a developing country seeking more than a museumpiece is ignored. Yet the issue is complicated by the fact that, at some level, the government leadership may well want a building that is a revered museumpiece and an alien intrusion, as long as this intervention can be promoted as an aspect of modern progress. The global architecture of parliament buildings still turns along a single major axis that runs between two poles: the economic pull of multinationalism and the magnetic attraction of personalism.

3. National vs. International Identity

A third frame of reference for the design of post-colonial parliament buildings is the government's interest in treating architecture as a visible symbol of economic development. As such, it is intended not only to promote national pride but to provide international recognition. Parliament buildings are intended as demonstration of a developing country's ability to equal the West on its own terms. As Geertz describes it, the challenge for developing countries is to find a balance between cultural self-determination and international modernity:

...[T]he peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two powerful, thoroughly independent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives-- the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes and opinions "matter," and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern state. The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity, and a demand that the identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as "being somebody in the world." The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice, and beyond that of "playing a part in the larger arena of world politics," of exercising influence among the nations.¹

In short, as Edward Shils phrases it, "'Modern' means being Western without depending on the West."²

For many states in the Third World, formal political independence has been accompanied by sporadic and uneasy development; sporadic because of insufficient funds and factional infighting, and uneasy because of increasing dislocation from traditional ways of life. Modernization, in its architectural manifestations, has led to the gradual globalization of cheapened and diluted versions of the "international style". If anything, post-colonial urban architecture has been, in general, far less attuned to the specifics of place than were its hybrid predecessors designed under colonial regimes. In many places, concrete-box parliaments have indistinguishably joined concrete-box offices and housing blocks, creating an "international style" far more ubiquitous than anything out of Hitchcock and Johnson.

In this context, "national identity" is not the overriding issue; the goal is identity in the eyes of an international audience. The consequence is that part of the "national identity" of some developing countries has come to be

¹ Ibid., p. 258. Geertz here is drawing upon the writings of Isaiah Berlin and Edward Shils.

² Edward Shils, "The Military in the Political Development of the New States," in Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 486.

defined according to the dictates and tastes of Western consumers. Some parliament buildings (like many hotels) are designed to remain in keeping with the pre-existing international image of the country; the building must, at some level, confirm a stereotype. The danger here is that the cultural richness that was negated by international modernism will reappear only in cartoon form. The box with the flag in front of it is replaced by a building that is a flag itself. One form of design denies the possibility of architecture to contribute to national identity; the other reduces architecture to a three-dimensional government-sanctioned billboard advertising selected aspects of indigenous culture.

In his essay, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", Paul Ricoeur identifies a central paradox inherent in all attempts at forging a post-colonial national identity: "It is a fact: every culture cannot sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization. There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization."¹ The elements of the paradox, however, are more complex than Ricoeur's formulation would allow. Implicit in his essay is the notion that there is some one "national culture," and that it is rooted in "an old dormant civilization". Yet, even in the most seemingly monolithic new state, the residues of old civilizations are not one but many. Solutions, whether political or architectural, can never come easily, as long as there is no peaceful correlation between officially recognized "states" and the multitude of competing nations and affiliations that exist within them. In

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" in History and Truth, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 277.

the attempt to rediscover an old dormant civilization, pluralism is well served neither by denial nor pastiche.

Parliament as Architecture and as Institution

In all of the discussion of the capitol complex as a vehicle for the symbolic expression of national identity, it is important not to forget that these buildings, above all, are expected to be functioning institutions. The iconographic discrepancy between the political proclamations of "unity" and the architectural evocations of factional preference is significant, but it is not the most fundamental incongruity. Though it seems important to underscore the disjuncture between monumental architecture and feeble institutions, one must remember that it is the institutions of parliamentary government-- and not merely their monumental architectural treatment-- that constitute the truly alien presence. Architecture is a symptom of a much larger cultural conditions caused by the rapid introduction of Western institutions into formerly traditional societies.

In most countries that have gained their independence since the second World War, it is not only modern Western architecture that is imported, but also modern Western democratic institutions. In traditional societies, Edward Shils points out, conflicts are settled by an emergent consensus, rather than by voting:

The traditional image of "public life," moreover, has no room for *legislation* and for the public discussion preparatory to a compromise among conflicting contentions. Laws are not *made* in traditional societies. They are *found* in judgments made in the resolution of particular disputes. Debates in parliament and decisions by majorities, frequently composed of very heterogeneous interests, although having

certain parallels in tribal discussions about succession, have no parallels in the major functions of policy formation and lawmaking. The rudimentary governmental apparatus of traditional societies is not oriented toward the making of laws or their implementation. It is oriented toward the maintenance of order by the enunciation of what is right. It does not seek to do new things, things which have never been done before. It does not promulgate new laws. Above all, it does not promulgate new laws to establish new social and economic arrangements. It is a mode of affirming established rules.¹

To some extent, this enormous procedural and conceptual gap between traditional and constitutional governments was bridged by the training of an indigenous elite during the waning years of colonial rule. Yet the schooling of this native elite to accept the institutional trappings of Western constitutional democracy, could do little to educate the majority of the population or even to guide the elected participants. The chief concern, according to Shils, is not only that constitutional democracy is "different in much of its particular content and in some of its fundamental values from the indigenous tradition," but also that "it is experienced as alien by its practitioners." This, he points out, "places it at a disadvantage where indigenous things are at a premium:"

The elites of the new states are, of course, different from the mass of the population, as they are, indeed, in any state. They are different, however, in a significant way by virtue of the cultural disjunction between themselves and their people. This makes...for impatience, but it also makes for a desire to make oneself more indigenous. Awareness of the decayed or rudimentary condition of their indigenous cultural inheritance has made men feel the need to revive it; it has made them feel the need to affirm its value and to deny derogations whether explicit or implicit. In an atmosphere of sensitive nationalism where the dangers to the institutions which have arisen from this till fragile and scantily diffused sense of nationality are real, symbolic affronts to

¹ Shils, "The Fortunes of Constitutional Government in the Political Development of the New States," in Center and Periphery..., p. 469.

the need to be "of the people," to be authentically indigenous, are tangibly felt....The proponents of "alien" institutions feel themselves vulnerable to accusations that they are defenders of "alien" practices.¹

In this way, the instability of capitol institutions and the infusion of symbolic vernacular references into much of capitol architecture may be seen as ultimately and intimately connected.

Four Case Studies of Capitols

In the four chapters that follow, I provide close readings of the architecture, planning and political history of four post-colonial capitol complexes, in Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. While the four were selected chiefly because they feature intriguing buildings that have only recently been completed, they have been chosen also because their diversity provides a useful framework for discussion. They are diverse not only in terms of their architecture, but also in terms of their geographical location, their political context, their patronage, their architect's personal design priorities, their treatment of indigenous architectural traditions and their spatial relationship to the capital. As an overarching means of organization, the four essays are arranged to exemplify increasing degrees of abstraction in the use of architecture to delineate political power and pursue "national identity."

¹ Ibid., pp. 474-75.

CHAPTER FOUR

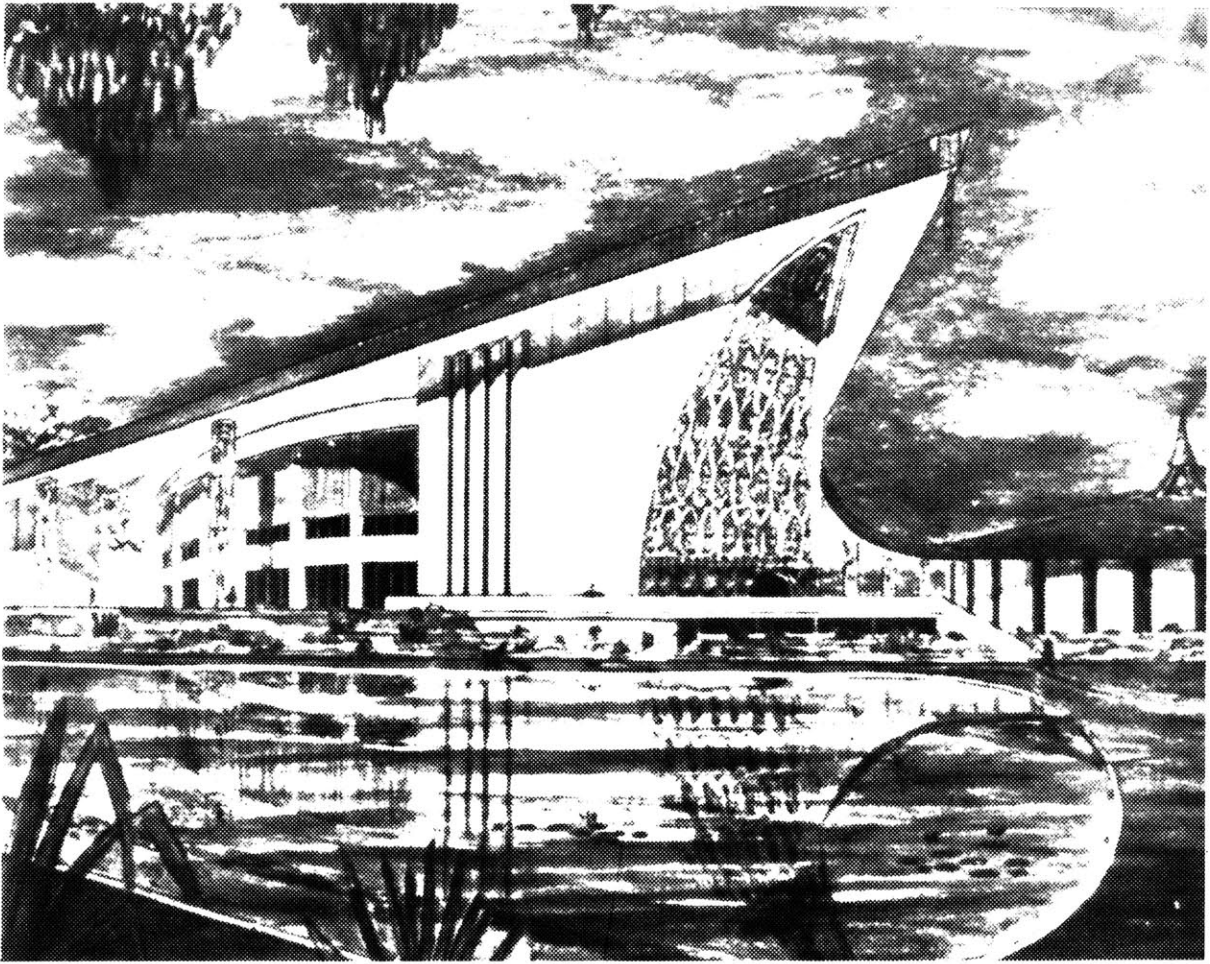
PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S CONCRETE HAUS TAMBARAN

The National Parliament building in Papua New Guinea (PNG), formally opened in 1984, constitutes a clear attempt to move beyond the bland internationalism of much of the post-colonial urban built environment. While seeking an architectural expression that is somehow "modern" (and thus in keeping with the overall development of the country), the architect has also used vernacular building traditions to mold an identity for the state. At a time (in the mid 1970s) when most developing nations still relied entirely on foreign-based "star quality" architects to fly in and bestow a design conception upon the country, the leaders in PNG insisted upon an indigenous solution. Australian expatriate Cecil Hogan, as principal architect of the Department of Works and Supply in Port Moresby at the time, is credited with much of the design for the building [Figs. 46 and 47].

Hogan's work did not proceed unimpeded, as his insider's role seems to have caused considerable controversy. The design competition, originally open only to members of the PNG Department of Works and Supply (the known as the National Works Authority), yielded Hogan's design as the concept thought most worthy of further development. Following objections, however, an officially adjudicated competition was held in 1977, this time open to private architects as well, with Hogan forbidden to enter since the design and the architect were already so well known. In 1978, Bill Phillips, a less senior member of the Works Department staff, was declared the winner of this second go-round. This design, which did not draw directly upon indigenous forms but emphasized the lushness of the landscape, was



46. Map of Papua New Guinea



47. Architect's Rendering of the PNG Parliament House

published prominently in the Moresby newspaper, and the matter seemed settled. Shortly afterwards, however, due to circumstances still unclear to me, the Phillips design was rejected and it was decided to revert to Hogan's original scheme. The National Parliament Commemoration booklet describes the situation with considerable ambiguity: by the time the Phillips design was chosen "the original design brief had become outdated and the designs submitted to the competition were accordingly in many ways unsuitable. Whereas Mr Hogan's design had always been undertaken in conjunction with advice from persons who had a great deal of knowledge and experience of the running of a Parliament and the design had, in several instances, been modified accordingly."¹ Most likely, this cryptic passage is suggesting that Hogan was well-connected politically, having discussed his design with Somare and other members of the government from the beginning. Somare, one of the three judges of the official competition, may well have preferred this first design to that of the declared winner. In any case, Phillips sued the government and subsequently received an out-of-court settlement, and Hogan's design was carried out. Strangely enough, the design fiasco appears to have received no write-up in any architectural journal, and even the Hogan design has never been fully published.² In settling on a locally-based architect, PNG's leaders acted to keep their building out of the mainstream of

¹ The National Parliament Building, booklet issued "In Commemoration of the Opening By His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales," 7 August 1984, p. 13).

² I am grateful to Professor Balwant Saini, who served as one of the judges of the official competition, for clarifying to me certain aspects of this complex situation [Conversation of 28 April 1988]. In addition to an article in the Air Niugini flight magazine and the commemoration booklet, the design appears to have been published only once: a now-defunct British engineering journal shows a top-view of the model and gives a few construction details. See "Papua [sic] Parliament Building Nears Completion," Consulting Engineer (UK), November/December 1983, p. 29.

international architectural culture, even as their country sought international recognition.

Yet, given that it must accommodate a system of parliamentary democracy that remains a largely alien import, the building cannot possibly blend in easily, as architecture or as politics. Colored by the group affiliations and preferences of its government client, the PNG Parliament building is meant to be a monumental announcement of its government's arrival on the international scene. Nonetheless, it was designed and built during a period of backlash against any monumentalism that seemed culturally irrelevant.

The Papua New Guinea parliament building-- like those in Sri Lanka, Kuwait and Bangladesh-- would seem to be representative of a second generation of attempts to reconcile modern architecture and post-colonial national identity. As such, it must inevitably be viewed in the context of the earlier essays at Chandigarh and Brasília. Not surprisingly, the December 1975 "Papua New Guinea Parliament House Design Brief" makes explicit reference to the Indian and Brazilian efforts.¹ Though Papua New Guinea is a small island nation of only three million people, the ambitious Design Brief includes a chart and sketches comparing parliamentary facilities in Canberra, London, Ottawa, Washington, Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, New Delhi, Brasília and Chandigarh. In attempting to set out general parameters for the PNG parliament design, the authors singled out the capitol buildings at Brasília for special disdain: "The new capital of Brazil is a city of vast dimensions and formal architecture. The design of the Parliament group is deliberately monumental and sited well clear of other buildings." The solution for PNG,

¹ "Papua New Guinea Parliament House Design Brief," prepared by the Parliamentary Design Committee for the National Executive Council, December 1975.

they countered, "need not be monumental. It may be more appropriate to have a group of buildings of a deliberately human scale, which invite public involvement and participation."¹

The first indication of deviation from the Brasília approach was made clear in the choice of site for the building. Although the 1969 "Select Committee on Constitutional Development" chose the remote town of Arona in the East Highlands province as the preferred site for a new capital, the 1975 Design Brief rejected this in favor of development on the outskirts of the existing capital of Port Moresby.² Arona, located at the geographical center of the new nation, was considered an appropriate symbolic choice but it was certainly not convenient. Completely inaccessible by road from Moresby, due to high mountains and dense jungle, it epitomized the problems of a country where most provinces are connected only by air travel. Given that it took a century and a half of discussion before Brazilians moved to urbanize the Amazonian frontier, it is not surprising that caution prevailed in Melanesia. As explained in the booklet issued to commemorate the opening of the Parliament, "Arona was considerably isolated in terms of communications and it would have put an extremely heavy financial burden on Papua New Guinea to change this and introduce such facilities as are necessary in a modern Parliament..."³ The report issued by Peddle Thorp & Harvey, the Australian firm hired as "Consulting Architects" for the project was even more blunt in its assessment of Arona, rejecting it as "totally

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

² *Parliament Building Commemoration booklet*, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

unrealistic" due to the "logistic problems in erecting such a complex structure in a remote area."¹

As the chosen alternative to a frontier capital, the government decided on a capitol complex on the frontiers of Port Moresby, PNG's only existing true city. Sited in the administrative district known as Waigani, the parliament became part of a master plan for civic and office development. At the ceremony marking of PNG's formal independence on 16 December 1975, Prince Charles unveiled a plaque and "officially pronounced" Waigani as the site of the parliament building. From that moment forward, the progress of the building became symbolically identified with the progress of independent constitutional democratic government. In the Design Brief for the building, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Design Committee called for it to be "a key building and an example" within the "Waigani City Centre"² [Fig. 48].

The nature of this "Waigani City Centre" deserves some comment. Emblematic of what seems to be a recent trend wherever a new country has chosen to build a new capitol rather than a new capital, Waigani is a "City Centre" without a surrounding city. It is as if Brasilia were only its Three Powers Plaza, New Delhi only its Raisina Hill, or Washington, D.C. only its Mall. The function of the capital city is distilled into its administrative and the touristic essences. The new parliament takes its place among the other buildings intended to promote the existence of "national" culture. Approaching Waigani from Port Moresby, the cultural monuments appear on one side of the road, the offices for bureaucrats on the other. The

¹ Peddle Thorp & Harvey, "Final Report on the Papua New Guinea Parliament House," by Ron Burgess, Project Architect, n.d. (1984?), section 2.

² Brian Holloway, "Letter of Transmission to Prime Minister Michael Somare," in Design Brief, p. 5.

Parliament building takes its place in the chorus line of symbolic institutions, existing and projected. The cast-- in order of appearance-- includes the National Library, the Supreme Court, the National Parliament, Independence Hill, the National Museum and Art Gallery and the State Reception Center. Nearby, as if waiting in the wings, are a National Theater complex and Mirigini House, the Prime Minister's official residence. Unlike Brasília or Abuja, however, the buildings are not choreographed along some rigid axis of constructed vistas nor carefully arranged around a plaza. Neither Independence Hill nor the Parliament House is a focus of any large urban design. Like so many other PNG towns that grew up on the sides of an airstrip, the monuments of the PNG government are simply strung out along the side of a road, at intervals of approximately 300 feet.

The Design Brief stressed public access to the site, calling for a design that would "face the city" and be built on "a human scale, obviously pedestrian and inviting."¹ To date, however, it invites only the hardest of pedestrians. Like the capitol complexes of its automobile-dictated predecessors, Waigani's monuments relate better to the clouds than to each other. Still, it is too soon pass definitive judgment on the site qualities of Waigani since much of the intended parklike environment has not yet been planted and developed. The 1975 Design Brief envisioned that "this whole area" would be "landscaped down towards the [artificial] lake" and "hopefully" would become "a park, botanical gardens, picnic and recreational area embracing the museum, dance grounds and amphitheatre, Independence Hill, etc., through to the new National Library."²

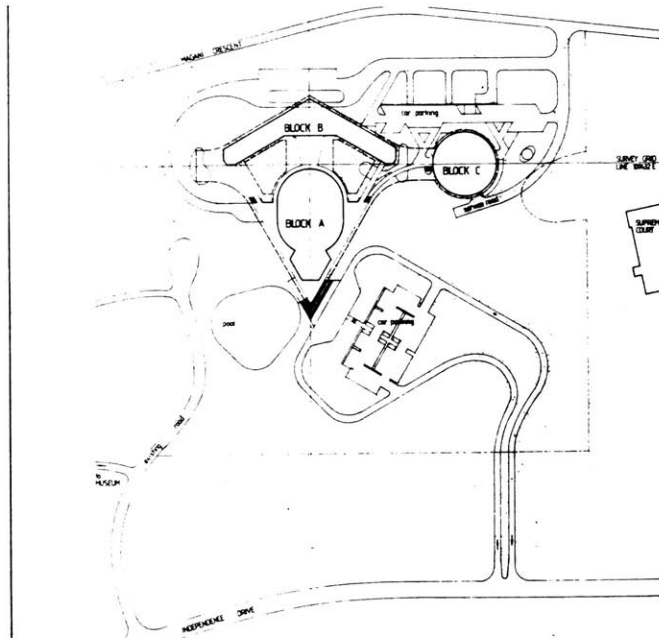
¹ Design Brief, p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 23.

Within this capitol complex-- envisaged as a series of monuments in a park-- the Parliament building was charged with becoming a "a key building and an example." At Waigani, unlike the designed capitals that have been discussed, the parliament had to assert this central symbolic importance without recourse to neo-baroque siting techniques. With nothing in its urban design location to reinforce its pre-eminence in relation to either Port Moresby or to the other monuments of Waigani, the designers of the National Parliament had to rely on architecture alone to convey the necessary symbolism [Fig. 49]. For a country so newly independent and for a population so overwhelmingly unaccustomed to the theories and practices of constitutional democratic rule, an enormous amount of highly explicit symbolism was clearly though necessary. And, for sheer density of such symbolism, the resultant building probably has few equals anywhere in the world.

At first glance, it would seem that the parliament building design epitomizes the enormous dislocation caused by rapid development. Though a parliamentary framework of sorts had existed for more than a decade before independence in 1975, many of PNG's most influential politicians felt that this constitutional "framework" needed an architectural component as well. A new Parliament building was also thought necessary for practical reasons; it replaced a more centrally-located but undersized and makeshift structure that once served as the city's first hospital¹ [Fig. 50]. Whatever the pressing programmatic needs, the desire for symbols clearly steered the design thinking behind the building. Not surprisingly, the superimposition of Westminster-inspired parliamentary democracy upon a overwhelmingly

¹ Judy Newman, "Parliament House," Air Niugini Magazine, 1984?, p. 9.



49. Site Plan of Disconnected Parliament House, Waigani



50. Old Assembly Building, Port Moresby

rural archipelago inhabited by a thousand tribes speaking more than 700 languages and dialects was thought to require the authority of an imposing edifice. Timothy Bonga, Speaker of the National Parliament, described the building as "a symbol of political independence" and emphasized its importance as visible evidence of political progress:

We have adopted many ideas from overseas and have integrated them with our traditional consensus systems. Democracy comes naturally to Papua New Guineans. The particular form we have adopted-- the Westminster system-- less so.

To reinforce this system, a suitable impressive and monumental building was needed. In this parliament we have it.¹

The 1975 Design Brief, composed during the heady days of newly-gained independence, is a document brimming with references to "Papua New Guinean" identity. The first steps to consolidate such an identity were undertaken with a directness as unequivocal as it was disingenuous. The "National Identity Bill of July 1, 1971" ratified the designs for the national emblem and flag and, looking towards independence, named the country "Papua New Guinea."² Yet even the name of the country, chosen to encompass two previously politically separate areas-- "Papua" and "New Guinea"-- is indicative of barriers to a single identity. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Design Committee called for a building that would be "suitable to the lifestyle, climate, geography, cultural and social aspirations and

¹ National Parliament Commemoration, Speaker's Foreword. As evidence of the enormity of the educative task involved in introducing constitutional democracy, preparations for the 1964 elections entailed five hundred patrols visiting 12,000 villages, distributing pamphlets in many languages, showing films, charts and drawings and giving talks on the processes of democratic elections (National Parliament Commemoration booklet, p. 5.).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

traditions and economy of the people,"¹ but did not say how a designer should proceed to do this, given that "the people" were not one but one thousand. Similarly, the Chairman concluded that the building should demonstrate "Papua New Guinea's worthy traditions of art, architecture and settlement planning (of which there is little proper documentation and almost no public knowledge)" and should assist in the "development of industries, crafts and materials of a Papua New Guinean nature so that the substance of the Parliament will also be of the country."²

The problem here is that to assume some "Papua New Guinean nature" simply begs the question. To define "Papua New Guinean" in terms of products available within the territorial bounds of the new nation is far easier than to define "Papua New Guinean" in terms of cultural practices. One task asks only for a list of indigenous (= symbolically acceptable) materials while the other demands that one ask who uses what for what purposes. When the Design Brief discusses the "Structure" of the proposed new parliament and asserts that "This should be functional and yet express an acceptable, traditional design and art form," one must ask what it means to be "acceptable" and to whom.³ Is this a mere tautology, suggesting that the design that is acceptable to the judges is the design that will win? Given that this Brief served as guidelines for a limited design competition, and that Cecil Hogan-- the chosen architect-- also served on the Parliamentary Design Committee that prepared the Brief, there are certainly grounds for suspicion. Yet the issue of which traditional designs and art forms are

¹ Design Brief, p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 11.

"acceptable" is fundamental, transcending the ethics of architectural competitions.

The limits of acceptability were, however, remarkably clear and well-defined in the Design Brief. In both words and illustrations, it was reiterated throughout that an acceptable design would rely very heavily on "traditional" architecture. A final chapter to the Brief contains comments about the proposed building by five "well-known citizens," and seems calculated to insure that the report would not be dismissed as a product of Australian expatriates. We are told that Mrs. Tamo Diro "opts for the Highlands 'raun haus' style, and that Mr. Bernard Narokobi insists that the design "take full account not merely of the building styles of our people, but also the very essence of our people's architecture."¹ Both Mr. Pokwari Kale and Father Ignatius Kilage stressed the need to use local materials with "any steel and concrete well concealed," and Mr. Pious Kerepia, Commissioner of Police, emphasized the need for adequate security, suggesting that public access be maximized but the means of access be limited in number.² "In summary," the Brief concludes, "there is a solid consensus in the views put to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Design Committee:"

The building should be of solid local materials, embody traditional architectural values and, while not being over ostentatious, should reflect the strength of the nation. Father Kilage suggests that all this can be obtained by ensuring that the appearance of the building is decided upon by national graduate architects.³

The remarks of these "well-known" five are consistent in their belief that the Parliament's architecture should reflect indigenous architectural traditions,

¹ Ibid., p. 46.

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Ibid., p. 47.

though only one proffers a particular preference for a "style." The Narokobi suggestion for a "full account" of many styles and a demonstration of some architectural "essence" is both the most comprehensive and the most vague. The authors of the Design Brief attempt to steer the architectural decisionmaking towards some specific acceptable examples, providing a six page compilation of photos and sketches, titled simply "Art and Architecture." These examples, which include samples of both Highlands roundhouses and coastal "Haus Tambarans" (spirit houses), are presented as a catalogue of styles, none of them "national" but all found within the nation. The Design Brief concludes by noting that "a truly Papua New Guinean National Parliament" would appear as "a prime symbol and example in the manner of the 'Haus Man' in a village society. As with designing a 'Haus Man' it is very important to Melanesian attitudes to involve everyone concerned and reach a consensus."¹ This idea of Parliament building by "consensus" seems to have been very directly played out in the nine years between Design Brief and finished structure, and the result is an amazingly literal carrying out of the initial charge to design "in the manner of" a village Men's House. Significantly, some of the very same photos used in 1975 to illustrate the Design Brief were reused in 1984 to "explain" the finished design.

The building that eventually resulted is a gargantuan version of a village Haus Tambaran, or spirit house.² While a single two acre roof covers six

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

² While no one would dispute the imposing size of the Parliament Building, it need also be said that some Haus Tambarans are, themselves, quite immense. Some are almost as tall as Hogan's design for the Parliament, though the traditional buildings have nowhere near the bulk of the new building complex. The choice of this kind of Haus Tambaran is thus somewhat less of a dimensional shock than might first be thought. The building marks one of the few instances in the world where truly monumental architecture is found at the level of the smallest village.

stories of government offices [Block "B"] arranged in the form of a boomerang behind the council chamber [Block "A"] and a smaller circular building [Block "C"] (a "raun haus" containing amenities such as conference rooms, a billiards room, bars and sporting facilities), it is the allusion to the Haus Tambaran that inevitably remains the building's most striking feature [Figs. 51-54]. Though it is true that in some sense the Haus Tambaran, like a parliament building, served as a center of village decisionmaking, the new building is intended for the worship of an entirely novel deity: the spirit of nationalism.¹ In the transition from village sacred space to national symbol, the Haus Tambaran was transformed into concrete and mosaic, transported out of the jungle and into suburban Port Moresby, and transmigrated into the largest and most costly structure ever built on the island.

Undeniably and even avowedly glib, the transformation is nonetheless dramatic and provocative. The decision to capitalize on the essence of an autochthonous architectural form, rather than construct yet another internationalist box, has everything to do with promoting nationalism. "National Identity" cannot come easily to the majority of the 3 million citizens whose primary loyalty has been to family, clan and tribe rather than party, province and country.² Nor is nationalism an easy thing to promote where national boundaries have little to do with the ethnic, tribal and racial

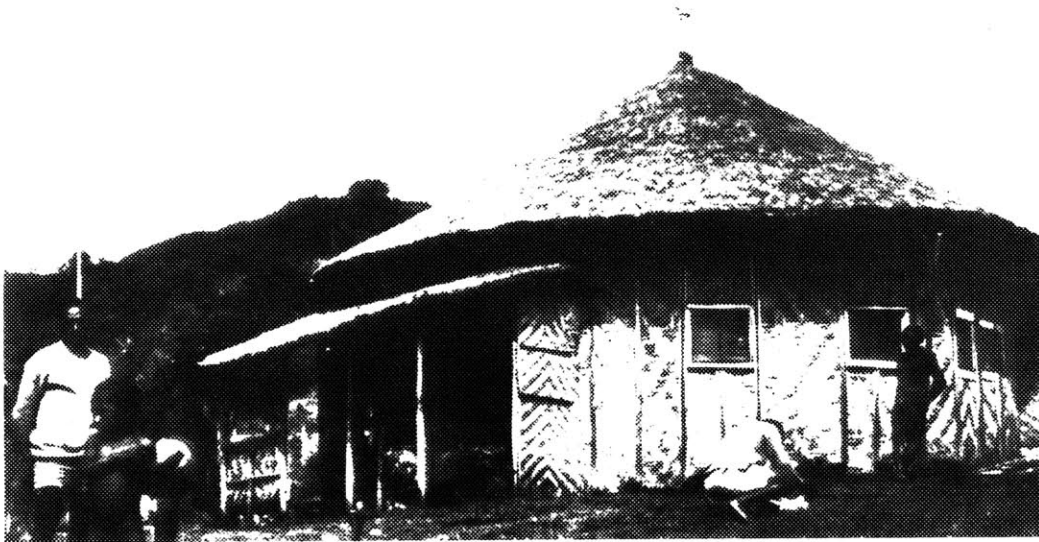
¹ For a good account of the appearance and function of the Haus Tambaran in the villages of the Maprik area, see René Gardi, Tambaran: An Encounter With Cultures in Decline in New Guinea, trans. Eric Northcott (London: Constable, 1960), especially pp. 135-47.

² Perhaps the most obvious limitation of an essay of this length is the inability to explore the nature and significance of the cultural diversity of Papua New Guinea (or the other places I discuss) in any depth. While it may appear odd, even comical, to be citing an airline magazine while refraining from all reference to the enormous corpus of anthropological writings, it is my intent that these case studies be no more than preliminary studies of the interplay between architecture, culture and politics. In these pages, I can do little more than delineate some of the many issues involved.

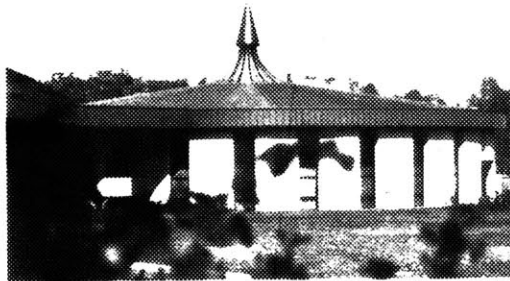


51. Haus Tambaran, Maprik

52. "Haus Tambaran," Waigani



53. Raun Haus, Highlands



54. "Raun Haus," Waigani

ties of the people. Though formally independent from Australia since 1975, PNG remains economically dependent in most ways, and bitter reminders of other aspects of the colonial legacy are not easily overcome. More than anything, perhaps, the harsh artifice of the straight line border separating Papua New Guinea from Irian Jaya (a territory that is Papuan-populated but Indonesian-controlled) indicates the extent to which both colonial and post-colonial administrations can be indifferent to the affiliations of indigenous peoples.

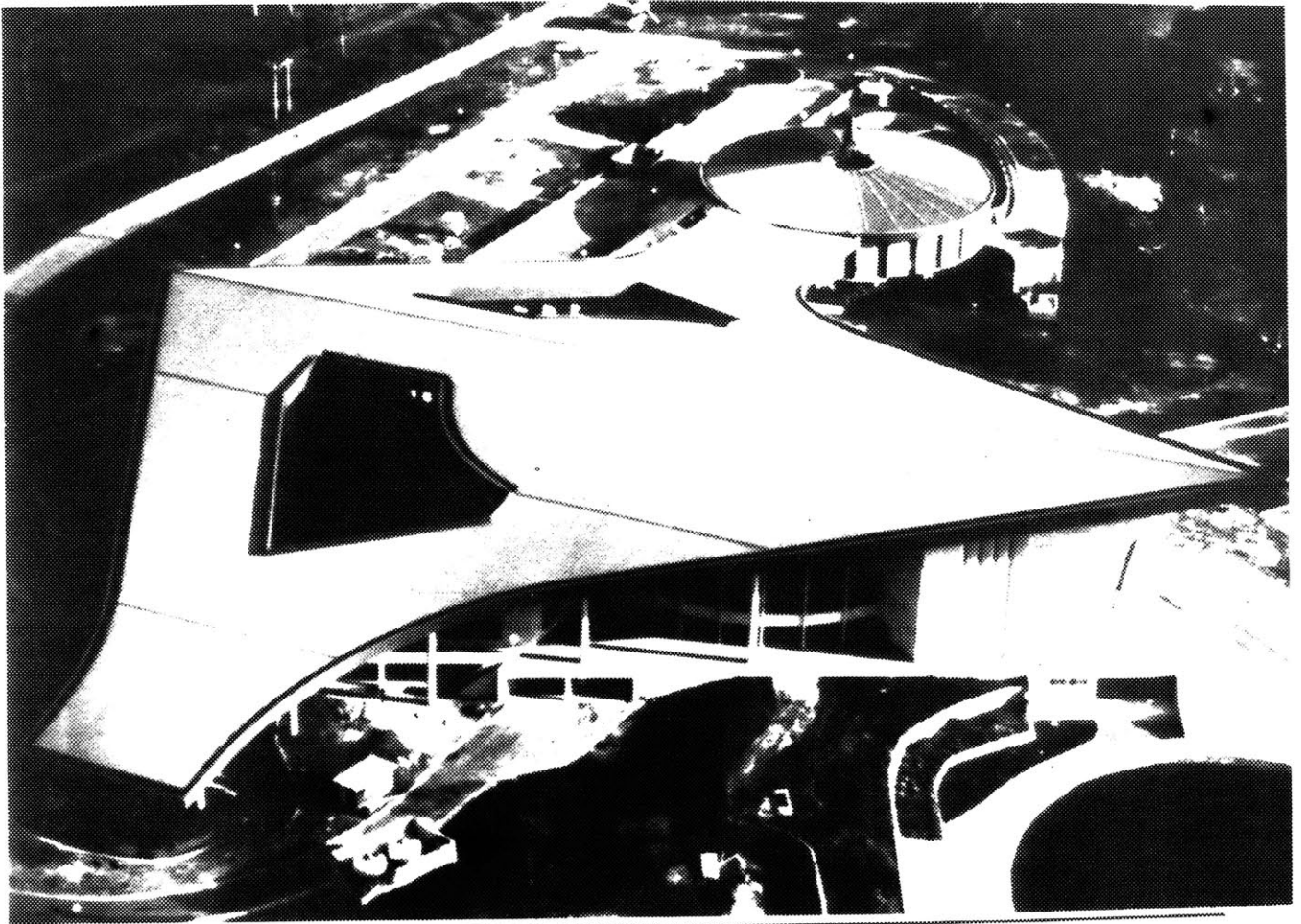
Out of necessity, then, the "national identity" of Papua New Guinea is pursued selectively. The soaring upswept front facade of the building must be regarded as far more than an gesture of form. It is a gesture rooted in social, political and cultural choices, with both national and international implications. From the air, according to Somare's interpretation, the building's shape is "modelled on a spear head flying towards the future" and "symbolises the...astonishing rate" of progress since Independence¹ [Fig. 55].

While the booklet issued to commemorate the opening of the new Parliament House explicitly states that the building's form was inspired by the village Haus Tambaran, not all Haus Tambarans are created equal.² Papua New Guinea's democratic spirit is expected to reside within a Haus Tambaran form found only in an area of the Sepik province near the town of Maprik. Not surprisingly, perhaps, PNG's Prime Minister Somare, who championed this design for the new parliament, was an MP from this same Sepik province.³

¹ Parliament Building Commemoration booklet, p. vii.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ Osmar White, Parliament of a Thousand Tribes: Papua New Guinea: The Story of an Emerging Nation (Melbourne?: Wren Books, 1972), p. 195.



55. "Spearhead Flying Towards the Future"?

While it may be true that the forward-sloping thrust of this particular Haus Tambaran design is among the most memorable, it is by no means a representative piece of architecture for Papua New Guinea as a whole. It resonates only with the village architecture of a small part of one province, differing from others in the area that have either twin peaks or no leaning upsweep at all. Moreover, this choice of source material for the parliament building is almost completely alien to the village architecture of the Highland Provinces, where many tribes did not develop even the institution of the Haus Tambaran. While there is an explicit reference to one type of Highlands "raun haus" this is relegated to the recreation block, a clearly secondary aspect of the total composition.

This lack of relevance to the building traditions of the Highlands must be seen in the context of a long rivalry between the highland areas and coastal zones to the north and south. As an exhaustive study of the development of PNG political parties notes: "Highlands members...saw themselves as a distinct and neglected section of the country, for which they blamed the [Australian-controlled] administration. Whether the immediate issue was a hospital, a transmitter or a secondary school it seemed to them that some other Districts, especially coastal Districts, were more favoured and found it easier to get what they wanted."¹ Osmar White's Parliament of a Thousand Tribes, a detailed history of the PNG independence process, emphasizes that the people from the various provinces suffered from "antagonisms" which are "deep rooted in ethnic, cultural and environmental differences."² Writing shortly before independence, he concluded: "For many years the prime task

¹ P. Loveday and E.P. Wolters, Parties and Parliament in Papua New Guinea 1964-1975: Two Studies (Boroko, Papua New Guinea: Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, 1976), p. 70.

² White, p. 205.

of central government in Papua New Guinea will be to prevent destructive fragmentation of the country by secessionist movements or by reversion to inter-tribal warfare. Its methods of keeping cohesion must encourage the growth of 'national' sentiment to the point at which it supersedes the primitive rivalries and jealousies of groups and provides an emotional base for national solidarity."¹ This, it would seem, is the central justification for the enormous expense (approximately \$30 million) of the new parliament house.

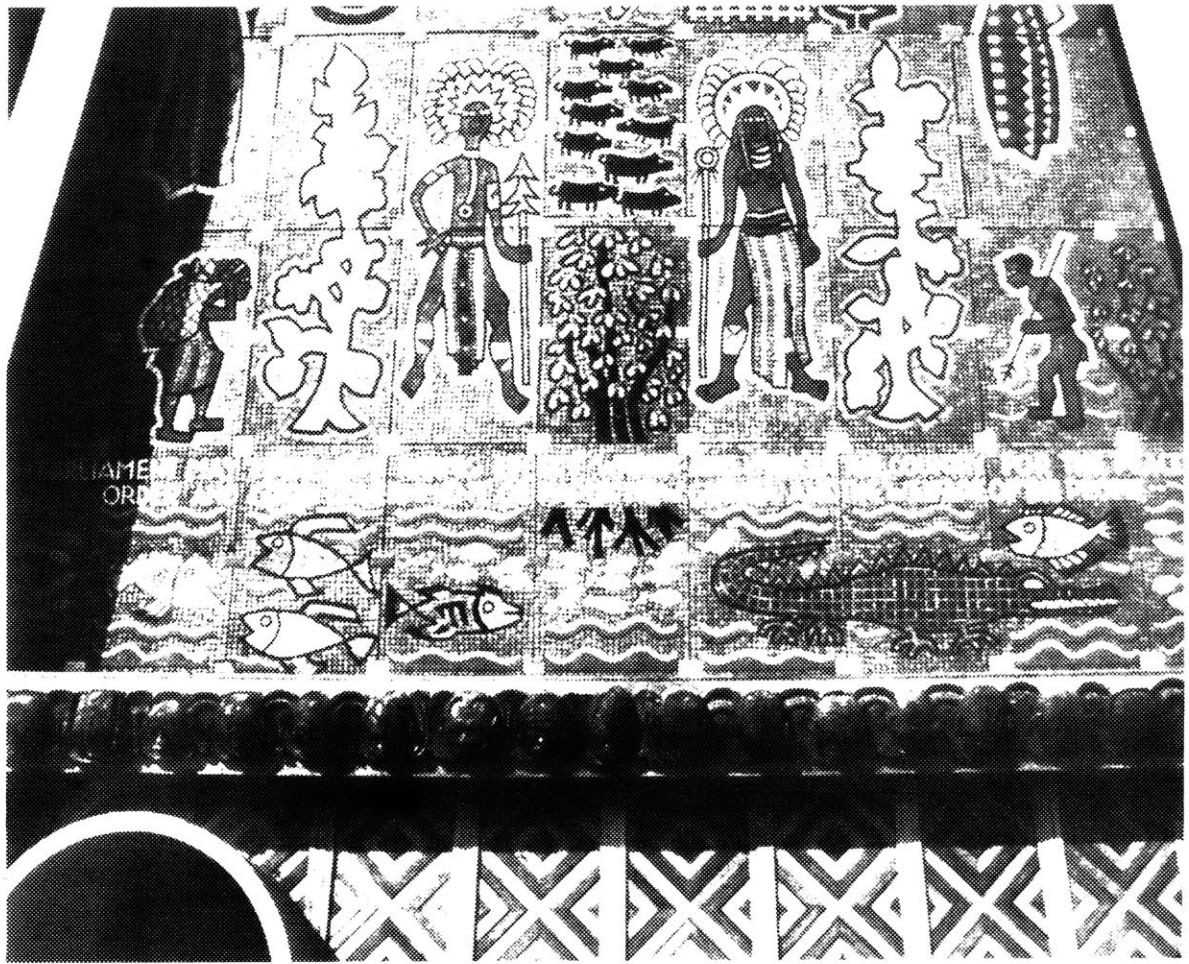
And yet, behind the rhetoric of nationalism lurks the realities of internationalism. The choice of the Maprik-area Haus Tambaran form for the parliament building entrance is not merely a distinctive and memorable shape or the personal favorite of a Sepik-based Minister; it is also the indigenous architectural form most widely known to foreigners. For the outsider, contemplating the investment of either tourist dollars or the advancement of development capital, it is an instantly recognizable image derived from the most widely-touristed and publicized area of the country. In the international competition for development funding, it is a symbol of a tribal unity which does not now exist. It provides a simplified and catchy visual image without a hint of factional discord. The building rises as a veritable advertisement for political stability, thoroughly modernized yet rooted in a quaint traditional village culture. As the facade itself asserts, in white tile lettering just below a mosaic interpretation of the mighty Sepik, "...ALL POWER BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE--ACTING THROUGH THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES". While the proceedings inside the chamber are trilingually transmitted to Members (many of whom can neither read nor

¹ Ibid., p. 224.

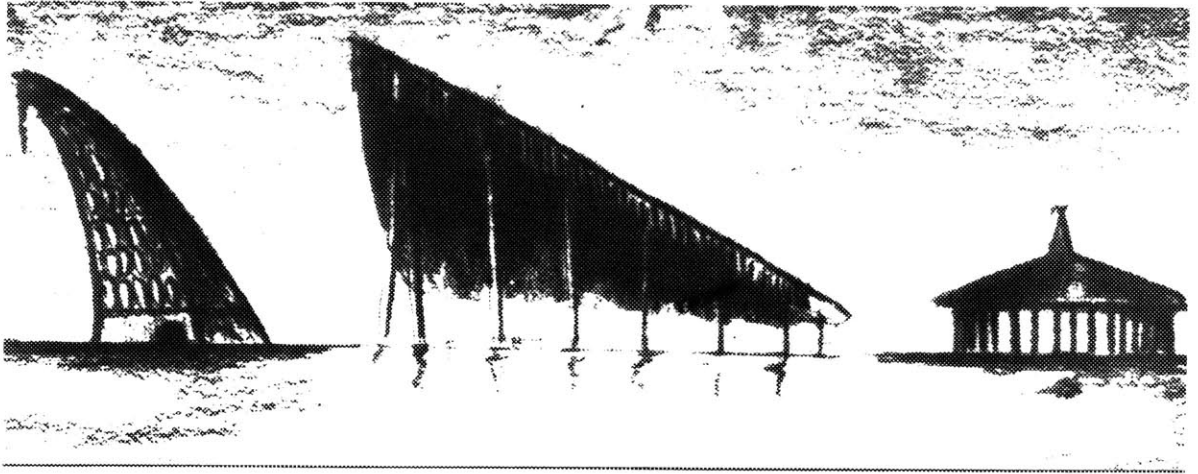
write) through earphones, the constitutional quotations on the facade appear only in English [Fig. 56]. While this is surely sufficient to attract the attention of the Australo-Western visitor, it can bear little relevance to the discussions within. In the effort to demonstrate the existence of a constitutionally-backed national identity, the English facade bespeaks the international nature of the audience that the designers and promoters of the parliament building wish to reach and convince. Equally important, it is a reminder of the non-orthographic nature of so many of PNG's languages and the fact that English, the language of the most recent colonials, is still the government's preferred national language, even if it is not the one most widely spoken in the country. The English language, itself, is an attempt to mediate among factions, and impose a kind of linguistic least common denominator.

If the overall massing of the building is intended, as a Cecil Hogan sketch shows [Fig. 57], to be a composite of Haus Tambaran and Raun Haus, the facade treatments and interiors carry the analogy of "democratic representation" in architecture to an even greater extreme. Throughout the building, there is an attempt to depict the enormous diversity of PNG's component peoples through the symbolic evocation of their art and architecture. Yet, despite the evident sincerity of the effort to make certain that all component peoples will feel duly represented in the design of the National Parliament, the result is a caricature of diversity. Moreover, while the artistic practice of many of PNG's component cultures is alluded to at the level of fine detail, the dominant imagery of the Sepik region is inescapable.

Archie Brennan, associated with the National Arts School in Port Moresby, was brought in to coordinate the art content of the building. Brennan's design for the sixty-three foot high mosaic on the front facade is adapted



56. PNG Parliament House Mosaic Facade



57. Hogan Sketches: Fusing A Parliament

from an amalgam of drawings by various "national artists."¹ This mosaic replaces the traditional (but far less durable) painted bark designs of a Maprik-area Haus Tambaran with a collection of symbols from everyday PNG village life. With the exception of a single small image of a helicopter (so stylized as to be almost unrecognizable) the imagery is entirely an evocation of the rural interior. Dress is traditional, not Western. Wildlife abounds; birds of paradise are depicted as larger than humans (and, indeed, the building as a whole is decidedly bird-shaped).² Oddly enough, as a symbol for an archipelagic nation, there is relatively little water shown; the mighty undulations of the Sepik and the Fly are there but the only large underwater scene depicts fish and crocodiles together, perhaps also indicative of fresh water. Once again, it is the imagery of the river cultures that reigns supreme.

At the base of the entrance facade mosaic there is a ten meter lintel of kwila wood spanning the entrance. Carved into it are nineteen "ancestral masks", representing the nineteen provinces, each carved by a different carver from a different province.³ While there are differences among these carvings, this effort to produce a representative democracy of artwork yields a rather bland and studied result, perhaps because the all carvers were forced to design masks of exactly the same size and were not permitted the use of color.⁴ The result is a lamentable loss of both diversity and vitality,

¹ The term "national artist," used in the National Parliament Commemoration booklet does little more than beg the question of what makes the artist "national."

² Images of birds, and the elaborate use of their feathers for adornment, are central to the ritual activities of many tribes in PNG. Not unlike the fate of Haus Tambaran architecture, these rituals in some highland areas of the country are now transformed into staged ceremonies for paying tourists.

³ Newman, p. 5.

⁴ To be fair, however, the lintels of the traditional Maprik-area Haus Tambaran also feature a series of identically sized and deliberately repetitive carved wooden heads, though these make magnificent use of vibrant colors.

not to mention the utter lack of ritual context. Entering the building, one pushes door handles carved in the shape of kundu drums, another instance where a ritual object has been lifted from context and transformed into simply a secular "shape" that looks indigenous.

Inside the building, mixed messages abound [Figs. 58 and 59]. Though the building retains one unique feature of the traditional Haus Tambaran in that it has two exits but only one entrance, the rest of the interior is the very antithesis of the traditional interior, characterized as a labyrinth of dark anterooms "where one can make progress only by stooping."¹ René Gardi describes his visit to a Sepik village men's house:

Once, in a remote village, when I crept into a small spirit house, I suddenly found myself, with a start, facing thirty-two large coloured spirit figures, which stared spectrally at me through the gloom....These lifeless wooden sculptures seemed to live, to move, and to bear down upon me; the expressions of these faces, which were after all portrayed so simply, were startling and their effect daemonic.²

In an artificially lit and thoroughly air-conditioned series of large chambers where the closest thing to spirit figures are periwigged clerks, the sudden shocks still present are very different from those of the village. At no point in the entire building complex is there an attempt to convey the experience of being in one of the traditional structures; all is surface imagery, aimed at diluting and uniting diverse traditions into an aesthetically and politically palatable whole.

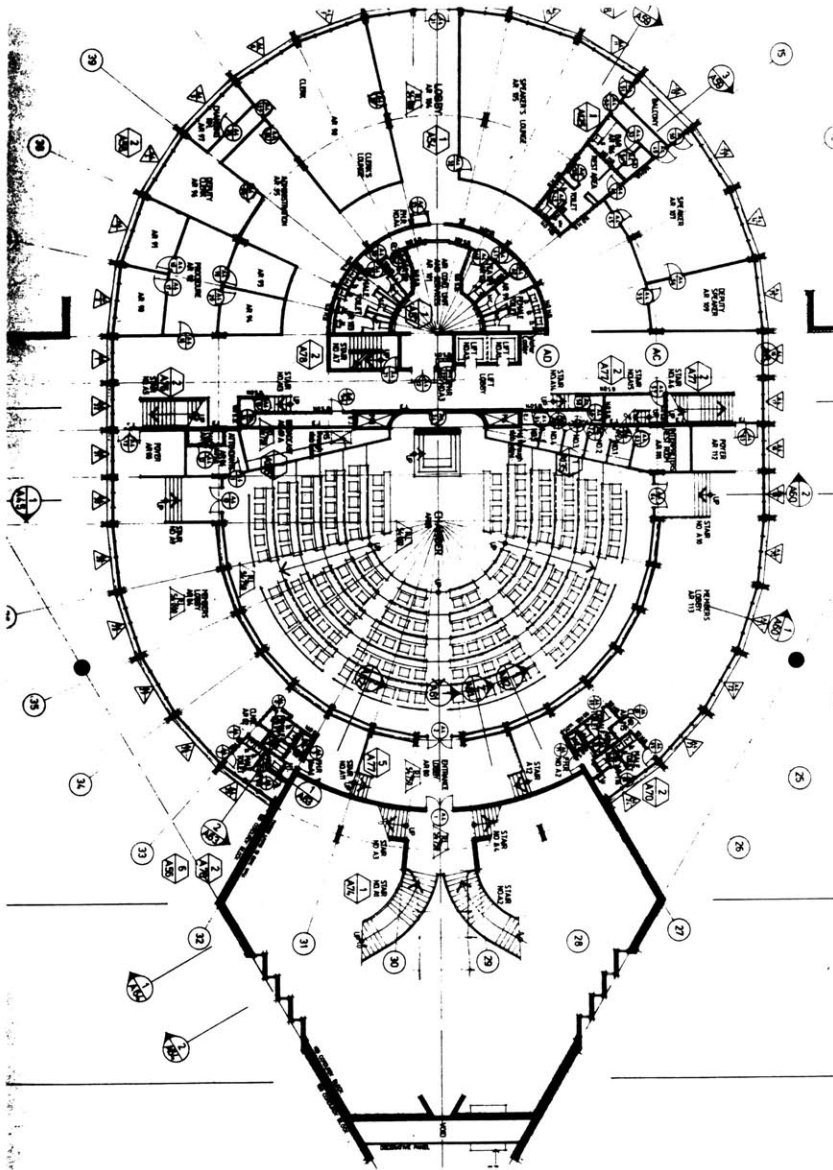
In the effort to give more equal treatment to the artistic traditions of all the provinces, many of the works are collaborative efforts among carvers

¹ Gardi, p. 142.

² Ibid., pp. 142-43.



58. Fish-eye View of PNG Parliament's Two-Exited Entry Hall,
Showing Assemblage of Carved Poles



59. Plan of Assembly Chamber and Entrance Hall

from different tribes and even different regions. The Speaker's chair, for example, is intended to be a cross between the "basic form" of the one used in the British House of Commons and the traditional "orator's stool" used in ceremonies in the Sepik region. If this juxtaposition were not jarring enough, the allusions are further compounded and confounded [Fig. 60]. Though the idea of the orator's stool comes from the Sepik, the intricate carving surrounding it draws upon motifs from the Trobriand Islands and Milne Bay areas, where the orator's stool is not employed. Moreover, these particular motifs are used not for purposes of ritual gathering but to "decorate their ceremonial canoes." As the explanatory booklet concludes: "The whole stylistic range of these motifs has been adapted to the needs of this striking setting." Artistic democracy continues: carved into the front of the Speaker's desk is a "garamut-- a long cylindrical drum carved from one log-- [that] has long been used to call people together" in ceremonies on "Manus Island, along the coastal and island communities and in many regions of the mainland," while the wall surrounding the Speaker's chair is "screen printed with paintings of carved masks from the Gulf and Western Provinces." Only the carved wooden panels that surround the chamber and decorate the fronts of the Members' desks are provincially neutral: "The motif...cannot be identified with any specific region of Papua New Guinea but," we are reassured, "it is closely linked to traditional design."¹

In the grand hall there is a 15 meter high assemblage of carved poles which, literally, bolt together the carving traditions of a dozen regions though, again, the Sepik-area work seems dominant. For the chairs in the Prime Minister's lounge, the Sepik presence is unchallenged. These chairs,

¹ National Parliament Commemoration booklet, pp. 22-24.



60. PNG Parliament Interior, Showing Multi-cultural Speaker's Chair

which were assembled and padded in Australia, were carved out of one thousand sticks of garumet timber distributed to craftsmen from various Sepik villages, each with a distinctive style of carving.¹

In all this, there remains a certain irony in the effort to artistically depict a rural and preindustrial lifestyle in an urban parliament building. In adapting traditional forms for this purpose, an enormous dislocation has inevitably occurred. What once were intrinsic parts of ritual are now rendered as "sculpture." Once-sacred items have been lifted from intricate systems of meanings at the level of family and village and have been ascribed new roles having to do with PNG as a nationstate. Thus objectified, they are now to be viewed in Western terms, as "art." A different collection of meanings now applies; they are to be judged for their beauty and utility and, perhaps, for the memories they may yet instill. As such, the sculptures, carvings and other artwork of the parliament building are not that unlike what is displayed in the National Museum, just down the road (though at least the Museum's objects did once play an actual role in rituals). Only in the context of a Western notion of art (a notion long since understood even in remote villages where carvers now cater to the tourist urge for some "tribal" decorations), could the Westerner's preference for Sepik products be understood by those who designed the parliament building.

Nonetheless, Brennan claims that the work selected was meant to represent PNG as a whole: "We worked very hard to design something which we felt belonged to this country yet of which one could not immediately say: yes that is Sepik, that is West Highlands, that is Trobriand."² Despite his effort, or perhaps because of it, a certain Sepik-centrism remains. While it

¹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

² Newman, pp. 5-6.

may be that this was made inevitable by the mere choice of the dramatic Haus Tambaran form, the choice of an enormously complex and vibrant ceiling design for the grand entrance hall and part of the council chamber, does not help the building demonstrate "diversity."

Brennan adopted his design from that of the painted tapa (bark cloth) ceiling of the Ambunti village "courthouse" in the Sepik province. His designs were then flown to Sydney, transferred onto panels with the aid of a photostanning technique and rendered in a synthetic material which, it is said, resembles a "coarse velvet" when viewed from sixty feet below.¹ Though the official booklet describing the Parliament ceiling notes that "Tapa cloth bearing specific tribal designs may traditionally only be worn by members of that tribe," there seems to have been no qualms about making the Ambunti designs shelter an entire nation's lawmakers.

This combination of native workmanship and Australian technology appears repeatedly in the stories of how "the big meeting house"² was realized. The PNG Department of Works and Supply hired the Australian firm of Peddle Thorpe and Harvey to manage the project, with the stipulation that they maximize and diversify the national involvement in the project. The need for outside assistance was acute since, as of 1984, the building industry in PNG remained completely dominated by expatriate-owned firms, with indigenous builders accounting for only 5% of the output.³ The realization of the parliament building represents a remarkable logistical and managerial triumph, one abundantly endowed with harrowing tales of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

² According to Newman, and corroborated by the reports of other travelers, this is how the building is frequently referred to in rural areas distant from Port Moresby.

³ Alan Stretton, The Building Industry in Papua New Guinea: The Industry Structure and Labour Market (Boroko, PNG: Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, 1984), p. 138.

moving large objects (such as 10 meter logs) from Sepik swampland to Port Moresby building site. In an effort to use local material resources, the building was designed using as little steel as possible, and all concrete bricks were made nearby. A high percentage of the workforce were PNG nationals and local subcontractors were used whenever possible.¹

One benefit of the parliament house which may become of some lasting significance for the building industry has been the initiation of a glulaminate factory, formed to manufacture the ceiling beams. Not only is this factory expected to continue to function, it is expected to use new milling techniques developed during the parliament project which allow white oak (found in abundance on the island) to be used for furniture and other wood products.² Nonetheless, there are considerable grounds for skepticism about the effects of the parliament building on the future of the PNG building industry. Much of the technology developed, it would seem, could well be irrelevant to at least the immediate post-parliament building needs. As John Nankervis of Peddle Thorpe and Harvey comments, evidently without grasping the full irony of his words: "This project has been of immense value to this country. The expertise which has been developed among the nationals involved in the building is considerable. Unfortunately, a lot of their expertise will be lost as most of them will be unable to find a similar job again, which is really a shame now that they have gained the skills."³ Despite having learned a great deal "in terms of structural problems and material problems," Nankervis adds, of those employed on the project, "most will either go back

¹ Newman, p. 8.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Cited in Ibid., p. 8.

to their villages or just hang around Port Moresby with nothing to do.”¹ Thus, unless a sudden upsurge of interest in mosaics should threaten to turn suburban Port Moresby into the Melanesian Ravenna, the parliament building may become yet another entry in the annals of inappropriate technology.

Nonetheless, on many levels, the building is very appropriate for its purpose. As an advertisement for independence and as an idealization of the hopes for representative democracy, the building certainly inspires confidence. Both the process and the product show evidence of a nationalist assertiveness, despite the inevitable reliance upon Australian and expatriate expertise. Nonetheless, if this ten year process of decisions and construction indicates anything, it indicates the supreme importance attached to the design of this building and the overarching concern that it contribute towards “national identity,” whatever the cost.

The costs, however, would seem very high, and not just in terms of money. For all the attempts at introducing and highlighting the artistic traditions of the multitude of cultures that together comprise the new state, there is a danger that this exercise in national identity-making will instead act to trivialize the culture it professes to promote. Just as self-conscious as the building itself, most of the sculptural details appear compromised and enervated, if they are to be judged using Western criteria for “art” (perhaps because the precedents most pleasing to Western eyes have long ago been shipped off to Western museums).

¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Taking the example of the synthetically-reproduced Ambunti "courthouse" canopy, the designs are stripped of their traditional associations with a legend or an event, and are instead valued only for color and texture.

The mural consists of more than 300 panels, each approximately 2m x 1m. A close study will reveal that only 14 different design units are used but, by careful juxtaposition and rotation and by the nature of the design of the panels, an ever-changing imagery is achieved.¹

While there is a facile appeal to the analogy between "the power and guidance gained from ancestors overlooking" important decisions in the Haus Tambaran and the "fitting canopy" hung over the National Parliament, the manipulation of "design units" to achieve "ever-changing imagery" is a total reversal of the traditional role. Yet, perhaps, such judgment misses the point.

The distortion that takes place between the traditional canopy and the modern one is probably not only functionally necessary but also symbolically appropriate. Surely it would have been no less disconcerting if the deteriorating Ambunti bark cloth ceiling had been inserted in its original form. The mediation of high technology in the transformation of art is thoroughly in keeping with the arrival of modern parliamentary institutions and the recognition that the village cultures are, themselves, rapidly deteriorating. One worries only that this kind of pseudo-literal abstraction will only serve to hasten the decline. The original bark paintings were never intended as direct representations of ancestors, legends and events. Their interpretation always depended on prodigious powers of abstraction by the villagers, even where specific iconographical references were widely known.

¹ National Parliament Commemoration booklet, pp. 19-20.

In the Parliament Building, however, the abstraction is of an entirely different order, and far more limited. For better or worse, the transformed and transposed ceiling seems very closely related to the phenomenon known as "tourist art," and is completely in keeping with the "tourist architecture" that frames it.¹

"Tourist art", a phenomenon of increasing prevalence in the last twenty years, is defined in one recent book as "a process of communication involving image creators who attempt to represent aspects of their own cultures to meet the expectations of image consumers who treat art as an aspect of the exotic."² While it is true that the parliament building cannot really be considered as "tourist art" since it is not available for purchase and since it is far more than a tourist attraction, there still seems to be a sense in which the building itself is "consumed". What is consumed is its image-- the image that the leadership of the new state wishes to convey to its own people and to the world. The production of tourist art and, by extension, tourist architecture, inevitably involves the negation of the original culture-bound meanings and ritual associations of a given artifact and its transmutation into a marketable "work of art". As Nelson Graburn has observed, this transaction "involves an increasing tendency among the artists to speak only to the consumer and to remove those elements of style or content that might prove contradictory, puzzling, or offensive to the unknown buyer....In the headlong rush to please the tourists and the taste-makers the artisan finds himself in danger of surrendering control of his product."³ In Papua New Guinea, the emerging

¹ See, for example, Benetta Jules-Rossette, The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective (New York: Plenum, 1984).

² Ibid., p. 1.

³ Nelson H.H. Graburn, ed., Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), p. 32.

class of indigenous "taste-makers" cultivates a kind of sophisticated primitivism that projects both a domestically advantageous demonstration of political order and an internationally palatable, and stylistically recognizable, artistic identity.

If the Port Moresby parliament building is termed "tourist architecture", however, it must be pointed out that not all tourists are foreigners. Still caught up in the euphoria of independence, the general populace (by most every account) is quite taken with the new building; those who can afford to do so flock to see it and few dispute the wisdom of this great expenditure.¹ To point out that the building's artists and architects were concerned with fashioning the international identity of their country is not at all to dismiss their creation or to demean the personal rewards that participation in this venture may well have brought.

It will take a generation or so before the building's impact can be assessed. Perhaps it will become a rallying point for representative democracy. Perhaps it will become the headquarters of resistance against the incursions of an expansionist Indonesia. Or, perhaps, it will become a hated symbol of the dominance of one part of the country over another. It may even be that a future generation of feminists will object to a National Assembly inspired by a village "Men's House" where the presence of women was forbidden. Though it now seems a product of a unique combination of social, political, technological, artistic and architectural conditions, over time the building itself may well become a factor in subsequent change. Lacking a new capital to set it off as the centerpiece of urban design, the PNG

¹ This assessment of the building's popularity is based on the reports of a few travelers with whom I have spoken. I have not, however, heard of any more systematic attempt to judge national feeling about the building, though it would seem that knowledge of its existence is quite widespread.

Parliament House is nonetheless a remarkably stimulating design, raising many issues. Even though its adaptation of traditional design elements seems sterile in comparison to the originals, the sheer logistics of marshalling so many different artistic references into this roadside shrine is something of a marvel. It is ample proof that architectural design can survive even when a barren Haus Man is without a Baron Haussmann.

CHAPTER FIVE

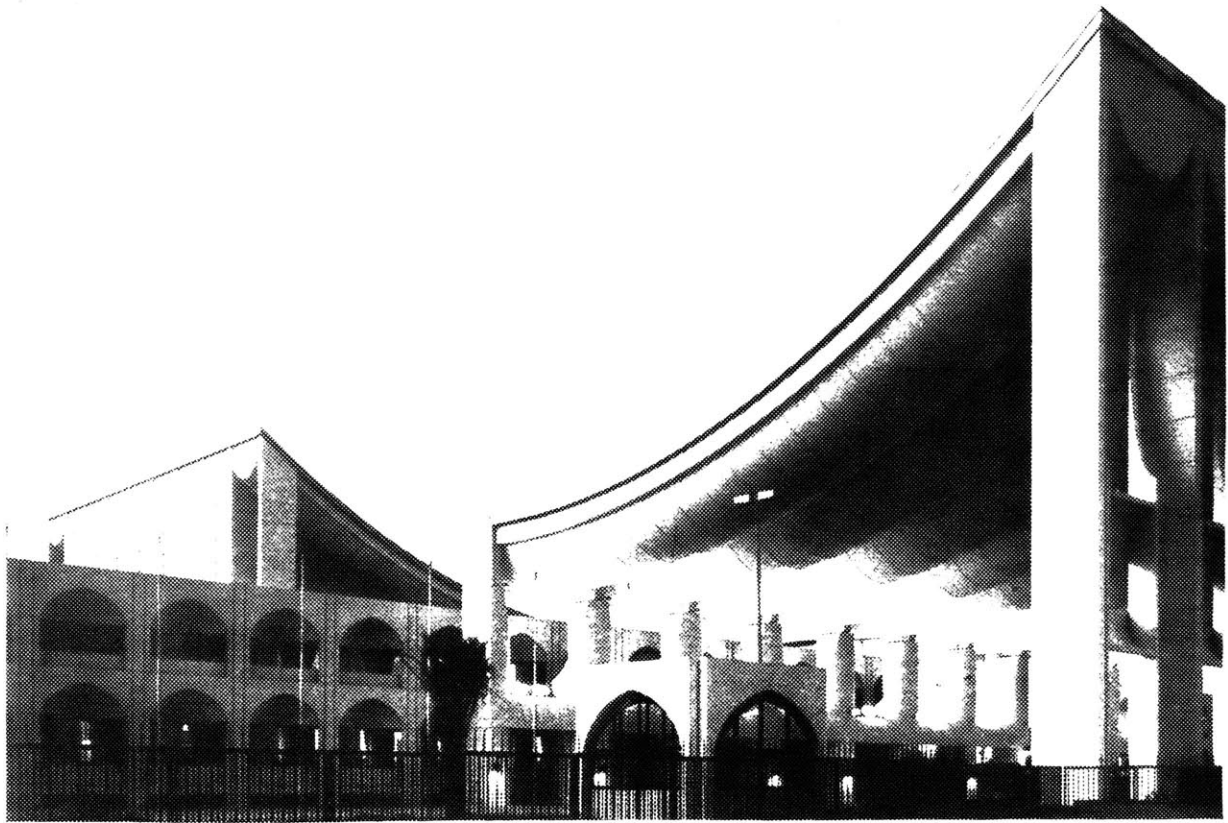
PRE-CAST ARABISM FOR KUWAIT

At present, Kuwait is known to the world for three things; its oil, its money and its precarious position in the war-torn Persian Gulf [Fig 61]. Nestled between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, it has struggled to remain officially neutral in the Iran-Iraq war, though its leaders clearly favor the claims of their Iraqi neighbor. While such ostensibly external concerns may well be uppermost in the minds of worried Kuwaitis in the 1980s, serious (and not unrelated) schisms threaten social and political stability from within, as well. These internal rifts have caused the ruling Emir to dissolve parliament twice, first between 1976 and 1981 (while design and construction of the imposing new National Assembly building was underway) and again, beginning in 1986 (only months after the building was completed). While no National Assembly building can avoid being a political statement as well as an architectural exercise, the institutional instability of the Kuwaiti parliament raises particularly compelling questions about its monumental architectural treatment. In interpreting the form and purpose of a cultural artifact such as this one [Fig. 62], architectural analysis can benefit greatly from an examination of Kuwaiti socio-political tensions.

Kuwait's great wealth has not come about without consequences. A half-century of oil-sponsored riches has necessitated that a tribally-oriented sheikhdom confront issues of global scope. But such wealth and the extensive welfare state that it has subsidized have not provided equal comfort and privilege for all. And, increasingly, the attendant westernization, once more happily seen as synonymous with modernization,



61. Map of Kuwait



62. Kuwait National Assembly. Viewed From Arabian Gulf Street

has itself come into question. The very rapidity of change leaves an important residue, a concern for traditions and values of the past. Jørn Utzon's National Assembly building (designed in collaboration with his son Jan) is an attempt to confront some of these traditions; it is an architectural essay which endeavors to assemble national identity out of sections of concrete.

This consolidation of "national identity" has two unusual dimensions, one historical, one contemporary: first, Kuwait was never really in the situation of being fully colonized and, second, with the massive influx of foreign workers, Kuwaiti citizens are a minority group in their own country. The first factor, a long history of de facto independence that preceded legal independence in 1961, meant that Kuwait was able to escape much of the political turmoil that accompanied the accession to statehood in many other small countries. Though Kuwait was under Ottoman hegemony in the 19th century and under British "protection" thereafter, Kuwait has been ruled by the same family (the al-Sabah) since the 18th century settlement of the area. Since British interest in Kuwait long preceded the discovery of oil, and was initially motivated by the strategic importance of access to a warm-water Gulf port rather than the lure of wealth, Kuwait lacks much of the history of resource exploitation by colonial powers that is so evident elsewhere. Though the vast petroleum resources of Kuwait have surely been exploited ever since the first export of oil in 1946, much of the profit from drilling concessions has gone to Kuwaitis. With the production of oil, however, has come an enormous introduction of foreigners intent on remaining in the country and, by their very presence, challenging the traditional social and political structure of Kuwait. Ironically, perhaps, foreign presence and influence may be more strongly felt after independence than before it.

If national integration was initially hampered by the lack of a clear colonial "enemy" against whom sentiments could be roused at the time of independence, the search for a unified post-protectorate Kuwait has been encumbered by factional discord and a divisive citizenship policy. The leading English language guidebook to Kuwait, addressed in large part to foreigners going there on business, seeks to minimize these concerns:

The numbers of foreigners assisting in the country's development have served to compound the Kuwaiti sense of identity rather than diminish it. The effects of this potentially disruptive demographic imbalance, with Kuwaitis numbering less than half of the total population, have been greatly mitigated by Islam and the cohesive force it represents: the overwhelming majority of expatriate residents in Kuwait are Arab and Asian Muslims.¹

Yet the rosy tones of this guidebook, written with full government cooperation, mask important tensions over the denial of citizenship-- with its attendant privileges-- as well as the not inconsiderable tensions that exist between and among different Muslim groups.

Living in Kuwait is not equivalent to being a Kuwaiti citizen. Since conditions for naturalization are very strict, and numbers are tightly limited, citizenship has remained "an almost impossible goal for expatriates."² Yet, without citizenship, a resident is automatically condemned to a second-class existence. And, in political matters, even citizenship does not guarantee the right to vote, unless one is a "first class Kuwaiti"-- a literate male over the age of 21 who can prove that he (or his parents or grandparents) was resident in Kuwait in 1920. Denial of citizenship affects far more than voting

¹ John Whelan, ed. Kuwait: A MEED Practical Guide (London: Middle East Economic Digest, 1985), p. 1.

² Ibid., p. 109.

rights, however; it pervades many aspects of daily life. While the government supplies a wide range of social benefits to its population of 1.7 million (both natives and foreigners), the one million non-Kuwaitis are discriminated against in housing, employment, and certain other economic regulations. Only Kuwaiti citizens are allowed to own property³ and Kuwaiti nationals retain clear preference over non-Kuwaitis in terms of mortgages, interest rates and availability and quality of non-rental housing.⁴ The same preferential treatment for Kuwaiti citizens holds true regarding employment. Not only are all Kuwaitis guaranteed jobs, they are also "guaranteed higher salaries than their non-Kuwaiti counterparts, even though the work is the same."⁵

Moreover, Kuwait's law requires the participation of a Kuwaiti citizen for almost every type of business activity: a Kuwaiti or Kuwaiti entity must hold at least 51 percent ownership in any foreign business venture; Kuwaiti agents are required on most purchasing contracts; only Kuwaitis can speculate in the local stock market or own land; imports must be in the name of registered Kuwaiti importers; and the government makes a strenuous effort to see that Kuwaiti contractors are involved in government projects.⁶ Because of the property ownership restrictions, all non-Kuwaitis are subject to the decisions of Kuwaiti landlords. In this context, government sponsored Kuwaiti-only housing districts are "a highly visible and easily understood

³ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴ Kuwait: MERI Report (by Middle East Research Institute, University of Pennsylvania) (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 30.

⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

symbol of the difference" between the privileged Kuwaitis and the majority of the population.⁷

It is not surprising, then, that one recent assessment of Kuwait's political and economic situation concludes that, of all the problems associated with rapid social and economic change, the "most serious" one is the "ill-will built up by resident aliens."⁸ While many of the alien majority living in Kuwait may well be satisfied transients, present in Kuwait under relatively short-term lucrative contracts, this is not the case for most Palestinians. Kuwait's most disaffected group, the vast majority of Palestinians lack Kuwaiti citizenship but are otherwise completely bound to Kuwait. Many immigrated to Kuwait following the creation of Israel in 1948 or the territorial annexations of 1967 and thus, in the absence of a separate Palestinian homeland, consider themselves stateless. Despite lengthy residence in Kuwait, and despite having become "the predominant force in Kuwait's civil service and professions,"⁹ most of the estimated 350,000¹⁰ Palestinians are denied naturalization into the country. The presence of a large and economically secure yet disenfranchised group has, according to recent reports, "led to growing bitterness and has increased the possibilities for internal disruption."¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30. In practice, many wealthy non-Kuwaitis are able to rent homes in the so-called "Kuwaiti-only" districts.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Barbara Rosewicz, "Gulf Democracy Feeling Threatened, Kuwait Seeks to Keep Both Secure and Free, Amid Crackdown on Risks, Rights are Still Exercised by Press and Parliament," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 December 1985, p. 19.

¹¹ MERI Report, p. 15. More recent press reports indicate that the tensions are only getting worse. See, for example, Rosewicz, "Gulf Democracy..." and Jonathan C. Randal, "Kuwaitis Tested: Growing Tension Seen After Attack on Leader," *Washington Post*, 14 June 1985.

The resident alien population continues to protest the slow rate of intake. The Palestinian or other foreigner who has lived in Kuwait for 20 years without citizenship has no more right to stay in Kuwait and enjoy its benefits than the most recently arrived Korean construction worker.... For their part...even the most liberal western-educated Kuwaitis believe in the policy of 'Kuwait for Kuwaitis.' They believe justice for the Palestinians (i.e., home, citizenship, and the right to vote) must be accomplished in Palestine rather than Kuwait. This sentiment is underscored by Kuwait's very vocal pro-Palestinian foreign policy.¹²

Kuwait's Palestinians are not alone in feeling that they have not had a fair sheikh. Intra-Muslim religious tensions have substantially increased in the wake of the Iranian revolution and its Shiite fundamentalism. The Kuwaiti government struggles with Iranian-fomented subversion, both real and imagined, fearing its spread.¹³ This struggle focuses on Kuwait's own large Shiite population, variously estimated to include between 18-30 percent of its residents. Only one quarter of these are citizens, while the rest are recent or long-term immigrants from Iran, Iraq or Pakistan.¹⁴ According to a 1985 report, the Kuwaiti government "is very vocal in advertising its mistrust of its Shiite population and discriminates against them in opportunities and promotions within the armed services and the administration."¹⁵ This same report concluded:

In Kuwait the consequence of the Iranian revolution has been agitation by local Shiite militants, intrigues sponsored by the Iranian government, and increased vigilance by Kuwaiti Sunnis....The Shiite community has alleged that Shiites are being edged out of the army and police and a Sunni mob recently burned a Shiite mosque. Several Shiite mosques were torn down in the name of urban renewal and were replaced by Sunni mosques. While a serious confessional rift does not seem imminent, tensions remain high.¹⁶

¹² MERI Report, p. 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Sunni-Shiite tensions, in their domestic as well as international manifestations, have led to increasing security problems.

In addition to day-to-day tensions and institutionalized discrimination, there have been significant terrorist attacks directed at public officials and commercial facilities. Most notable of these was the coordinated bombing spree of 12 December 1983, when seven targets were attacked, including the US and French embassies, Kuwaiti government installations and American commercial concerns. Six persons were killed and 86 were wounded in the 90 minute spate of explosions, attributed to Iraqi Shiites financed by and operating from Iran.¹⁷ Another incident that would seem to have had direct impact upon the security precautions in Kuwaiti public buildings such as the National Assembly, was the May 1985 attempt to assassinate the Emir.¹⁸ In an attempt to force the release of seventeen political prisoners, a suicide bomber drove a car into the his motorcade. Though the Emir was not seriously injured, this incident seems to have made the previously "very unassuming" leader much more security conscious: a new armored Mercedes limousine soon replaced his usual Chevrolet and, now escorted by an armored convoy, he began to vary his once predictably timed movements between residence, office and palace.¹⁹ The timing of this assassination attempt very nearly coincided with the completion of the National Assembly building, where the Emir has an extensive office and reception hall complex,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36. In addition to the Iraqis, several Kuwaiti Shiites, two Lebanese Shiites and one Lebanese Christian were also involved. In a measure to increase security, after Kuwait traced the identity of the US Embassy suicide bomber "by luckily finding his thumb in the rubble," the government introduced a fingerprinting requirement for everyone in the country over age 15 (reported in Rosewicz, p. 19).

¹⁸ Christopher Dickey, "Kuwait Ruler Eludes Attack By Car Bomb," Washington Post, 26 May 1985, p. A1.

¹⁹ Randal, "Kuwaitis Tested...."

and surely must have prompted even greater concern for his security within it.²⁰

Added to all the other factional and regional tensions already described are increasing financial constraints, present even in a state as economically sound as Kuwait. The most telling fissure, with social as well as financial repercussions, was the 1982 crash of the informal Suq al-Manakh stock market, involving some \$90 billion in unpaid commitments. In the aftermath, the government is thought to have spent more than \$7 billion to support share prices on the official stock market, compensate small investors and shore up the financial community.²¹ Beyond the monetary losses, the crash laid open class and generational tensions within Kuwaiti society by undermining "the essential trust and confidence which formerly underlay transactions in Kuwait" while unveiling "latent hostilities between the favored old ruling families and the new class of educated young men who have just recently acquired their wealth."²²

Though Kuwait's per capita GNP remains among the highest in the world, the 1980s have brought a distinct letdown from the skyrocketing oil prices that followed the 1973 boycott. Commissioned and designed at this peak of wealth and financial optimism, even the National Assembly building did not escape the subsequent budgetary squeeze. When construction costs for the building came in higher than was originally estimated, Utzon's firm was asked to make significant cutbacks in the building, restricting its intended

²⁰ Once the Amiri Diwan is completed, as part of the Sief Palace complex, the Emir will receive visitors and have his main offices there. This joining of office and palace will thereby reduce the need for his movement around the city.

²¹ Whelan, ed., p. 91.

²² MERI Report, p. 15 and p. 34.

dual function as a convention center.²³ Yet, since Kuwait's immense foreign investments assured the financial well-being of the country regardless of the price of oil, and since a \$400 million separate conference center was subsequently commissioned, it may well be that other, non-financial, reasons entered into the elimination of the convention hall. One thing seems certain: much had changed during the twelve years between initial design and first occupancy.

Given all the changes in the social and political situation that have taken place in Kuwait since 1973, the building occupies a significantly different symbolic place from that originally intended. In the course of grappling with all of the problems already described, the government's whole attitude to democracy has come under question. One must view the completed building, housing a non-existent institution, in the context of the ruling family's ambivalent and superficial commitment to the democratic sharing of power. Yet it must also be seen in the context of the Gulf region as a whole, where even a halfhearted gesture to democratic power-sharing is notable. In its more liberal moments, twice undercut by the dissolution of the Assembly and restrictions on the press, Kuwaitis enjoyed a far greater measure of freedom of expression than most other Arabs in the Middle East.²⁴ Despite the decision to build an imposing home for the National Assembly along the waterfront near the Emir's Sief Palace, there was little reason to think that

²³ Although construction costs were high, it should be noted that few non-Western countries would have the indigenous resources to undertake a project as structurally complicated as this at all. Kuwait's capacity to do so is a direct result of the influx of expatriate workers. Even so, the Utzon firm notes that 15% of the workforce had to be imported (Jørn Utzon and Associates, "Aga Khan Award Application: Client's Record," 12 January 1985, p. 3).

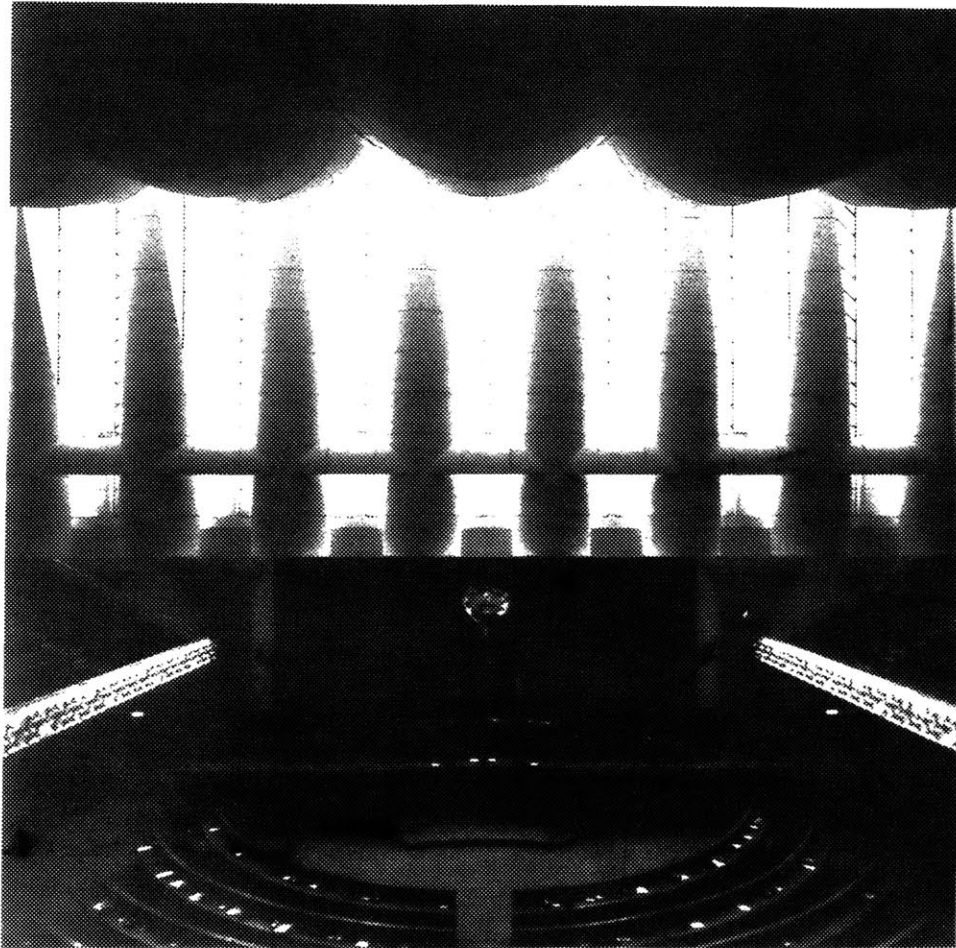
²⁴ Mary Curtis, "Few Kuwaitis Mourn For Democracy: Many See Need to Curb Dissent While Gulf War Rages," Christian Science Monitor, 11 February 1987, p. 9.

this architectural power-sharing would have political ramifications of equal magnitude.

When the National Assembly was created, following the attainment of full sovereignty in 1961, the al-Sabah insisted upon certain strict limitations to its power. Most obvious is the provision for a miniscule electorate, designed to help insure that the same large families who dominate Kuwait's economic life would retain their political influence.²⁵ In a country where the eligible electorate numbers only about 70,000 out of a population of 1.7 million,²⁶ the National Assembly can hardly be said to assemble the representatives of a "nation." Yet, voting restrictions constitute only a small part of the checks upon democracy. Most of the power remains with a group of sixteen Ministers appointed by the Emir, rather than the fifty elected representatives. As a consequence, an oligarchy rules the country whether or not the Assembly is functioning. (The power of these Ministers is spatially illustrated in the Assembly chamber, where the seating is designed so that focal point is a wall of ministers, sixteen-men wide, literally outflanking the front-row parliamentarians [Fig. 63].) These Ministers, selected from old Kuwaiti merchant families who have been trusted supporters of the al-Sabah for two centuries, hold full voting rights in the Assembly, with the most important portfolios usually retained by members of the ruling family itself. Thus, with 16 of 66 votes essentially guaranteed to support the Emir's position, it requires the support of only 7 of the 50 elected parliamentarians to prevent the necessary 2/3 majority from passing legislation that would be against the wishes of the Emir. Moreover, the Emir

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ Charles Wallace, "Kuwait Abrogates Much of Its Democracy-- With Only Muted Reaction," Los Angeles Times, 15 February 1987, Section I, p. 6.



63. Ministers' Dais Outflanks Parliamentarians, Kuwait National Assembly

has the right to initiate, sanction, and promulgate laws, and to rule by decree when the Assembly is not in session.²⁷ The ultimate limitation upon the Assembly's power is, of course, the Emir's constitutional right to dissolve it by decree.

The parliament was not, however, dissolved because of its weakness or its irrelevance, but rather because of its unanticipated strength and its challenges to the power of the Emir and the Council of Ministers. Citizenship, while greatly curtailed in numbers, nonetheless cuts across many of the other factional discords in the country. As a result, the parliament that was intended in large part as "a rubber stamp for policies set forth by the ruling class as embodied in the executive,"²⁸ proved to be far more contentious than its creators had envisioned. In 1976, when the parliament was dissolved for the first time, Emir charged that the representatives had "exploited democracy and frozen most legislation in order to achieve private gain"²⁹ and expressed concern about "Lebanization of Kuwait," referring to increased discord between rival religious groups.³⁰ Jassim Khalaf's 1984 dissertation on the institutional structure and function of the Kuwait National Assembly notes that the government contended that the drastic measure of dissolution was taken in order for the country "to deliberate upon the democratic experience in Kuwait."³¹ Yet, in the very act of dissolution, any such deliberation was rendered superfluous.

²⁷ Jacqueline Ismael, Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 83.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

²⁹ Whelan, ed. p. 16.

³⁰ Wallace, page 6.

³¹ Jassim Muhammad Khalaf, "The Kuwait National Assembly: A Study of its Structure and Function," Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Albany, Department of Political Science, 1984 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International,

The reasons for the 1986 dissolution were equally complex. In a speech to his countrymen, the current Emir (who, prior to his accession in 1977 had made a major contribution to the shaping of Kuwait's constitution and had long supported the need for a parliamentary system³²) declared: "I have seen democracy shaken and its practices decline... This has been accompanied by a loosening of the inherited cohesiveness of Kuwaiti society."³³ According to a press report:

No one is quite sure what triggered the government's decision to dissolve the Assembly. In his speech to the nation announcing the decision, Emir Sabah said the parliamentarians had fanned secular divisions. This was seen as a reference to questions raised by parliament members about the loyalty of Kuwait's Shiite Muslims....But Kuwaitis interviewed for this story unanimously said that they thought the government's chief reason for dissolving the Assembly was the parliamentarians persistent, increasingly aggressive questioning of government policies.³⁴

Whether for reasons of factional discord or power politics, it was clear that the ruling family and its associates were coming under unaccustomed criticism. What is surprising, at least to Western diplomats quoted in the Western press, is that most Kuwaitis did not seem to be especially disturbed by the sudden loss of what democratic freedoms they had gained:

We were frankly surprised when the Assembly was dissolved. But the big-business families weren't as upset as you might think. The bottom line here is that everyone is rich and the basis for political dissent doesn't really exist. So a lot of Kuwaitis just sort of shrugged.³⁵

According to the Christian Science Monitor's reporter, the "most consistent theme in conversation with Kuwaitis" during the aftermath of the dissolution

1985), p. 208. Khalaf mentions that some Kuwaitis he interviewed contended that the dissolution was prompted by unspecified "external forces" (p. 212n).

³² Whelan, ed., p. 3.

³³ Wallace, p. 6.

³⁴ Curtis, p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

was that these were "regrettable but necessary steps."³⁶ One wealthy Kuwaiti commented that "The members of parliament were not acting responsibly" and that "it was good that the government sent them home."³⁷ The Wall Street Journal reported that Kuwait's financial community was so encouraged by the demise of the quarrelsome parliament that Kuwait's local stock market actually rallied. As one banker put it: "The new government, when its formed, will have more direct impact, without going through the National Assembly...without any delay."³⁸ Despite this cautious optimism on the part of some, others warned that the dissolution of parliament and the censorship of a press that had once offered "some of the liveliest reporting in the Arab world"³⁹ of could well increase tensions:

...[I]n the long run, the Emir of Kuwait's rescinding of parliament elections and press freedom shuts what has always been considered an important safety valve that allowed Kuwaitis to vent political grievances. The danger is that these grievances now will be pent up and even driven underground, adding another potential source of political instability to the list of dangers already facing the rich oil sheikhdom in the Persian Gulf.⁴⁰

With a war going on off its north coast and increasing division within its borders, Kuwait faces ever greater threats. What follows is an attempt to demonstrate how Utzon's building fits into this troubled picture.

³⁶ Curtis, p. 9.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸ Barbara Rosewicz, "Kuwait's Dissolution of Parliament Risks Sparking Political Unrest in Long Term," Wall Street Journal, 7 July 1986, p. 16.

³⁹ Curtis, p. 9. The connection between parliament and the press was especially close in Kuwait since the parliamentarians' printed speeches were protected by legislative immunity, thereby enabling newspapers to be more daring in their coverage (Curtis, p. 14).

⁴⁰ Rosewicz, "Kuwait's Dissolution..." p. 16. The system of *diwaniyas*, discussed later on, would seem to assure that political passions would have many outlets, even without the presence of a functioning National Assembly.

Utzon's Arabism

The building exists symbolically in at least two very different ways. Most explicitly, it is a symbol to the world of Kuwait's commitment to democratic institutions in a region known only for monarchical or oligarchical control. This is the kind of symbol that Utzon's firm sought to create. In proposing the building for a 1986 Aga Khan Award (which it did not win), the designers proclaimed that "It stands as an impressive symbol of Kuwait's representative form of government, an imposing public monument which lends dignity and strength to its urban setting, and a soaring architectural tribute to Kuwait's faith in its future."⁴¹ But there is also a second symbolic interpretation, very likely of equal importance to the government as the first: to Kuwait's residents the building is a telling symbol of the government's commitment to perpetuating the special privileges of Kuwaiti citizens, underscored by a recent decision to try to reduce the foreign segment of the population to 50% by 1990.⁴² In the absence of a functioning parliament, however, the two symbolic purposes of the building are each reduced to cruel ironies. Not only has the experiment in democracy been summarily cut short by Emirial fiat for the second time in a decade, so too the very need for this crackdown has called into question the predominance of the ruling family and the rest of the elected Kuwaiti elite. While it may be no great task to challenge the quality of a fledgling democracy (and even unfair to do so given the autocratic tendencies of the region), these limitations have spatial implications which bear upon the design and the interpretation of the building.

⁴¹ Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p.6.

⁴² Rosewicz, "Gulf Democracy...", p. A1.

Especially now that parliament is both dissolved and officially discredited, the building appears to be designed for a physically-- as well as politically-- much more open society than exists at present. This is a building which, from its grand entrance portico to its overscaled central "street," seems to demand a certain public involvement. But such a public presence is at odds with the current political situation, with its understandable emphasis upon the need for security, and one wonders if the government client ever intended anything resembling free public access to the building. Whether he realized it or not (and his words suggest that he did not), Utzon designed a public building for an exclusive club.

According to its architects, the Kuwait National Assembly building is "an excellent synthesis of traditional Arabic architectural principles and contemporary design expression."⁴³ It is this synthesis and these principles I wish to probe here. The attempt by Utzon to define and promote a national identity for Kuwait has two aspects. First, is the perceived need to assert a Kuwaiti identity that goes beyond relatively recent matters of petroleum and riches or, more precisely, an identity that precedes these and encompasses these in a culture with deep historical roots. And, second, closely tied to this wish to emphasize historical depth, is the recognized urgency to stress and maintain the privileged claims of the Kuwaiti citizens within a plural society where they remain a minority. The initial decision to commission a prominent building to house the National Assembly and the particular forms with which this building was carried out are each manifestations of this dual search for identity.

⁴³ Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p. 6.

The resultant building draws upon a wide range of building types and urban forms from throughout the Gulf region but, in the process of their abstraction and admixture, they are dislocated and trivialized. As elegant as this building is in some of its manipulation of pre-cast concrete elements, it is clumsy in its attempts to modernize "Islamic" symbols. In discussing the building, Utzon makes reference to three aspects of "traditional Arabic" architecture-- the nomad's tent, the Bazaar and the covered square (as a place for political gathering). In the discussion of the building that follows, each of these will be considered in turn.

1. The Nomad's Tent

Though the story of the region is a dual history of fishermen and desert nomads, the history of the al-Sabah remains tied firmly to the latter. The early history of Kuwait, subject to the usual semi-mythology that surrounds any discussion of "founding fathers," is especially potent since the direct decedents of these founders still rule the country. By the late 18th century, after other family groups had moved on, the Sabah family gained control over Kuwait. Since the al-Sabah are a branch of one of the largest tribal confederations in the Arabian Peninsula, the Aniza, the Bedouin have been associated with Kuwait since the first days of their dynasty.⁴⁴ In contrast to many tribally-oriented families whose interests turned toward the sea (and whose ties with the Bedouin consequently diminished), the Sabah family remained oriented toward the desert, apparently based on their interest in the active trade between Aleppo and the Gulf. They continued an active

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

relationship with the bedouin tribes, camping out with them regularly and marrying from among them.⁴⁵ In the early days, especially, "Sabah power was based upon the family's relationship to the desert."⁴⁶ While Sabah power today is fueled by oil rather than desert trade, the Bedouin remain an example of the overweening importance of family, clan and tribal ties even in an age of rapidly diminishing pastoralism. According to a 1985 assessment:

The self-identity of most native Kuwaitis is based on the extended family and larger kinship groups. These loyalties are important not only in a social sense but also in a political sense in that blood ties are the predominant determinant of Kuwaiti citizenship and membership in the political elite. The most prominent Kuwaitis are descendants of the Bani Utub (People who Wandered), who migrated to Kuwait early in the 17th century from central Arabia.⁴⁷

To this day, the structure of Kuwaiti government, where the Emir and his 16 appointed Ministers run the government, is dependent upon these 18th century family ties forged in the desert.

Thus the connection of the ruling family and its associates to the Bedouin is largely based on what Geertz terms "assumed blood ties," an untraceable kinship thought to be real.⁴⁸ Yet Bedouin political power is actual as well as metaphysical.

With the establishment of constitutional democracy in 1962, the role of the bedouin as traditional supporters of the ruling family has to some extent carried over into parliament. The existing parliament has a significant proportion of bedouin, or at least deputies with tribal links and support-- more than 50 per cent according to some estimates.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ismael, p. 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ MERI Report, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁸ Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution," in The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 261-62.

⁴⁹ Whelan, ed. p. 64.

The 1981 national redistricting increased the number of voting constituencies from 10 to 25, a tactic designed to increase the representation of outlying areas, usually more tribally oriented, while cutting across ethnic and confessional enclaves in the metropolitan area.⁵⁰

Charges of bribery and gerrymandering to increase the strength of the Bedouin were rife. The composition of the new assembly was far more conservative than that of its predecessors. Twenty-four members were Bedouin with a background of loyalty to the ruling family, thirteen were young technocrats, four were Islamic traditionalists, three were Arab nationalists, and only two were Shiites, although Shiite candidates had constituted more than a third of the total field.⁵¹

In this context, it is not at all difficult to perceive the symbolic appropriateness of the Bedouin tent as an influence on the architecture of the National Assembly building. These Sunni Bedouin, with their over-representation in parliament, the police and the military,⁵² and their primordial connection to the ancestors of the ruling families, are to be iconographically preferred.

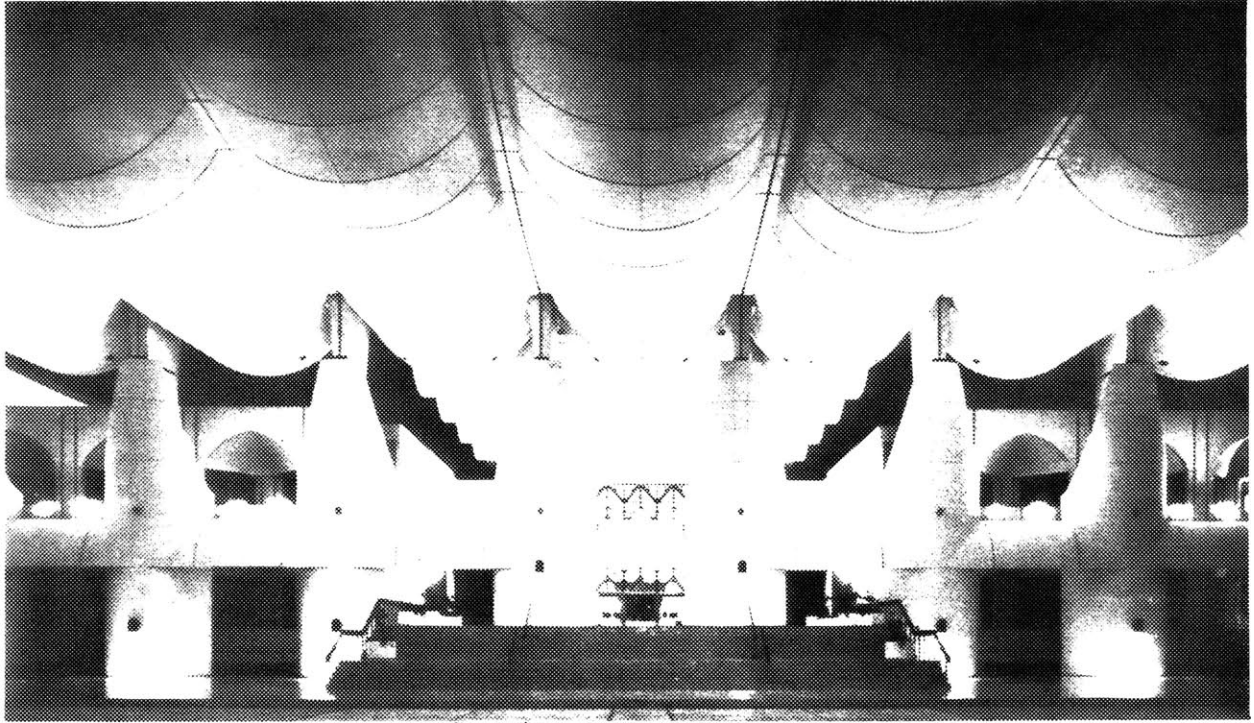
Surely the most striking aspects of the Kuwait National Assembly building are its two tent-like roof forms [Figs. 64 and 65]. According to the architects: "The shape of the roof of the Assembly Hall and the covered Public Square in front of the main entrance conveys the lightness of a billowing Arabian tent. This concave shape is also an ideal acoustical element which excludes disturbing echoes."⁵³ All matters of acoustical soundness aside, it is a decidedly remarkable feat to make 600-ton concrete beams billow, though disturbing echoes remain.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

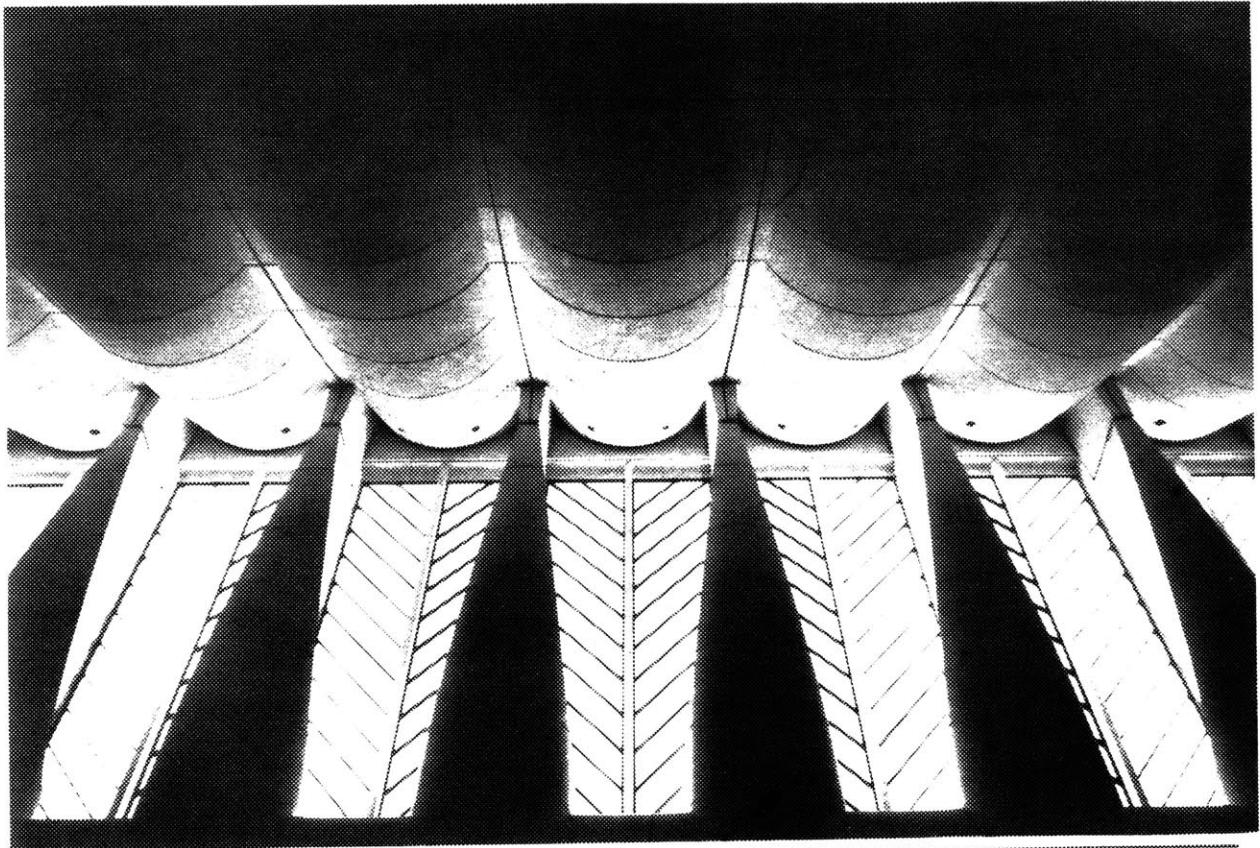
⁵¹ MERI Report, p. 20.

⁵² Whelan, ed., p. 63.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.



64. Tented "Public Square," Kuwait National Assembly



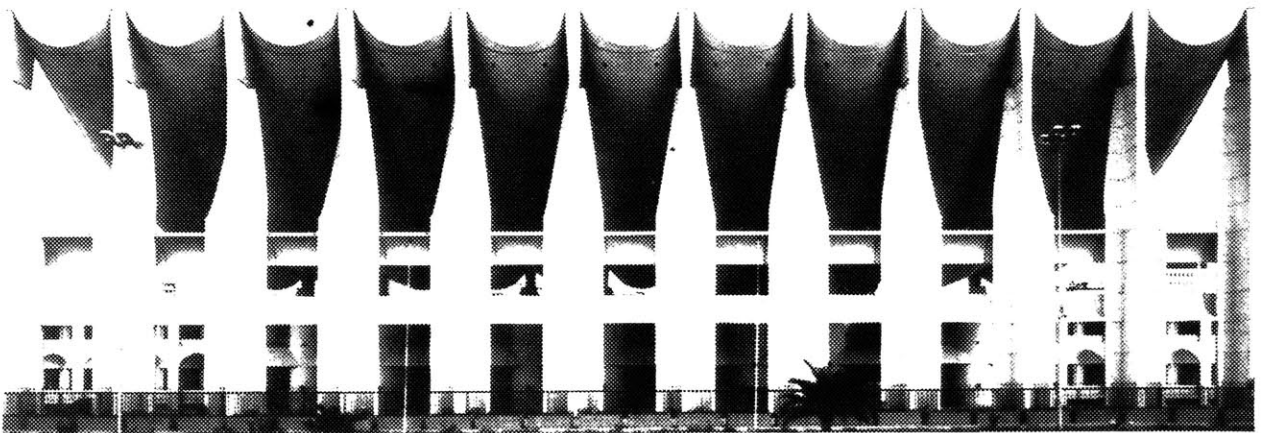
65. Tented Assembly Chamber, Kuwait

At first glance, and even upon further reflection about Kuwaiti society, the decision to evoke the Bedouin tent seems a brilliant move. If ever there were a symbol of Kuwait's deeper history, it is the Bedouin. Kuwait city is built where the desert meets the sea, and the national assembly, located on Arabian Gulf Street, is sited and designed to emphasize this duality. Moreover, through summoning forth the imagery of a seaside concrete tent, the design achieves an attempted synthesis. Yet this synthesis, undoubtedly an apt commentary on the recent and rapid urbanization of the Bedouin, is considerably less than convincing. In attempting to abstract a visual image from a disappearing way of life, the building contributes to that lifestyle's decline. If the forms are intended to evoke the memory of a collective past, one must question the use of a technology that makes that past seem yet more distant and alien. The billows may seem an adequate allusion on the drawing boards of imported Danes (and even in the minds urbane Kuwaiti ministers called upon to select the architect), but do they really invite serious contemplation of a desert past, a heritage which so many Kuwaiti leaders claim to cherish? [Fig. 66].

Utzon seems to have grasped the importance of the tent's symbolism for modern Kuwaitis but, in abstracting it, he has delivered little of its imagery and even less of its principles. Utzon's portico tent is not only of a scale far exceeding that of its precedent, it also fails to address the traditional tent's central purpose: not only must a tent provide shade from an intense desert sun, it must also give protection from wind and sandstorms. Of Utzon's two tent-like roofs, one covers a plaza that lacks an adequate protective enclosure, while the other, over an airconditioned assembly hall, is a totally enclosed environment-- neither space has much of anything to do with a tent. Moreover, though Utzon does succeed in making concrete look as if it is



66. Guest Tent of a Sheikh (Iraq)



67. Abstracted Tent Poles?

sagging in a tent-like fashion, it is really a kind of curious half-tent. The traditional Bedouin tent of this area, made out of goat or sheep hair woven into long brown or black strips (not white), is suspended from a series of central ridge poles, with the sides held up by smaller poles. The central ridge poles number from one to five depending upon the wealth of the family.⁵⁴ In Utzon's rent tent, the concrete equivalent of the ridge pole is detailed to accentuate the split-- the side facing inwards appears as an intact column but, in fact, the "pole" is a hollowed half-cylinder [Fig. 67]. If one is to play out this tent transformation idea, it does seem appropriate that the billowing entrance portico is hung from a full dozen "ridge poles," for surely this place belongs to the very wealthiest of families. If Utzon's half-columns are to be seen as consistent with the half-tent image, however, this form is reduced to idiosyncrasy in the other parts of the building, decidedly un-tentlike, where it is also found. While it may be that the traditional Bedouin shelter and Utzon's tentesque abstraction of it are poles apart, this does not negate the considerable appeal of Bedouin imagery-- however superficial and distorted-- to the Kuwaiti government authorities who approved the design.

Nonetheless, there is something rather perverse about using concrete to translate the sense of a desert nomad's billowing tent into a seaside politicians' immovable hall. While, in its best moments, Utzon succeeds brilliantly in "making concrete breathe, or perhaps sigh"⁵⁵ one wonders why he begged such trouble. Why not employ-- as in the case of SOM's Hajj terminal outside Mecca-- a fabric structure in the first place? Perhaps he

⁵⁴ Whelan, ed., p. 66.

⁵⁵ Roger Connah, "Kuwait National Assembly Complex," Living Architecture, no. 5, 1986, p. 123.

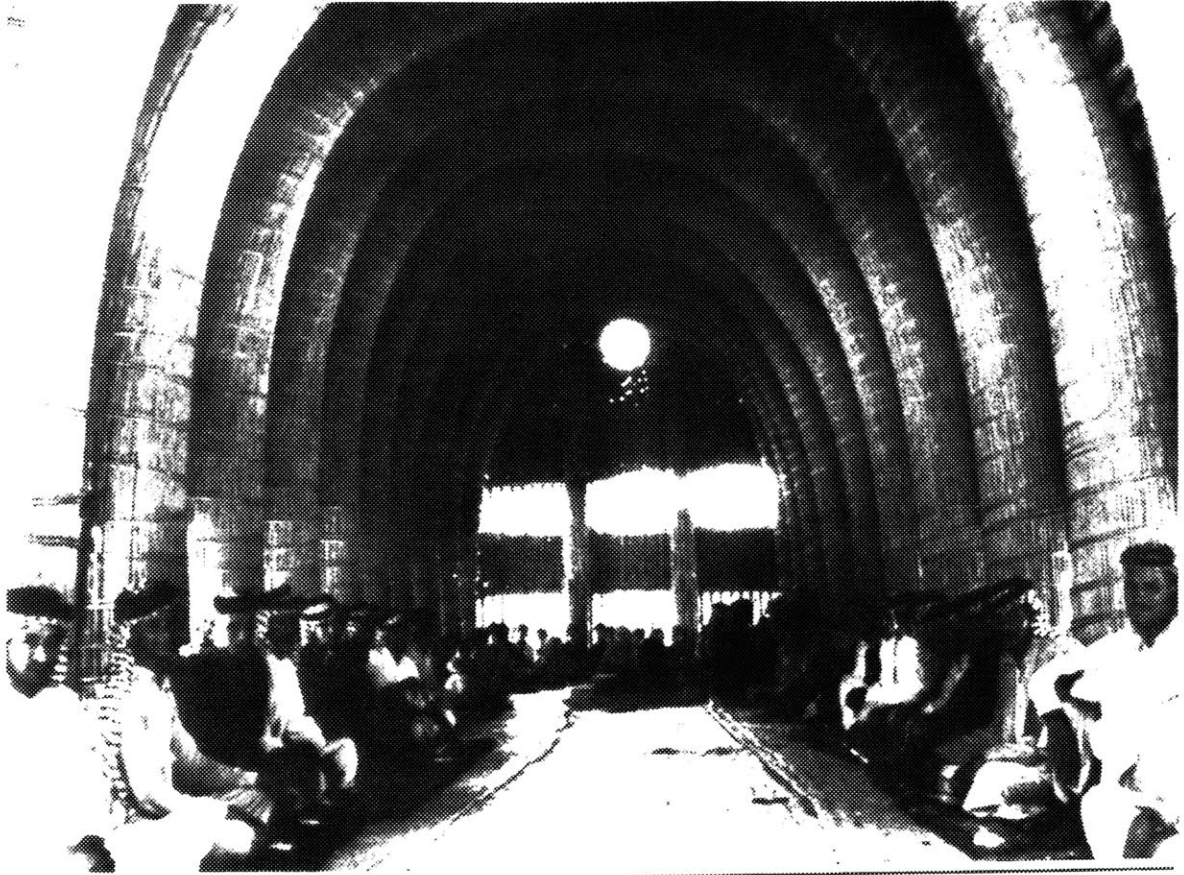
was encouraged by the success of the Sydney Opera House in using concrete to evoke cloth. In any case, he shows little inclination to learn from a nomadic people who managed to create structures using only the most minimal available materials. What is memorable is less the Bedouin precedent or even the idea of a tent; all this is subordinate to the structural tour-de-force of the portico.

Oddly enough, however, Utzon's design language is more specific in its architectural references to a tribal group that has no direct ties to Kuwait and who, though they live only a few hundred miles away in Iraq, have adapted their architecture to a very different climate. This group is the Marsh Arabs, and Utzon's design seems clearly to have been inspired by their dwellings⁵⁶ [Figs. 68 and 69]. What is transferred, however, has little to do with the spirit of these extraordinary buildings; Utzon extracts only the imagery, without the principles. The Marsh Arab references are presumably included not only because of their beauty, but also because of some supposed "relevance." These structures are well-published⁵⁷ and an acknowledged part of an emerging "canon" of vernacular building types, yet they bear no resemblance to any buildings found in Kuwait. Thus, while it is understandable that an architect might want to make reference to them in the effort to make his building seem rooted in the "region," this is a regionalism that does little justice to the cultural and climatic place of these forms.

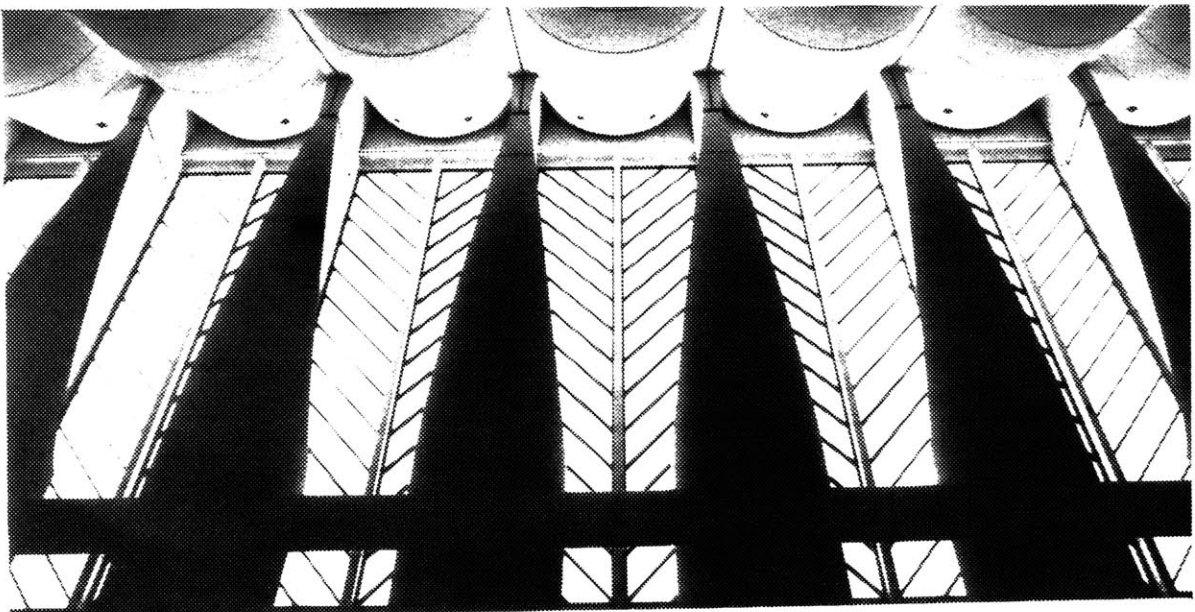
What seems visually similar in about the National Assembly hall and the Marsh Arab house-- such the alternation of thick pole and delicate infill-- is tectonically completely unrelated. Similarly, though Utzon makes elegant

⁵⁶ I am grateful to Sikander Khan for drawing my attention to this influence.

⁵⁷ See, especially, Wilfred Thesiger, The Marsh Arabs (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

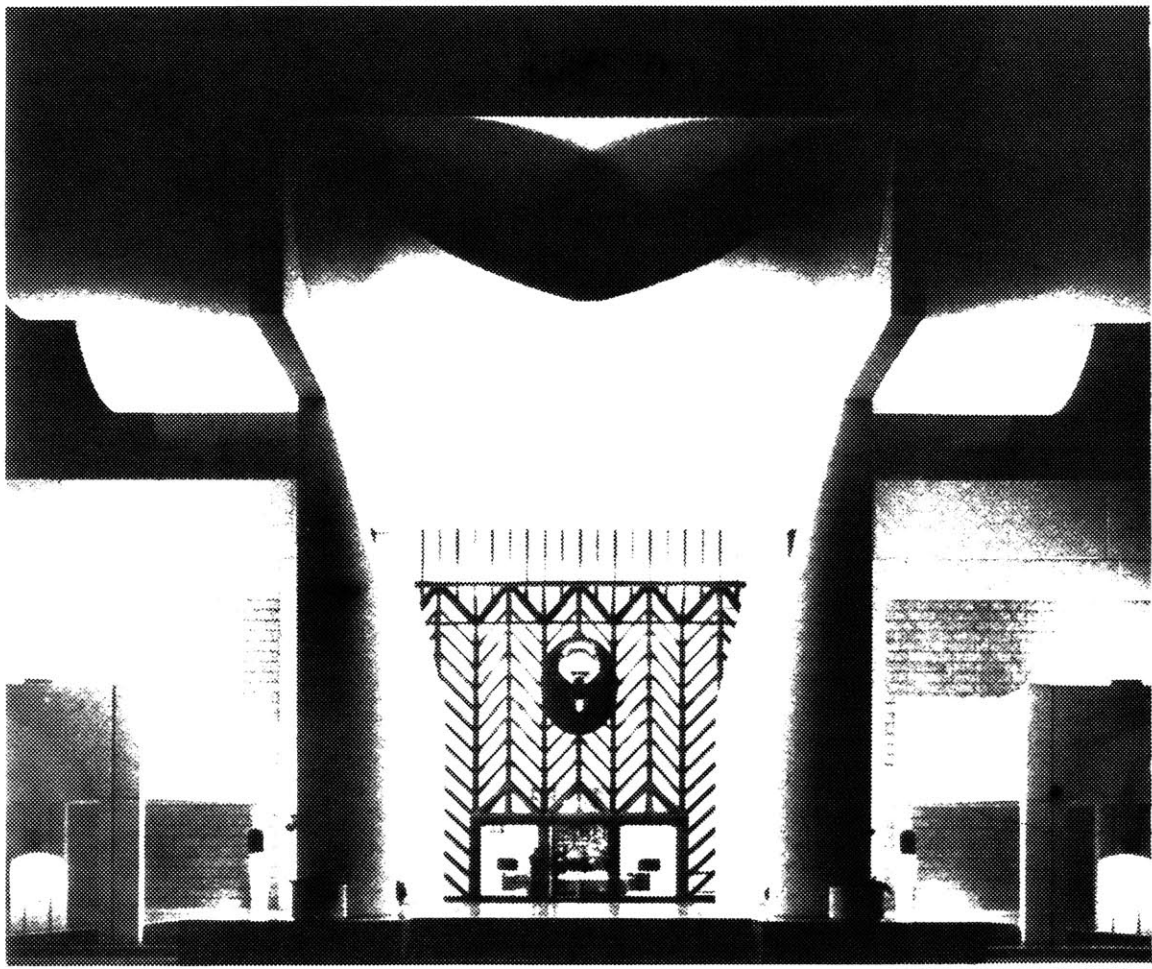


68. Interior of a Marsh Arab Mudhif



69. Marsh Arab-esque Interplay Between Column and Infill

reference to the Marsh Arab use of reed lattice in the mullion pattern of his Assembly hall windows, his abstracted palmfronds are tripped of their organic resonance when he applies them upside down above the entrance way [Fig. 70]. This inversion of the frond not only kills the plant; it kills the metaphor as well. The superficiality of his distorting abstractions is nowhere more clearly evident than in his insistence that the National Assembly building is architecturally related to the form of the traditional Arabian bazaar.



70. Inverted Fronds: Inverted Metaphor?

2. The Bazaar

According to Utzon, the National Assembly building is "organized...in a fashion close to traditional Arabian bazaars."⁵⁸ "The system of the bazaar is so simple and clear," he continues, "that it results in an administration building that functions superbly."⁵⁹ Yet the similarity that Utzon would like to claim is only a surface resemblance; the differences between the Assembly complex and the traditional bazaar are far more telling.

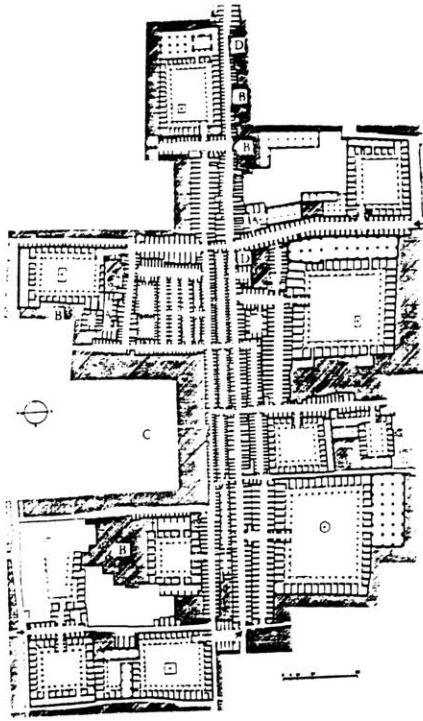
Utzon claims to utilize an organizational principle from the bazaar, but does so in such a reductive way as to negate the value of the analogy. In planning the building so that the entrances to all departments are accessed from a "central street" that is "similar to the central street in an Arab bazaar,"⁶⁰ Utzon isolates the clarity of a bazaar plan at the expense of its richness. Even a quick glance at the plan of a traditional bazaar, such as the ones in Aleppo or Istanbul, reveals that these are far more than "simple and clear" organizational diagrams [Figs. 71 and 72]. In treating the bazaar as merely an organizational diagram, Utzon's "central street" is detached from the Islamic roots he wants to claim for it. He could just as plausibly have claimed Roman town plans as his inspiration, though such a comparison does little justice to those towns [Figs. 73 and 74].

The "central street" of the Assembly complex is far closer to the organization of a Western shopping mall or an airport wing than it is to any kind of traditional bazaar.

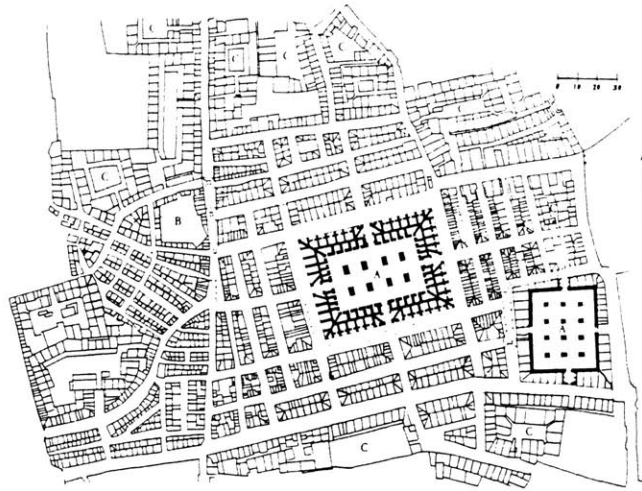
⁵⁸ Markku Komonen, "Elements in the Way of Life," interview with Jørn Utzon, *Arkitehti*, v. 80, no. 2 (1983?), English translation, p. 81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

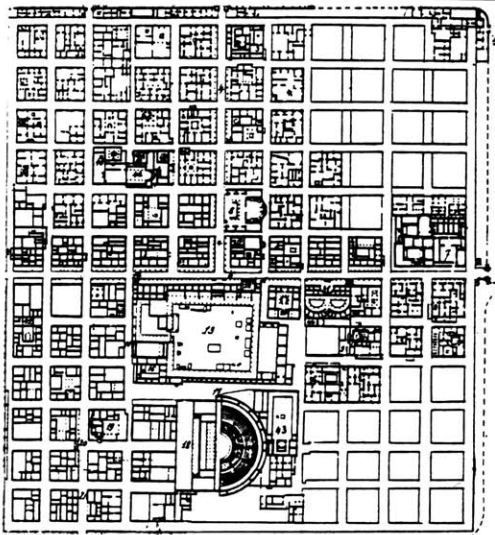
⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.



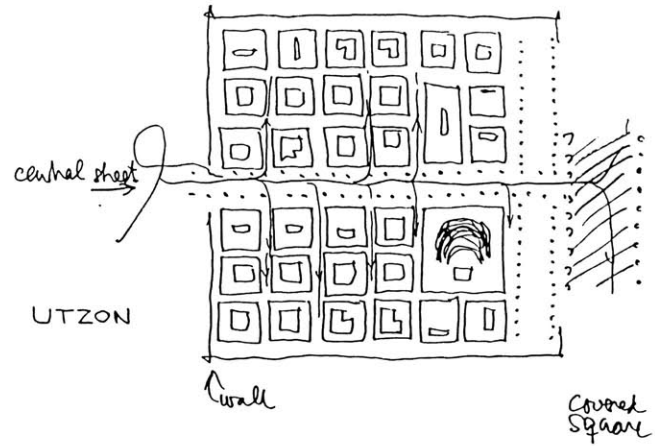
71. Plan of Bazaar, Aleppo.



72. Plan of Bazaar, Istanbul.



73. Plan of Roman Timgad (Algeria)



The plausible resemblances to the bazaar and its warren of souks are few. There is a half-hearted attempt to use "traditional Arabic light wells"⁶¹ to provide some of the secondary "side streets"⁶² with daylight and ventilation, but this bears little relation to the everchanging filtered light of the marketplace [Figs. 75 and 76]. In a like manner, though the architects claim adherence to "Islamic" principles in their design of courtyards within the various office modules, these openings serve none of the functions of the traditional court. Since they are un-enterable, they play no role in circulation, either human or atmospheric. While they provide welcome opportunities for landscaping and natural light, they linger as half-remembered formal gestures that have lost their social role.

In the end, the most convincing aspect of the bazaar metaphor is in its capacity for growth. According to Utzon:

The departments consist of modules of various sizes built around small patios or courtyards-- connected to the central street by side streets. Each department can be extended at any time by adding modules. The building can grow sideways, away from the central street, and its outer boundaries will change as time goes by. These free-flexing outer boundaries of the system are very much related to traditional Islamic bazaar architecture.⁶³

Yet even here, the analogy falters: the modular office building and the traditional bazaar expand in very different ways. Whereas the traditional bazaar could break free of the rectilinear bounds of its "central street" and accommodate itself to the peculiarities of the surrounding urban fabric,

⁶¹ Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p. 6.

⁶² Komonen, p. 81.

⁶³ Jørn Utzon, "A House for Work and Decisions: Kuwait National Assembly Complex," in Denys Lasdun, ed. *Architecture in an Age of Scepticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 222. This text differs only slightly from that included in the Komonen interview.



75. View of Top-lit Aleppo Bazaar



76. 1939 View of Souk, Kuwait

Utzon's National Assembly complex is a walled island, imprisoned in its own grid.

The interest for Utzon is the flexibility of the module rather than the composition of the facades, the spatial dynamism of the overall form or the reaction of that form to the surrounding city. For decades Utzon has extolled the merits of "additive architecture:"⁶⁴

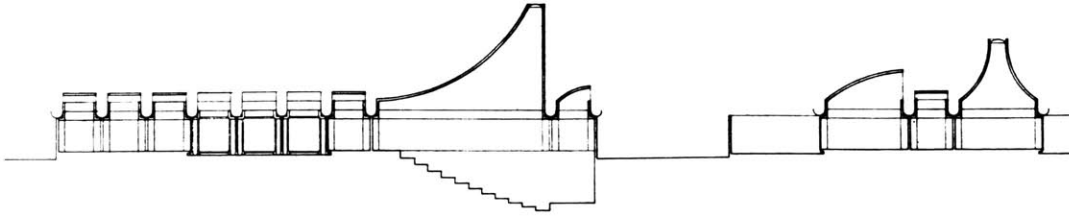
When working with the additive principle, one is able, without difficulty, to respect and honour all the demands made on design and layout as well as all the requirements for extensions and modifications. This is just because the architecture-- or perhaps rather the character-- of the building is that of the sum total of the components, and not that of a composition or that dictated by the facades.⁶⁵

A strength of this approach is that it allows the building to remain relatively low to the ground, respecting the two-story height of the old city.⁶⁶ Only the rooflines of the ceremonial spaces break this plane. On the other hand, however, the flexibility to add modules on the edges correctly presupposes that there is room on the site to do so. It is one thing to provide this room on a rural site and quite another to do this in the center of a city. What may seem appropriate in Utzon's design for a Danish educational center ("to be developed in stages or continuously as a growing organism") [Figs. 77-78], seems self-contradictory in a security-conscious urban setting, though the correspondance of formal elements is striking. While there is room on the site for the National Assembly "organism" to expand-- especially to the south and to the west-- security considerations have turned these open spaces into a cordon sanitaire around the building [Fig. 79]. While Utzon invokes the

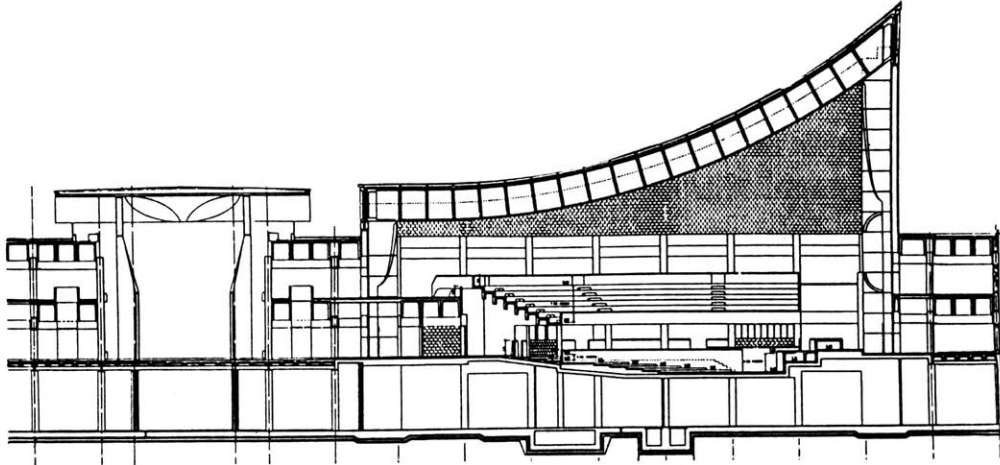
⁶⁴ See, for example, Jørn Utzon, "Additive Architecture," *Arkitektur*, No. 1 (1970), p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

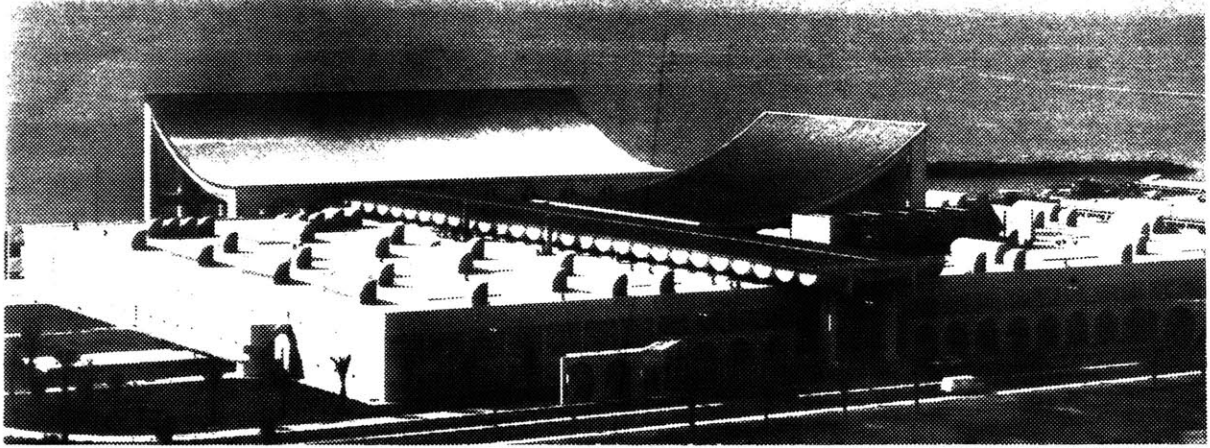
⁶⁶ It is also possible that this height limitation may have been imposed on Utzon by the Ministry of Public Works; they insisted that an adjacent car park be no more than two stories.



**77. Partial Section Through Utzon's Herning School Project:
Expanding Across Rural Site**



**78. Partial Section through Utzon's Parliament Building:
Additive Forms In the City**



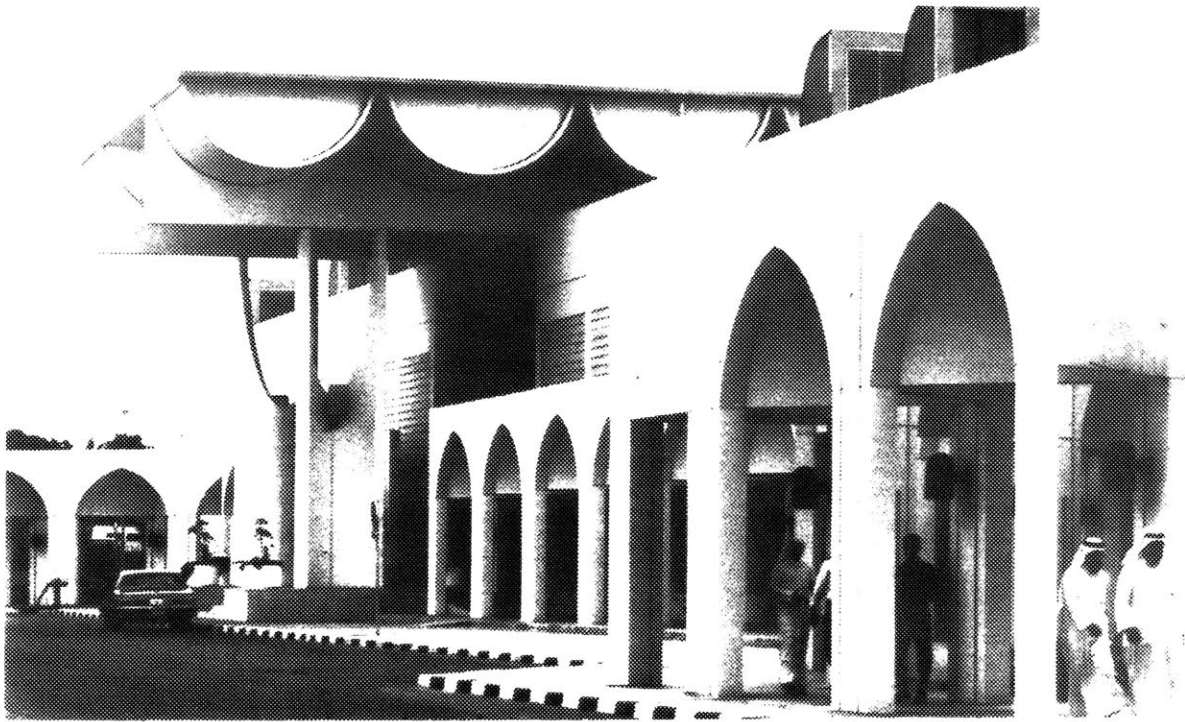
79. Kuwait National Assembly: An Island on the Edge of the Sea

analogy of the bazaar-- perhaps the most quintessentially urban form known to man-- his building is designed to deny any relationship with the real city that exists beyond the bounds of the pre-cast souk. In the plan of a Roman military camp, the main street, known as the *decumanus*, originates at the primary gateway to the complex, sited to face away from the enemy. In Utzon's Emirial encampment, the enemy is Kuwait City. The "Central Street," Utzon's indoor *decumanus*, leads nowhere, joins nothing. What begins on Arabian Gulf Street in overblown grandeur peters out into what appears to be some sort of Islamicized bus shelter [Fig. 80].

To be fair, however, at the time Utzon received the commission for the Assembly complex, much of the traditional mud-brick domestic architecture in the center part of Kuwait City had already been destroyed, in accordance with the ideas of a British town planning firm brought in as consultants in the 1950s. Applying New Town planning principles, Kuwait's development officials set aside the old town as a center for commercial development and government buildings, removed the old town wall, imposed a pattern of radial and concentric roads and replaced a great number of courtyard houses with shoddily built alternatives.⁶⁷ In the aftermath of this, only isolated pockets of the vernacular fabric remained-- it could be argued, then, that there was no "urban context" for Utzon's intervention, at least no traditional one. Utzon's analogous city could be seen as an attempt to re-evolve some of what was lost. Unfortunately, the analogy remains a poor one.

At base, the problem is that a bazaar, with its souks, is more than a clever piece of well-engineered infrastructure: it is a distinct social and economic environment. Even if Utzon had managed to evoke a spatial experience

⁶⁷ Whelan, ed., p. 147.



80. Islamicized Bus Shelter



81. The Sofa Souk, Kuwait

reminiscent of the bazaar, the new institutional presence cannot help but alter the meaning of the spaces: a bureaucrat's bazaar shares little with a merchant's souk.

In their verbal descriptions of the building, Utzon and his associates attempt to represent it as a familiar, even neighborly, sort of place-- an attitude that the formalism of the design certainly does not convey.

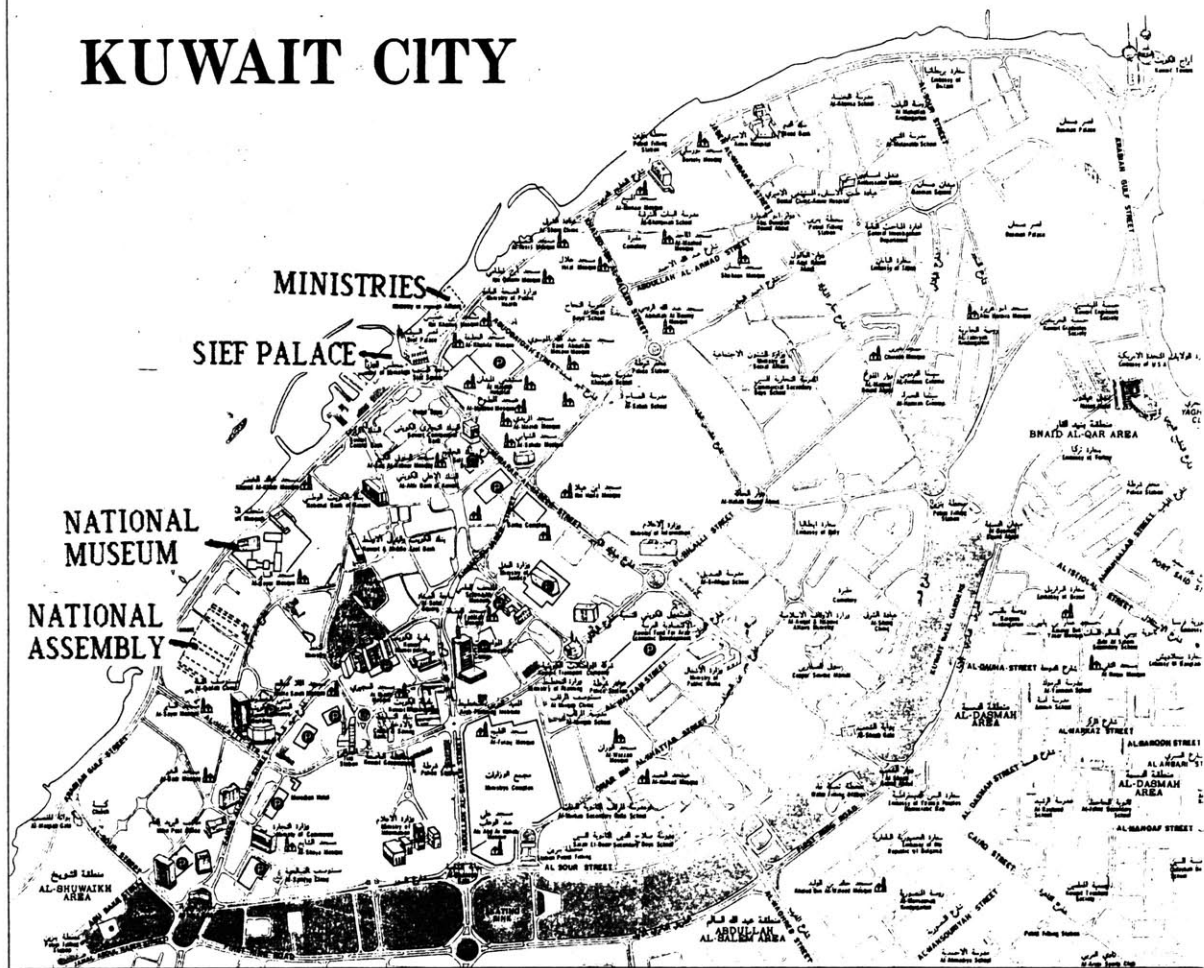
The arrangement of major uses around the Central Street makes it a general meeting place for government officials, politicians, visitors and the public. It is designed as a lively "street" in which exhibitions of interest to politicians and the public may be displayed, and at times of festivities or crowded meetings it can be used as a grand foyer.⁶⁸

Yet, if one looks at this chilly corridor, with its deadening rhythm of awkwardly arranged couches, a lively street is hardly what first jumps to mind [Fig. 81]. However it is described, the National Assembly complex is an office building designed for a fixed and regulated community of bureaucrats rather than a bazaar planned to accommodate an ever-changing variety of visitors of all ages and incomes. This is a "public" building in silhouette only.

Though Utzon did not choose the site of the building-- located close to the commercial center of the city-- he did choose to de-emphasize all connections to its urban surroundings. Despite being adjacent to the National Museum (like so many other parliament buildings), in Kuwait the two remain deliberately separated, divided by an oblong parking block between them [Fig 82]. Utzon has designed an "object" building that provides an unconvincing pretense of being part of some larger system. Like the Sief Palace and many other large residences, it faces the Gulf. Yet, in contrast to the Sief Palace, which has undergone a long and still evolving series of extensions and additions, the National Assembly building stands alone. It

⁶⁸ Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p. 6.

KUWAIT CITY



82. Map of Kuwait City: Waterfront Palaces and Institutions

may be, with a similar allowance for time and development, that this building, too, may become a source from which some larger piece of coordinated urban design could grow. Yet, with the Assembly dissolved, with a new conference center completed at five times the expense of the parliament building and with the Emir preferring his offices to be in the Emiri Diwan of the Sief Palace, prospects for National Assembly building expansion do not seem imminent. Even though it is located near the heart of the city, this capitol remains detached from its capital.

3. The Covered Square

The "covered square" at the Gulf-side entrance is the place where the pretense of public participation is most disturbing. According to Utzon, the "Central Street leads toward the ocean and out into a great open 'hall', a big open covered square, in the shade of which the people can meet their leaders."⁶⁹ Despite such billowed rhetoric, the result looks more like a monumental carport, in the shade of which the leaders can meet their chauffeurs [Fig. 83].

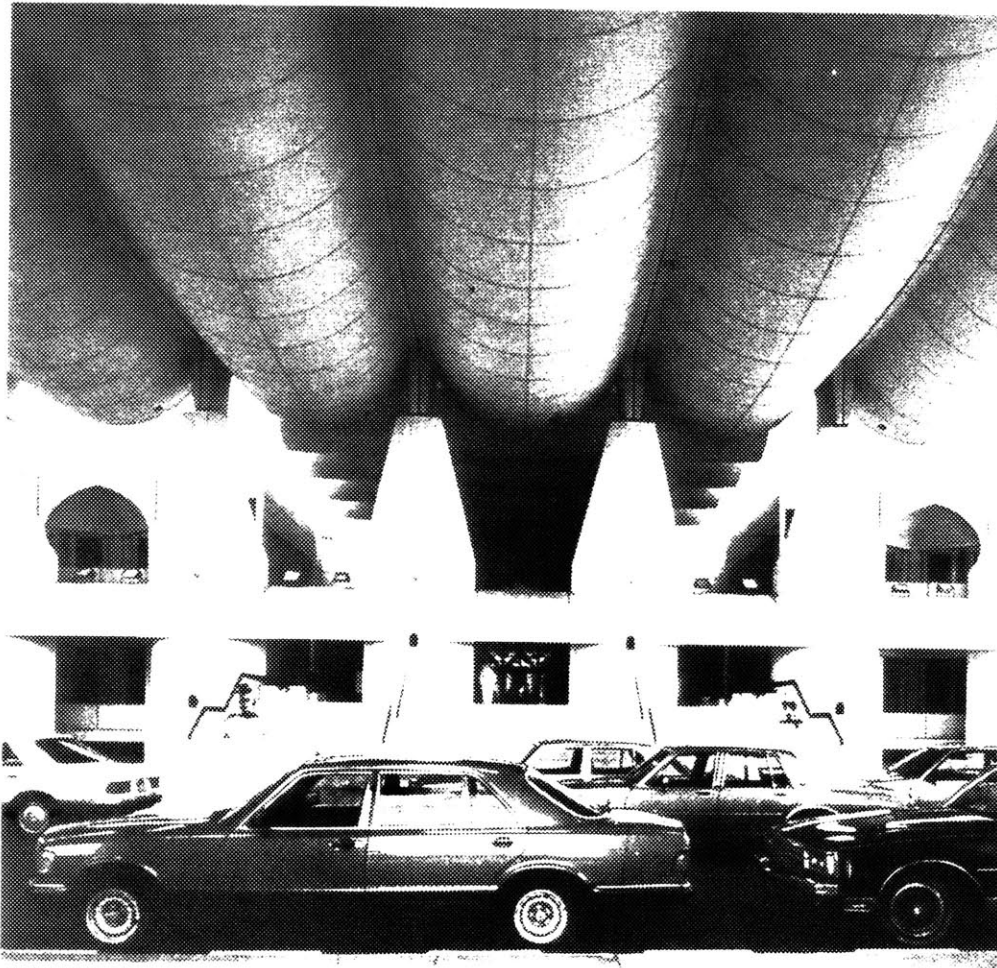
Utzon is hard-pressed to explain the "open covered square" in terms of Kuwaiti precedent but, ever the intrepid iconographer, he forges onward.

Arab countries have a tradition of very direct and close contact between leaders and people. The dangerously strong sunshine in Kuwait makes it necessary to protect oneself by seeking refuge in the shade. The shade is vital for existence, and this hall, this Covered Square, which provides shade for public gatherings, could perhaps be considered symbolic of the protection extended by a leader to his people.

There is an Arab saying: 'When a leader dies, his shadow is lost.'⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Komonen, p. 81.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.



83. Shaded Public or Shaded Mercedes?

Another Arab saying, less poetic, might be: 'When an Emir is attacked, his shadow is kept inside a very secure building.'⁷¹ Even the name "Kuwait" itself is derived from the Arabic words for "little fort."⁷² Security considerations, which dictate that this building must protect Kuwaiti leaders from far more than the sun, have multiple spatial implications.

To understand the origins of the portico/porte-cochère, one must look to Utzon's early drawings. These show the "open covered square" not as the undifferentiated parking area that it has become, but as the shaded forecourt to a mosque [Figs. 84 and 85]. With the elimination of the mosque (presumably due to considerations of security), the square lost its spatial definition as well as its most palpable function.⁷³ At the same time, the National Assembly complex lost its most outwardly visible indication of human presence.

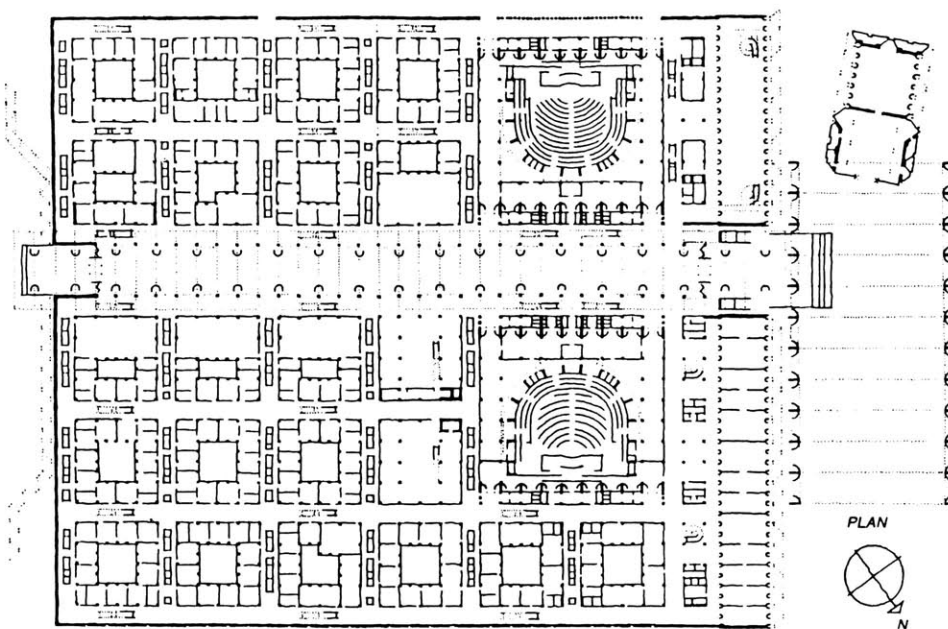
Though Utzon is right to emphasize the long tradition of informal political discussion and the equally old custom of face-to-face audience with the Emir, his covered square bears no resemblance to such traditional places of meeting.

Nightly gatherings, called diwanias, are the true heart of Kuwaiti society. They are a tradition dating back to when only tribes roamed Arabia and chieftains gathered their men to drink coffee and consult on everything from politics to gossip. ... On certain nights, the Emir's own diwaniya is open to anyone who wishes to come. When elections are in

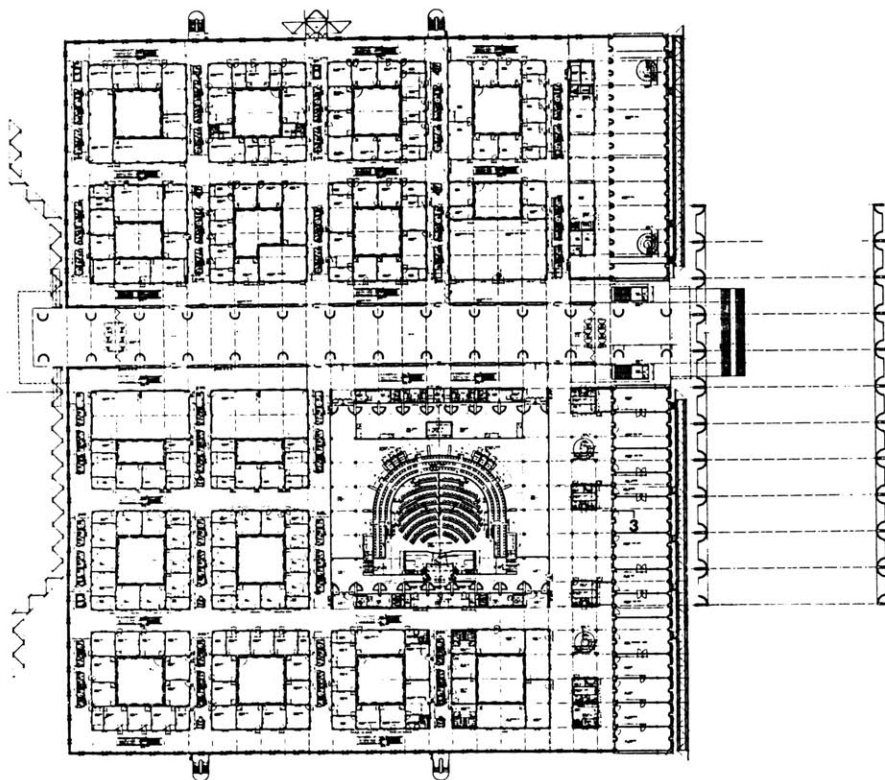
⁷¹ Despite the security consciousness of the National Assembly building, there is still some local fear that it, like the Sief Palace, might be vulnerable to attack from the sea.

⁷² Whelan, ed., p. 11.

⁷³ If they had proceeded with the mosque, it would have been very difficult to maintain fully controlled access to the site, since Islamic tradition insists on open access to a Mosque for those wishing to pray. The elimination of the mosque may also have had a political component. Though Kuwait has always been an officially Islamic state, the rising tide of fundamentalism has made the degree of government involvement with Islam an increasingly volatile subject. In 1983, for example, a law was passed to deny citizenship to non-Muslims (MERI Report, p. 31).



**84. Early Version of Kuwait National Assembly Building,
With Mosque and Conference Hall Still Included**



85. Later Version of Assembly Building, Without Second Hall or Mosque

the offering, *diwaniyas* are the place for preliminary maneuvering. During political campaigns, candidates make the rounds with their promises to all the various gatherings.⁷⁴

While nightly *diwaniyas* continue to thrive in coffee stalls along the Gulf Street and in private courtyards throughout Kuwait, they are invariably held in small and relatively enclosed spaces.⁷⁵ And, since they are held after dark, there is no need for sun-shading. Thus, while Utzon is correct to point to the need for shade and the need for "very direct and close" political contact, his architectural solution bears no relationship to existing social practice.

Conclusions

Utzon's often elegant form-making is as superficial in its evocation of the nomad's tent and the merchants' bazaar as it is irrelevant in its social accommodations. With its "Islamic" references treated as purely formal devices, the building is Arabist rather than Arabic. Though Utzon alludes to many significant aspects of traditional Kuwaiti architecture and urbanism, elements that do retain an ongoing relevance in the culture, the abstraction is meretricious. It is architecture that advertises the past with the casual gloss of a tourist promotion brochure, thriving on image without principle. It simplifies and romanticizes, and defies introspection. In short, it seeks only to confirm and extend a stereotype. Whitewashed and packaged, it gives the outside world more of what it already knows. In providing only surface

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

⁷⁵ The word *diwaniya* connotes both the gathering and the place in which it is held. After several coffee houses along Arabian Gulf Street were bombed during the mid-1980s, even more of the still-flourishing *diwaniya* activity is concentrated in private homes.

symbols, so overblown in scale as to contort their meaning, it does not even try to probe deeper questions of identity. This kind of architecture increases, rather than decreases, the perceptual distance between modernism and traditional forms of building because it fails to convey any spatial principles which can alert and stimulate the collective memory. Only in the reference to the Marsh Arab structures does Utzon come close to abstracting an evocative principle-- one having to do with the relationship between solid and void. But that architectural quotation, ironically, is one that has no bearing on Kuwaiti identity, since it is a building type from a minority group in Iraq. It is no surprise, therefore, that Utzon does not even acknowledge it as an influence.

Though the building is unsuccessful in conveying principles from traditional architectural and urban forms, it does provide a useful iconographic perspective on group relations in Kuwait. It is, thus, significant even in its superficiality. Though the reference to Bedouin tents has little phenomenological richness, it does underscore what would seem to be a deeply felt need to remember a nomadic past. Moreover, it simultaneously reminds Kuwaitis of the increasing political influence of the rapidly urbanizing Bedouin. Both aspects of Bedouin iconography serve the interests of the ruling family and its associates, for it is these old families, clinging to the benefits of limited citizenship rights, who often share with the Bedouin both presumed kinship and definitive political alliance. What is disappointing about the building is not that it recognizes the importance of these formative nomadic ties, but that these ties-- if they are indeed so crucial-- are conveyed architecturally in such a disengaged manner.

Ultimately, though, the building stands as a symbol of Kuwait's attempt to institute a measure of democracy in a region never known for power-

sharing. Designed during a period of hope, constructed during a period of renewed anticipation of democratic freedoms, it now stands as a reminder that Kuwaiti democracy is more fragile than the complex built to house it.⁷⁶ Yet parliamentary democracy, given the very limited forms in which it has been intermittently proffered, is easily perceived by the disenfranchised majority as part of the attempt to consolidate Kuwaiti hegemony over non-citizens. As a symbol of the government's attempt to consolidate Kuwaiti hold over Kuwait, the building itself may well become a rallying point (or even a target) for future resentment.

As a work of architecture for a political institution in a region of extreme international and domestic political instability, this building is a reminder of the difficulty involved in choosing which architectural allusions, if any, to emphasize. In his verbal and iconographic reliance upon abstracted tents, overhead coverings and souks, Utzon refers to forms found not only in Kuwait but all over the Arabian peninsula and throughout much of the Middle East. There is no attempt to explore those architectural forms that seem closer to being uniquely Kuwaiti, no attempt to relate this building either to the form of its city or to the rich architecture of the other palaces that also line Arabian Gulf Street. In the attempt to be "regional" and international, the building loses all sense of being local, and thus contributes little to advancing the most elusive identity of all-- the "national" one.

⁷⁶ In the absence of a national parliament, the Assembly chamber, has been used instead for meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a function it had been expected to serve (Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p. 6). With the completion of an enormous new conference center, however, GCC meetings will no longer require use of the Parliament Chamber.

CHAPTER SIX

SRI LANKA'S ISLAND PARLIAMENT

Though Sri Lanka (then still called Ceylon) gained independence from its last colonial administration in 1948, its new parliament building was not commissioned until thirty years later [Fig. 86]. Rather than a direct outcome of national liberation from the British, it was more immediately the result of internal party politics since independence. Although there had been acknowledgement of the need to expand the facilities of the Sri Lankan government for many years, the inspiration for the project came only with the 1977 election of members of Junius R. Jayewardene's United National Party to 5/6 of the seats in the national assembly, an abrupt electoral turnaround that ended the control of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Inspiration for the new building coincided not only with a new regime, but with two other important political developments, each of which made the National Parliament institutionally much weaker. The first event was a new constitution, which provided for an enormous increase in the power of the presidency, a title that Prime Minister Jayewardene added to his name in 1978. In 1982, he gained still further control over the machinery of constitutional government. Having been reelected for another six years, he proceeded to freeze the electoral cycle with a referendum delaying general elections and extending the mandate of his parliament for yet another six

years (with the result that there have been no parliamentary elections for more than a decade).¹

The second incursion into the potential authority of the National Parliament, with more drastic consequences, was the revival of fighting between the two major groups on the island, the Sinhalese majority who controlled the government and the Tamil minority, pressing for greater political autonomy in the north and east of the country. Tensions between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese and the Hindu Tamils had existed for 2000 years; with independence and periodic Sinhalese pushes for a single national language, passions once again exploded.² At the time of independence, there was less evidence of sectarian strife:

The Sinhalese and the Tamils ruled jointly, the rulers being the élite of Ceylon's colonial "old boys" club. They had grown up playing cricket and rugby together, had shared membership in the fashionable clubs, had gone through university together. They appeared to consider themselves Ceylonese, not Tamils or Sinhalese.³

Between 1956 and 1980, however the Tamils' share of government jobs dropped from fifty percent to only eleven percent;⁴ the British "divide and rule" policy that had favored the Tamil minority did not last long in a post-colonial environment.

¹ Mary Anne Weaver, "The Gods and the Stars-- A Reporter at Large," The New Yorker, 21 March 1988, p. 46.

² Sinhalese Sri Lankans constitute approximately 74% of the population and are nearly all Buddhist. The Tamil minority constitutes about 19% of the population, with 2/3 of these being "Jaffna Tamils," whose roots on the island date back 2000 years. The other 1/3-- the "Indian Tamils," number about 1 million and live in the Central Highlands and south. These are descendants of low-caste bonded laborers brought in by the British in the 19th century to work the tea plantations. They are considerably different from the predominantly high caste Jaffna Tamils, proud heirs of the ancient Tamil kingdoms -- who have been leading the fight for an independent homeland (see Weaver, p. 58).

³ Weaver, p. 40.

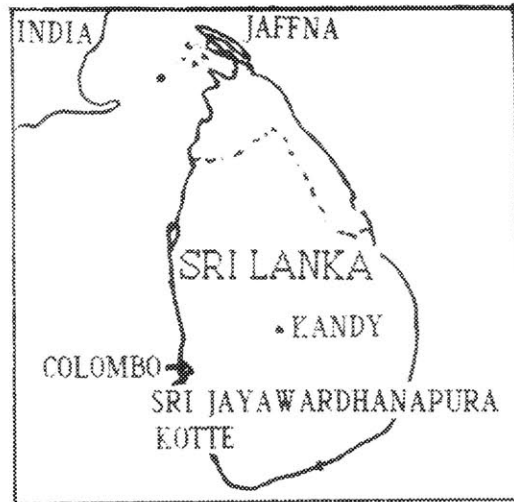
⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

In 1983, following anti-Tamil riots, the government asked Tamil parliamentarians to take an oath of allegiance to the "unitary state" of Sri Lanka. Asked to swear that they opposed even peaceful efforts towards separatism in the north, the 16 Tamil members of the parliamentary opposition refused, resigning their seats.¹ Riots and other disturbances related to the aims of Tamil separatists continue to plague the Jayewardene government to this day, exacerbated by the violence of the radical Sinhalese Liberation Front. Caught between the claims of many diverse factions-- the separatist demands of the Tamils, the political clout of 30,000 Buddhist monks, the schisms within Jayewardene's own party and the attacks of the radical nationalists²-- there is little room in Sri Lanka for parliamentary democracy, however elegant the new building [Fig. 87]. Though Jayewardene's 1977 victory had initially given Tamil separatists a cause for hope, since he was considered to be less of a Sinhalese chauvinist than his predecessors, a decade later the country faced the prospects of extended civil war.

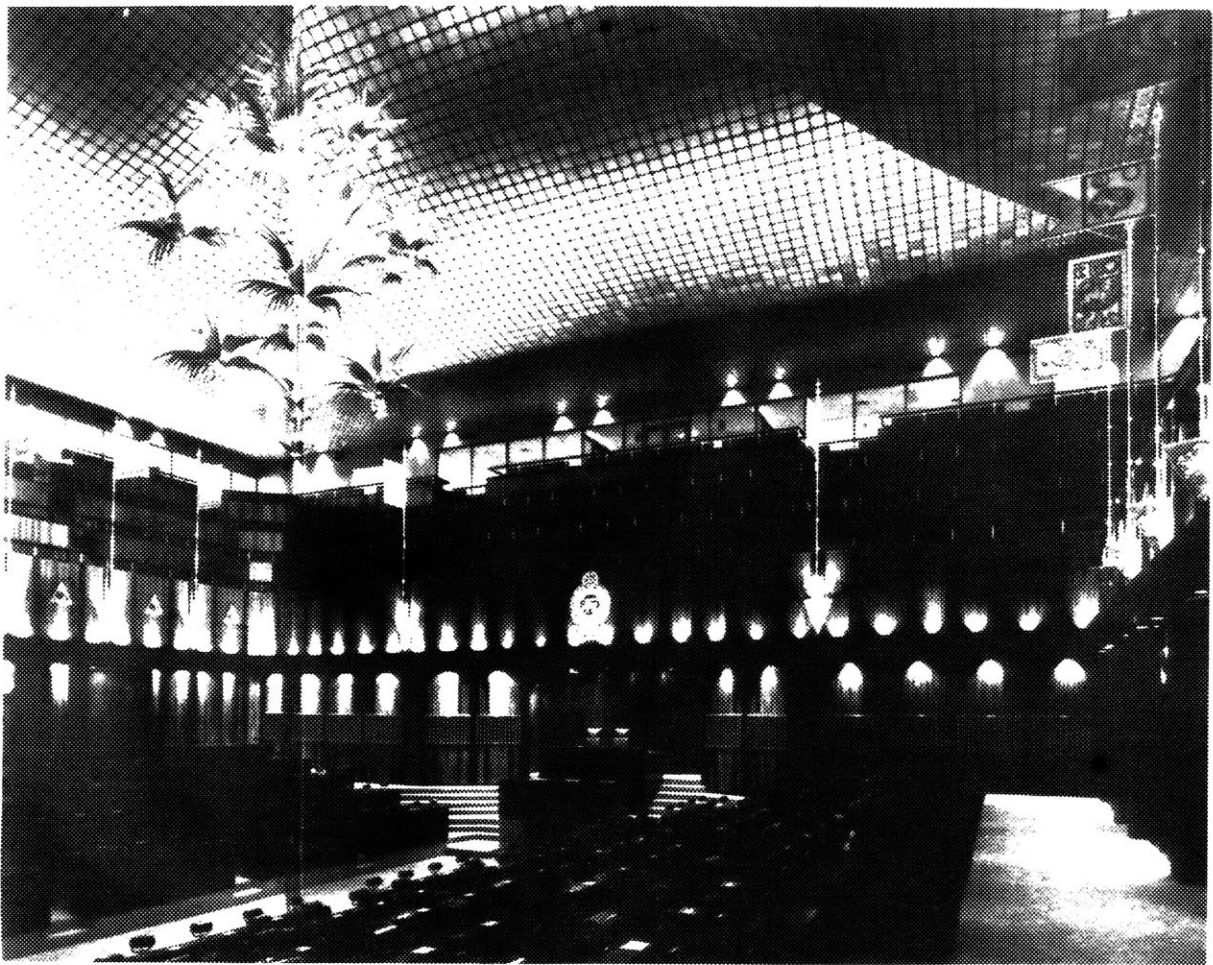
Civil wars are not resolved through architecture, though the new Parliament building for Sri Lanka, designed by Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, provides far greater evidence of consolidation in the realm of architecture than has been possible thus far in the arena of politics. The building stands squarely between the abstract universalism of high modernism and the more literal localism of PNG's concrete Haus Tambaran.

¹ Ibid., p. 57.

² In August 1987, radical Sinhalese nationalists succeeded in carrying out a machine gun and grenade attack in the new Parliament chamber, in an apparent attempt to assassinate Jayewardene. Though one person was killed and fourteen wounded, the President was unhurt. ("Sri Lanka Attack Misses President," New York Times, 19 August 1987, p. 1.) According to Ronald Lewcock, the consensus is that the death toll and damage could easily have been much higher and that Bawa's "soft finishes saved the day."



86. Map of Sri Lanka



87. Sri Lanka Parliament's Westminster-Style Seating: Aligned For Confrontation?

Occupying this middle ground, Bawa sought to capitalize upon indigenous formal traditions without either trivializing them or rendering them incomprehensibly abstruse. The monumentality of the Sri Lankan complex is mitigated by a recognizable iconography, one obviously rooted in Sri Lankan traditions. The success of the building is that it does not attempt to capture or "represent" all Sri Lankan culture with a single image. Its strength is the multivalence of its references, the willingness and the ability of its architect to draw upon many different parts of Sri Lanka's eclectic architectural history. Bawa's parliament building design is inclusive in its approach to history without descending into caricature or pastiche. While it may be that this could have been achieved without the design skills of an indigenous architect, Bawa's leadership would seem something of a milestone for post-colonial parliament building design.

However much one might wish to romanticize Bawa's indigenism, he is hardly only a locally-produced phenomenon. Educated in law and English literature at Cambridge, he became a barrister, a world traveler and the owner of a rubber plantation before returning to England to pursue a degree in architecture at London's Architectural Association. In his work, despite an attentiveness to the Sri Lankan rural vernacular, his consciousness of modern architecture in the West remains thorough. After a flurry of commissions in the 1970s and 1980s, Bawa has developed the international reputation that comes from glossy guest appearances on the pages of Architectural Review and MIMAR, culminating in a full-length monograph published in 1986. Still, after decades where most architecturally ambitious developing nations relied upon the import of foreign designers for reasons of prestige as well as expertise, the rise of Geoffrey Bawa heralds a heartening change in the balance of trade.

The change is heartening because Bawa's work exhibits a willingness to confront both the national and the international identities that new states (as well as more established ones) seek to forge.¹ As it is for any state, such identity is cultivated selectively. Sri Lanka's parliament building cannot be understood separately from the government it is meant to house and serve.² And in this, the Bawa Parliament clearly does not serve all segments of Sri Lanka equally. While it surely accepts and transforms the architectural language of many epochs, the building, taken together with its site, is overwhelmingly an exercise in recalling the golden age of unchallenged Sinhalese supremacy over the whole island.

This Sinhalese centrism is not, however, immediately obvious unless one is aware of the political conditions surrounding the commission and the historical associations imbedded in the choice of site. Before turning to these in greater detail, it seems important to recognize Bawa's success in transcending political cleavages. If it were possible to divorce the architecture from the politics, the building might well occupy a very different symbolic place. Yet, precisely because Parliament buildings are so directly politically engendered, commissioned with political as well as aesthetic intent, it is impossible to separate architecture from politics for

¹ One Colombo journalist describes Bawa's appeal as follows: It had become fashionable among the Western-educated social elite to have a house designed by Geoffrey Bawa because his houses were different from the hideous so-called American style dwellings of the new rich in the post independence period.

Bawa brought back traditional Sinhala and Dutch colonial architectural styles into his buildings..." (Karel Roberts, "The New Parliament Complex, Sri Jayawardhanapura, Kotte," The Sunday Observer (Colombo), 21 March 1982).

² For an overview of Sri Lankan political developments through early 1988, see Weaver, pp. 39-84. For further background to the contemporary political situation, see also K.M. de Silva "Independent Again: The Trials and Tribulations of Nationhood Since 1948" and Mallika Wanigasundara, "Modern Sri Lanka: Economic and Political Success Stories of the 1980s" in Sri Lanka (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall/APA Productions, 1984), pp. 55-65.

very long. If one wishes to probe the relation between a building and its cultural context, a purely formalist analysis will not suffice.

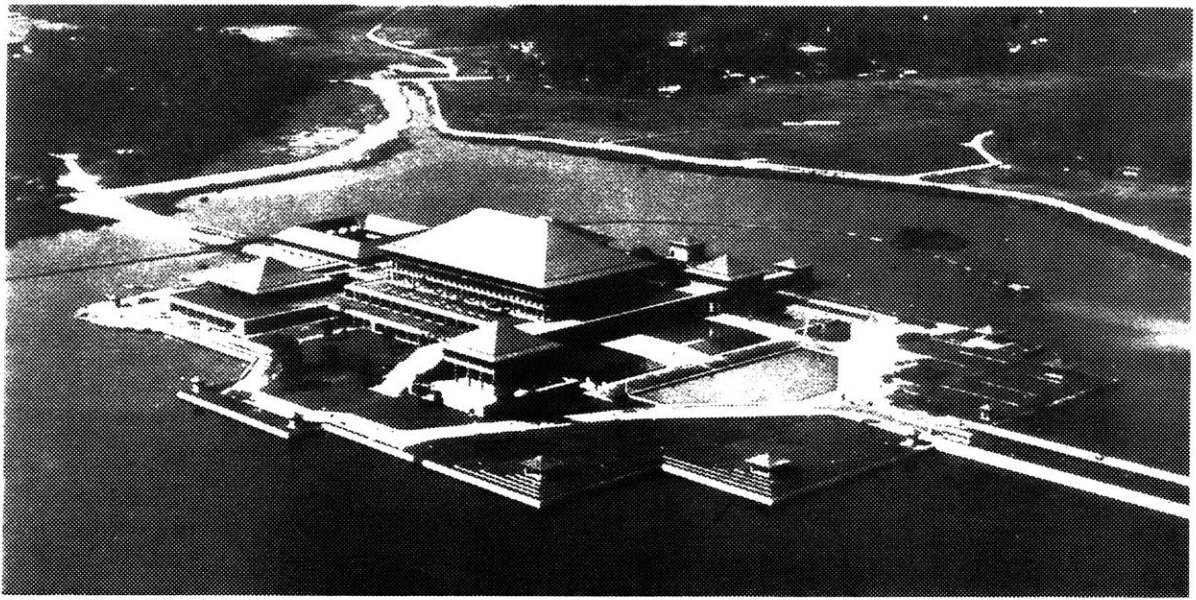
Bawa himself seems to resist this need for the infusion of non-aesthetic perspectives upon the evaluation of his work. In the cultural diversity he is willing and able to champion, he is more eclectic than most politicians would dare to be. As he puts it, in a rare public statement by a very private man: "I like to regard all past and present good architecture in Sri Lanka as just that-- good Sri Lankan architecture-- for this is what it is, not narrowly classified as Indian, Portuguese or Dutch, early Sinhalese or Kandyan or British Colonial, for all the good examples of these periods have taken the country itself into first account."¹ And, in his execution of the commission for a new parliament building, Bawa's "good Sri Lankan architecture" confronts an impressively pan-historic array of influences.

The parliamentary compound is-- like Sri Lanka itself-- an island, and rises from the water like some sacred fortress [Fig. 88]. As such, the new capitol complex may be seen as a direct evocation of waterfront temple complexes of the Sri Lankan past. It recalls the ancient habit of associating palaces with large manmade lakes (known as "tanks"), used for agricultural irrigation and still a prominent feature of the Sri Lankan landscape.² Yet Bawa's work recalls not only "classical" Sri Lanka's waterfront temples but also the blocky impregnability of the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial forts which guarded nearby Colombo in subsequent eras.

If it has aspects of a fortress, however, it is no monolith. Rather, it is a complex of buildings with a clear hierarchy. Like temple precincts of the

¹ Geoffrey Bawa, "Statement by the Architect", in Brian Brace Taylor, ed., Geoffrey Bawa (Singapore: MIMAR, 1986), p. 16.

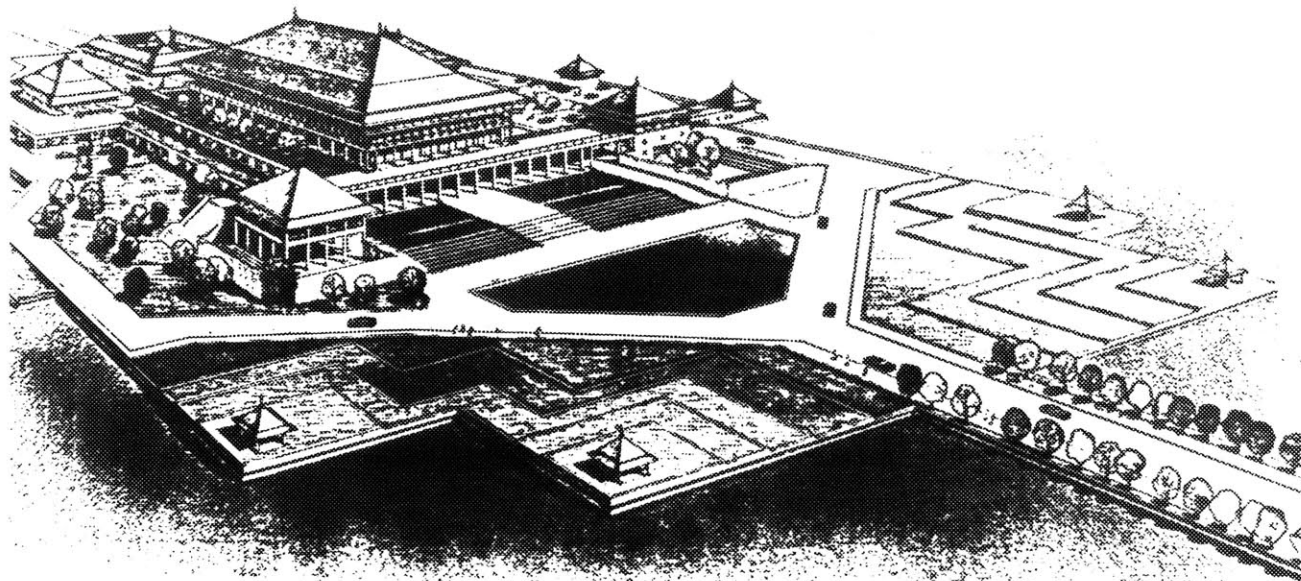
² For an overview of Sri Lankan architectural history see, for example, R. Raven-Hart, Ceylon: History in Stone (Colombo: Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, 1964).



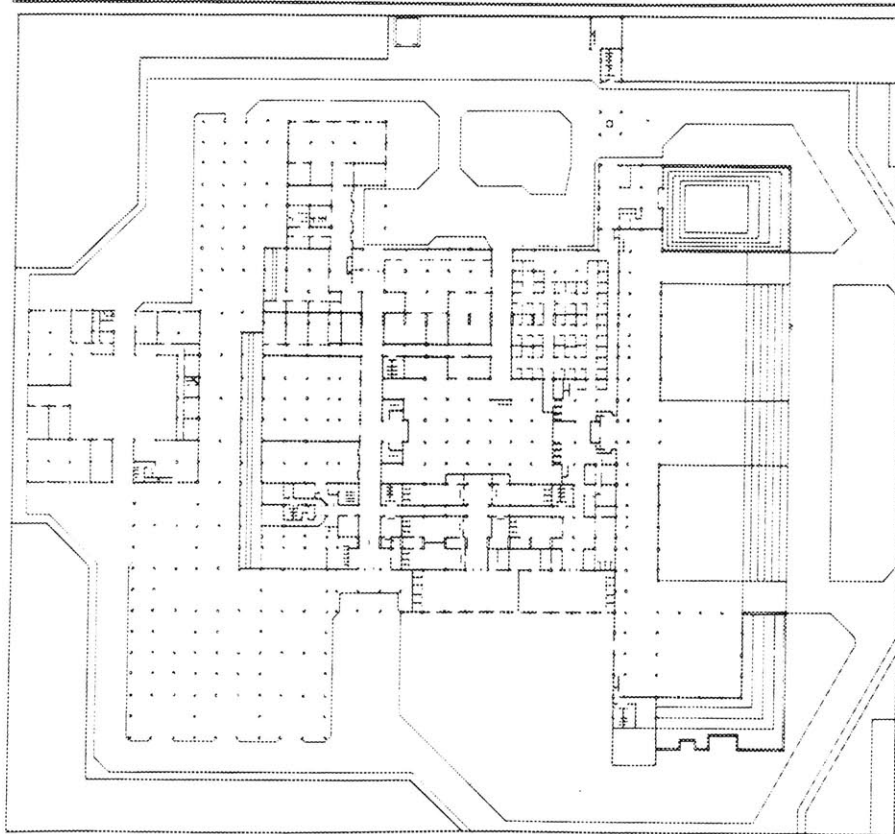
88. Sri Lanka's Island Parliament

past, there is one dominant structure in the center and smaller and subservient ones arrayed around it. Here, appropriately enough, it is the parliamentary chamber which is granted visual supremacy, while other functions such as an MP dining facility, a reception hall, a service block and security offices, are distributed into smaller pavilions which radiate from the central portion in pinwheel fashion [Figs. 89-92]. The spaces are interconnected by open colonnades and arcades which are at least vaguely suggestive of streets in colonial Colombo. While European in derivation, perhaps, they appear here in their indigenous adaptation, using traditional craft techniques and intricate timberwork. The building provides visual evidence that the influence of the "West" upon Sri Lankan architecture began long before the import of 20th century modernism and materials; it bespeaks a willingness to accept that such cultural exchange has been the operative rule throughout the island's turbulent history. This is an architecture which seems to deny that Sri Lanka can be captured or represented through the invocation of any one architectural "essence". To emphasize indigenous forms from many cultures and many ages is to adopt a broad definition of what qualifies as "Sri Lankan" and to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism.

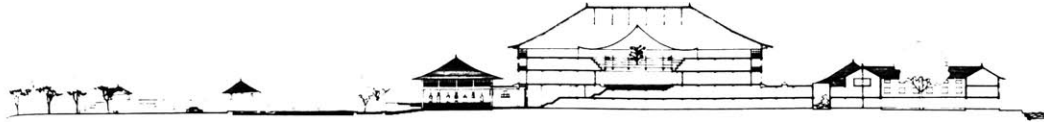
The Sri Lankan parliament building avoids the opposite pitfall, that of pastiche, largely because there is one dominant formal element in the design. More than anything, the parliamentary complex is identifiable as Sri Lankan because of its roofs. As Bawa puts it, "One unchanging element of all buildings is the roof-- protective, emphatic, and all important-- governing the aesthetic whatever the period, wherever the place. Often a building is only a roof, columns and floors-- the roof dominant, shielding, giving the contentment of shelter.... The roof, its shape, texture and proportion is the



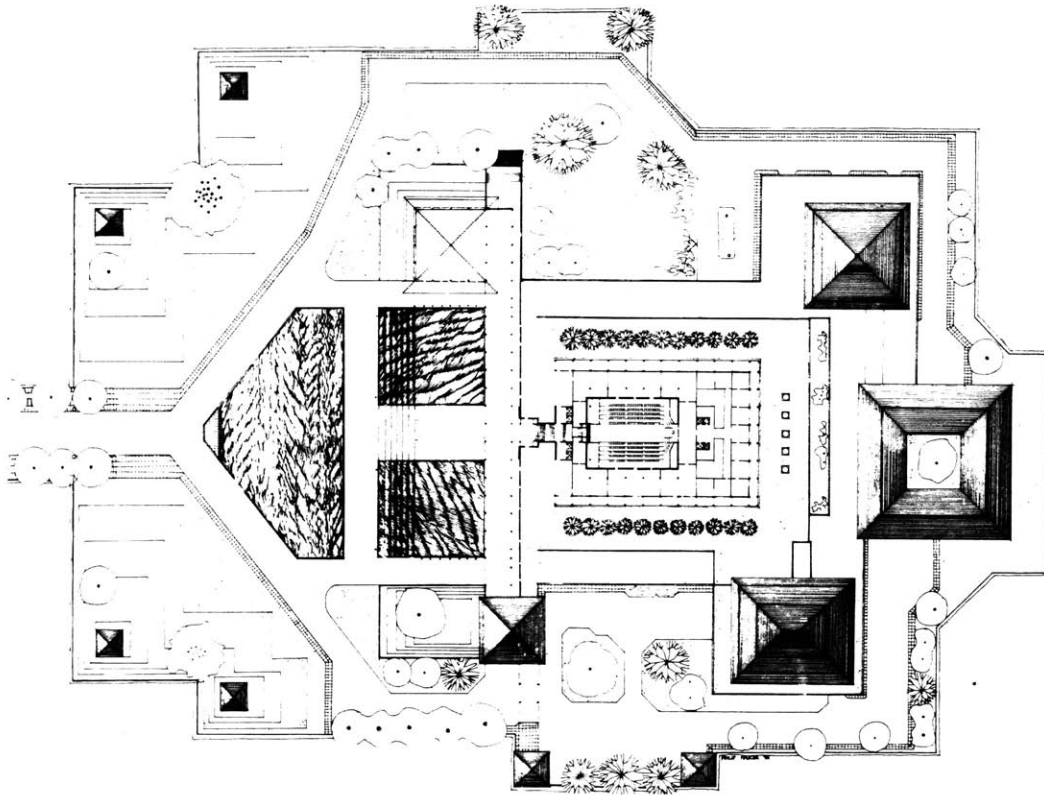
89. Perspective of Parliament Island



90. Plan of Parliament Island



91. Section Through Parliament Complex

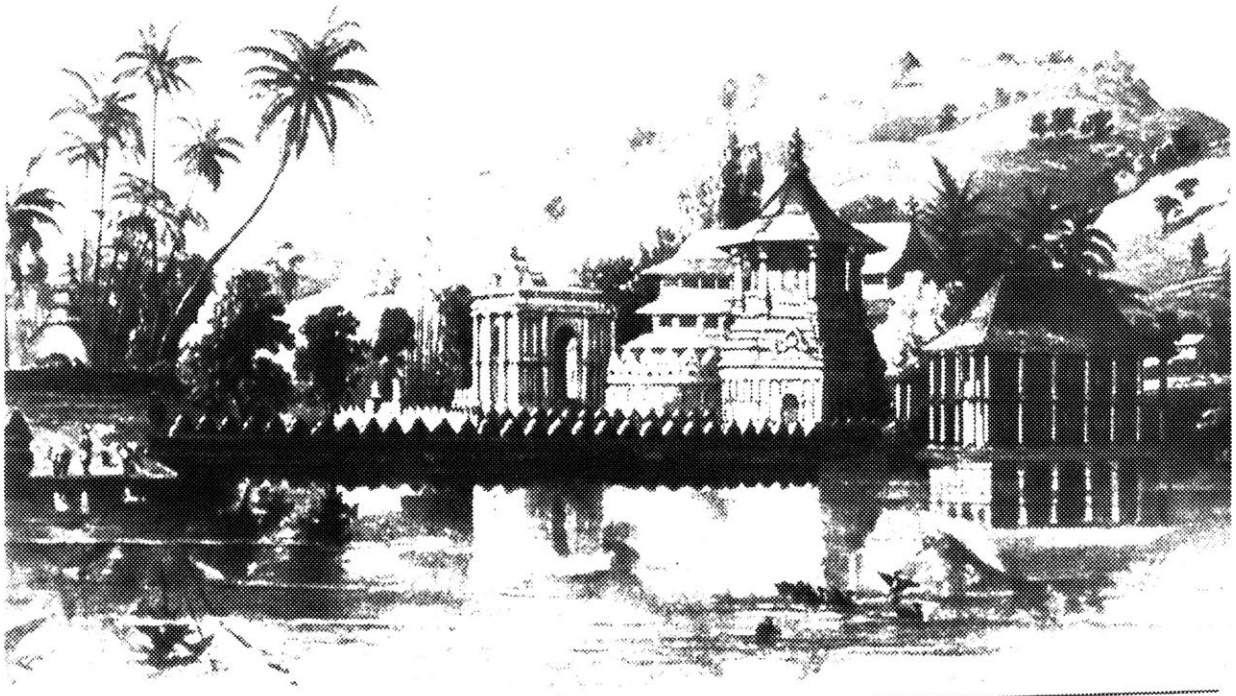


92. Plan of Parliament Complex

strongest visual factor.”¹ Here, the roofs of the capitol complex adopt the characteristic double pitch of the monastic and royal buildings of pre-colonial Kandy [Figs. 93-95]. This allusion to some of Sri Lanka's most revered monuments is a reminder, too, of the need for unity between the Kandyan highlands and the lowlands of Colombo. In contemporary Sri Lanka, though, the rift between highland and lowland peoples pales beside that of the Tamil-Sinhalese schism, a division seemingly reinforced by blatant reference to the roofscape of Sinhalese Kandy. Yet the political/architectural issue is still further complicated by the fact that Kandy itself is certainly not a purely Sinhalese city, given that several hundred years worth of its queens and their entourages had come from mainland India. Nonetheless, like the elected representatives within it, the new parliament chamber itself supports a Sinhalese vision of Sri Lanka.

Though the graceful and evocative rooflines of the building may be the complex's dominant formal aspect, many of those who have visited it prefer to emphasize its careful and thorough integration with the landscape and climate of Sri Lanka. While this integration seems unquestionably present in much if not all of Geoffrey Bawa's other built work, judgment about this aspect of the parliament building must be withheld. Whereas many of Bawa's smaller buildings make magnificent use of existing elements in the natural landscape, the development of the Sri Jawardenepura site essentially involved working against the forces of nature. Though Bawa did attempt to site his buildings in relation to existing mangosteen trees, the island itself is largely an artificial creation of landfill and swamp draining and thus seems inevitably at odds with the lushness found nearly everywhere else in the Sri

¹ Bawa, in Taylor, ed., p. 16.



93. Nineteenth Century View of Kandy's Temple of the Tooth



94. Lankatilaka Vihara, Outside Kandy

Lankan landscape. Only after tree plantings are completed and fully grown and after the grand copper roofs have fully oxidized to green, can this complex of buildings begin to approximate the organic continuity with the landscape that is characteristic of Bawa's best work. As Akhtar Badshah, who worked with Bawa on the initial phases of the parliament's design, puts it, right now the building still "looks too clean."¹ Part of the reason that this building may lack some of the intimacy of Bawa's other work may be attributable to the construction process itself. Bawa, who prefers to work in the style of the traditional master builder, making numerous and often significant alterations in his designs in mid-construction based on his on-site observations, was not permitted to do so in this case.² Instead, according to Brian Brace Taylor, the process of working with a Japanese construction company on an extremely tight timetable was "the trauma of Bawa's life,"³ though this would seem to be something of an overstatement. The Japanese firm was one selected by Bawa, out of a belief that no Sri Lankan or Indian firm could meet the desired timetable, and it was a firm that he had worked with in the past, on the Ceylon Pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka. Still, familiarity with the firm and ability to work with them did little to compensate for the speed with which the design had to be devised or the elimination of opportunities for substantial on-site adjustments. This disjuncture between project management and artistic practice is surely of special significance not only for the construction process but for the nature and detailing of the designs that Bawa proposed. Though, when seen from a distance, the structure seems to exude much of the Sri Lankan timelessness to which

¹ Interview, November 1986.

² See J.M. Richards, "Geoffrey Bawa," MIMAR 19 (January-March 1986), p. 46.

³ Brian Brace Taylor, "A House is a Garden," in Geoffrey Bawa, p. 15.

Bawa alludes when he writes of buildings composed only of "roofs, columns and floors," several critics have noted that more alien influences become pervasive when the building is viewed close-up. One may well question the environmental appropriateness of reinforced concrete (mixed with crushed stone and epoxy for the outer surfaces) as the structural basis for a building in a tropical climate. This inappropriateness is only confirmed by the necessity of importing the services of a Japanese construction firm to implement it. Though its handcrafted timberwork, its brasswork, its murals and its banners provide reminders of indigenous artistic traditions and motifs, they cannot conceal the politically desirable haste with which the complex was realized.¹ The multilayered references present in the massing and composition of the complex are not equaled in the details. After the distant glimpse of the grand roofs above the trees, the mid-range drama of the buildings growing out of the water and the grand processional of arrival, some commentators have indicated disappointment upon actually reaching the building.² Even \$43 million, it would seem, was insufficient to outfit the interiors with the same casual and evocative grandeur that is present in the massing. With this commission even Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's contribution to the international architectural scene, may well have met his match.

While Bawa's architecture is relatively open to influences outside the mainstream of traditional Sinhalese design, the siting of the building reveals political puposes that are far more parochial. Though the symbolic references to past traditions of relating manmade water to architecture may

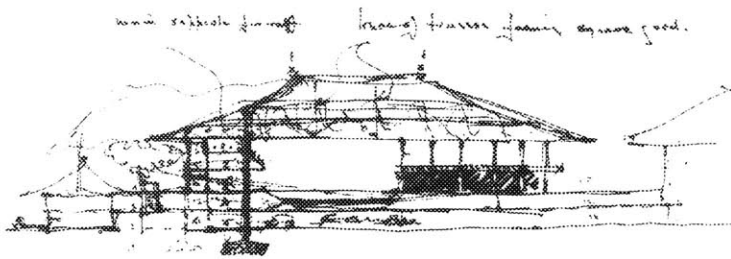
¹ Achievement of the whole complex took only about three years from conception to inauguration, a remarkably short time considering the size, complexity and location of the commission. ("Parliament, Kotte, Colombo," in MIMAR 19, p. 59.

² Rupert Scott, "Parliament Building, Sri Lanka" Architectural Review, v. 157 (May 1983), pp. 21-2, and William J.R. Curtis, "Towards an Authentic Regionalism," MIMAR 19, pp. 30-31.

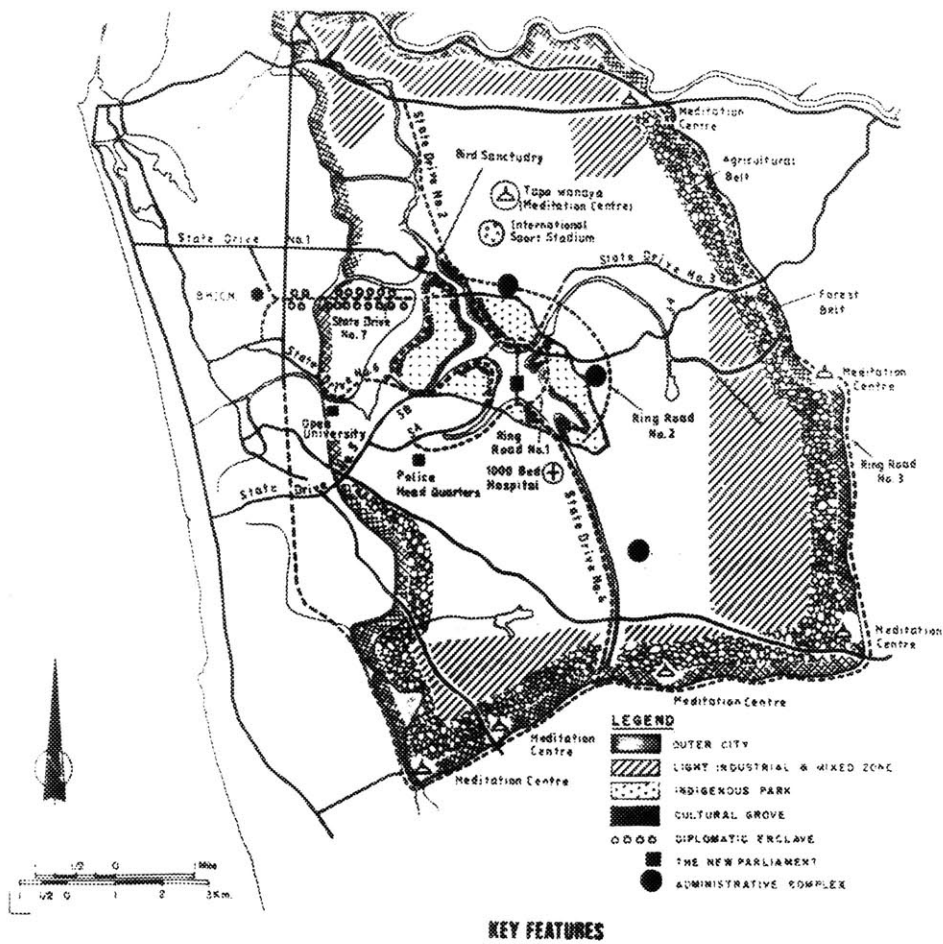
have remained at the heart of Bawa's conception for the building, it seems likely that the choice of site, reachable only by a single causeway from the surrounding land, had at least as much to do with considerations of security as it did with meditations on history. To point this out, however, is not to diminish the importance of either concern but rather to recognize that form and social context are inseparable, and that architectural form responds simultaneously to many different considerations.

Bawa's parliament, though critics have noted resemblances between its layout and that of Hindu temple complexes in South India, is a temple to Sinhalese nationalism and the rule of Jayewardene. It is constructed in a district whose very name, Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte, reminds citizens of its patron. This conjunction of names, however, is neither direct nor completely fortuitous: the place was named nearly five hundred years before a modern President moved to reclaim it. Moreover, the choice of Sri Jayawardhanapura as the site for the new Parliament building had tremendous political appeal to Sinhalese that went well beyond the familiarity of the name.

Though the selection of site certainly had much to do with the availability of inexpensive land near the capital, its significance far transcends matters of economics. Four miles outside of Colombo, Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte is no mere suburb: it was once a city of enormous importance in pre-colonial Sri Lanka [Fig. 96]. As the resplendent royal capital of the fifteenth century, it was the powerbase for Sinhalese control over the whole island, the last time such total control would be exercised until independence, five hundred years later. With this symbolic return to Kotte at a time of renewed Tamil



95. Preliminary Sketches by Bawa, Emphasizing Roofs



96. Overall Diagram of Sri Jayawardhanapura, Ringed by Buddhist Meditation Centers, With Ancient Capital and Parliament as Central Area

unrest, no doubt Jayewardene wished to imagine that a similar national control could be regained.¹

Through words and through architecture, it is this association between the glories of the old and the renaissance of the new that the promoters of the new capitol complex sought to recapture. As the building neared completion in 1982, Colombo's Sunday Observer ran a series of articles which stressed this connection. Though most of the articles emphasized the historical value of the site, the intended relevance to contemporary politics was thinly veiled at best. The press reports about the new building and its site highlighted its importance as a symbol of Sinhalese hegemony, a viewpoint which permeates the text and drawings of the Master Plan as well.

As conveyed in the Sunday Observer, the story of Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte clearly reads as a kind of cautionary tale for present-day relations between Tamils and Sinhalese. Only the tenses are different; the tensions are the same. In the second half of the fourteenth century, when the southern parts of the island, including Colombo and Kandy provinces, were "under the usurped control of the rebel Prince Arya Cakravarti of Jaffna," the Sinhalese King's Viceroy, Nissanka Alakesvara--who was "a zealous Buddhist"--realised that "the Buddhist Church as well as the Sinhala race were in great danger." As a "precautionary step," he built "a formidable kotuva [from which Kotte, or "fortress"] at Daarugama to prepare for a great war." Going forth from Kotte, Alakesvara's forces handed the Tamil enemy a "crushing defeat." And, since Alaksevara's "famous victory (-Jaya) over the

¹ For an brief overview of Sri Lankan history, see Sri Lanka, pp. 12-65.

enemy" was carried out from Kotte, this fortress "became famous as the New JAYAVARDHANAPURA," or--in English-- "Place of Victory over the Enemy."¹

While the account of this victory that is presented in the Sunday Observer is clearly told from a Sinhalese point of view, the description of Sri Jayawardhanapura given in the Master Plan is even more overtly a product of Sinhalese nationalist aspirations. According to the text provided along with a drawing on the "Plan of Ancient Sri Jayawardhanapura," "The fortress city earned the name of Sri Jayawardhanapura on successfully conquering the North in 1391."² This seemingly simple statement distorts the circumstances of the story in two intriguing ways. First, it is phrased to read as if the fortress itself had captured the North. While this may simply be the result of a grammatical error, it certainly lends support to anyone believing that the act of constructing a new parliament could actively assist in putting down Tamil insurrection. Second, there is a factual mistake which might lead a less-informed reader to overstate the historical parallel between the 1391 victory and the political situation six hundred years later. The forces who set out from Kotte in 1391 went into battle with Tamil invaders coming from the South not the North. Other Sinhalese troops forestalled that part of the Tamil enemy coming from the North. It would be many more years before a Kotte-based force would be able to defeat the Jaffna Tamils.

The highpoint in Kotte's history came a few decades after Alakesvara's triumph, during the fifty-five year reign of King Parakramabahu VI. When the new King acceded to the throne in 1412, the island-- then as now-- "was torn by different rival political units, particularly Jaffna, which was [still]

¹ Senarath Panawatta, "A Glimpse into the History of Sri Jayawardhanapura," The Sunday Observer, March/April 1982.

² Master Plan for Sri Jayawardhanapura, p. 4.

controlled by the [Tamil] rebel Arya Cakravarti." In consequence, a Colombo journalist continues, "from the moment of his ascendancy," Parakramabahu "felt uneasy and realised his sacred duty by the land of his birth to restore it to unity." He launched an "important national campaign against Jaffna, which was the greatest challenge to the sovereign identity of Sri Lanka as a single United Kingdom." Finally, in 1449, he captured the northern Tamil stronghold, and "proudly set Sri Lanka on the map of the world once more as a supremely independent sovereign nation."¹

Lest only Sri Lanka's Tamils find cause for alarm in the renewed Sinhalese rule from the famous fort, the article points out that, "after the subjugation of Jaffna, King Parakramabahu also found it expedient to send an army to attack the Chola Port of Adriampet in South India..." More than anything, however, the King sought to advance the prestige of Buddhism: "During his glorious reign Buddhism received undiminished royal patronage to emerge from gradual neglect to pre-eminent glory; a magnificent Temple of the Tooth was built in the City which constituted the chief attraction of the Buddhist World..." Guided by Buddhism, "art and architecture...blossomed and gradually a war-torn and depressed country steered towards peace and economic prosperity under one national banner." Five hundred years later, the one national banner flies again, from an island opposite the ruins. The journalist makes certain the analogy is not missed: "Along with the establishment of the magnificent new parliamentary complex in the historic Royal City of Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte," he writes, "a quota of flesh and blood is given to the dry bones of this ancient city to

¹ Panawatta.

resurrect with renewed prestige the splendour she last enjoyed under King Parakramabahu VI...."¹

Other articles in the Colombo press are equally adept at forging connections between 15th century Sinhalese Kings and a 20th century Sri Lankan President. In a piece suggestively titled "The Glory that Was-- and Is-- Sri Jayawardhanapura," Wilfred M. Gunasekera begins by noting that "It augurs well to have the Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka during the tenure of President J. R. Jayewardene installed in Jayawardhanapura Kotte." "This city," he continues, "which was founded by Alakeswara and adorned by Sri Parakrama Bahu VI is now enriched by the government of our elected President who will sustain good government in a unified Lanka and foster its culture and learning and inspire his countrymen over generations to come." This new Sinhalese dynasty in Kotte, he further implies, may also need defensive protection: "The Kings of Ceylon made it their capital for one hundred and fifty years, but it was built originally only to serve as a base for military operations."² The Parliament, too, seems well equipped for military operations. According to the Master Plan for "The Nucleus" of the capitol complex:

Security Units of all the Armed forces will stand sentinel to the North, East, South and the West of the New Parliament guarding this most important House of Assembly and the state residences. The Police will take position at the head of the ceremonial way, the Air Force adjacent to the state residences, the Army at the foot of the security access and the Navy across the waters at Baddegana. The Air Force will have a helipad and the Navy the blue waters for its patrol boats.³

¹ Ibid.

² Wilfred M. Gunasekera, "The Glory that Was-- and Is-- Sri Jayawardhanapura," The Sunday Observer (Colombo), 25 April 1982.

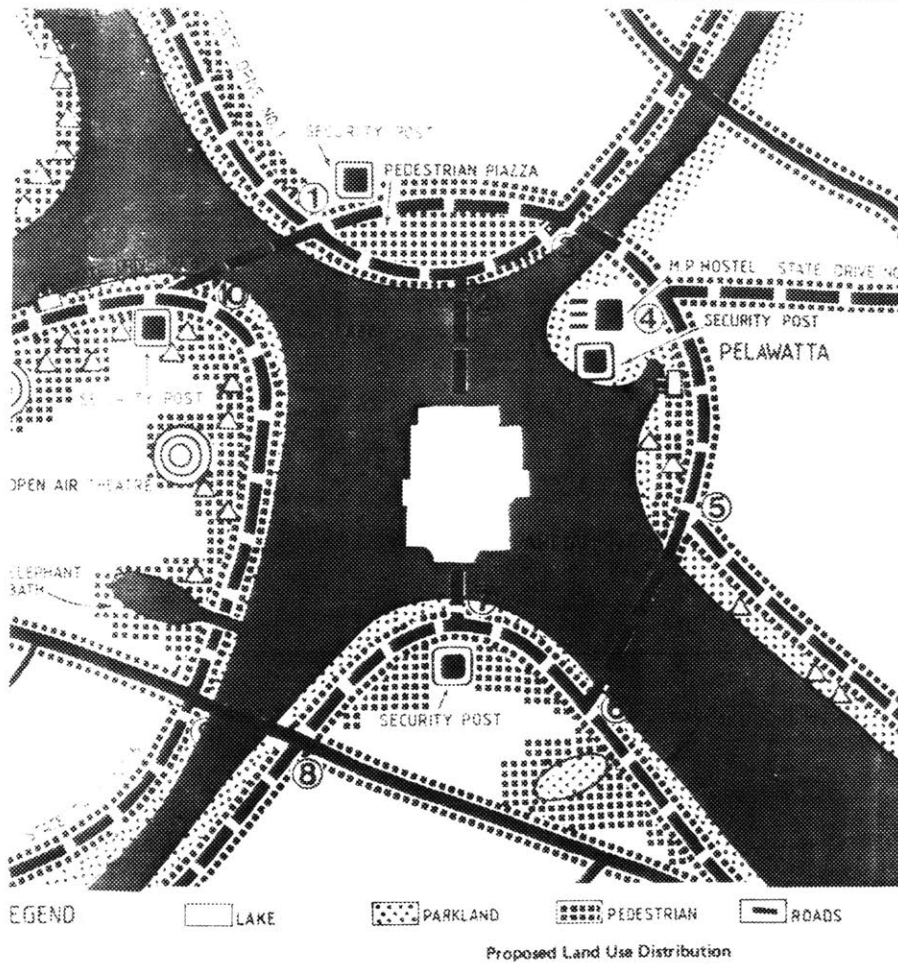
³ Master Plan, p. 46.

While such a statement may keep all branches of the military suitably appeased, this overwhelming need to provide for security-- thoroughly justified by current political instability-- must inevitably detract from the sense of openness and pedestrian freedom that is so consistently touted as a feature of the plan [Fig. 97].

Though the new Parliament building was clearly intended to be a symbol of democracy, both its design and its siting inspired symbolic recall of far less-inclusivist forms of government. A two-part series in the Sunday Observer by Karel Roberts describes the effort to "turn this ordinary middle class sprawling township, once the home of the Kotte kings, into a new showpiece of the nation with Parliament as the central gem in the diadem." And, indeed few would doubt that the Sri Lankan *caput mundi* wears a royal crown. Noting that the old colonial parliament building in Colombo was felt to be "no longer in tune with the new national aspirations and image," Roberts observes that the new building "would reflect all the features of traditional Sinhala architecture."¹ Yet, since Sinhala is not equivalent to Sri Lankan and ancient Kotte is far from uniformly touted as the golden age of the island's history, the building cannot help but be another symbol of alienation for disaffected Tamils.

The Sinhalese character of the Sri Lankan capitol complex is made abundantly clear in the Master Plan, which clearly shows the intentions behind the juxtaposition of modern parliament and ancient citadel. In the ambitious and multifaceted attempt to convey the Buddhist heritage of the country, ancient Jayawardhanapura operates by analogy as well as by proximity. Both the fifteenth century fortress city and the twentieth century

¹ Roberts, "The New Parliament Complex...."



97. The Plan to Keep the Island Secure

parliament are on islands; both evidence an obsession with security; both are dominated by places for ceremony-- an architecture of walls and temples. One island protects the embattled Sinhalese politicians, the other gives sanctuary to exalted Sinhalese traditions [Fig. 98]. Taken together, this cultural archipelago is described as an "Indigenous Park:"

This will form a zone designed to highlight and promote the growth of indigenous arts and crafts and indigenous planting and landscaping techniques to result in a truly national environment. It will form the Nation's identity and the City's pride. It will be her head and bosom.¹

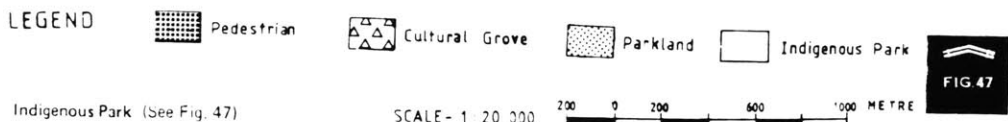
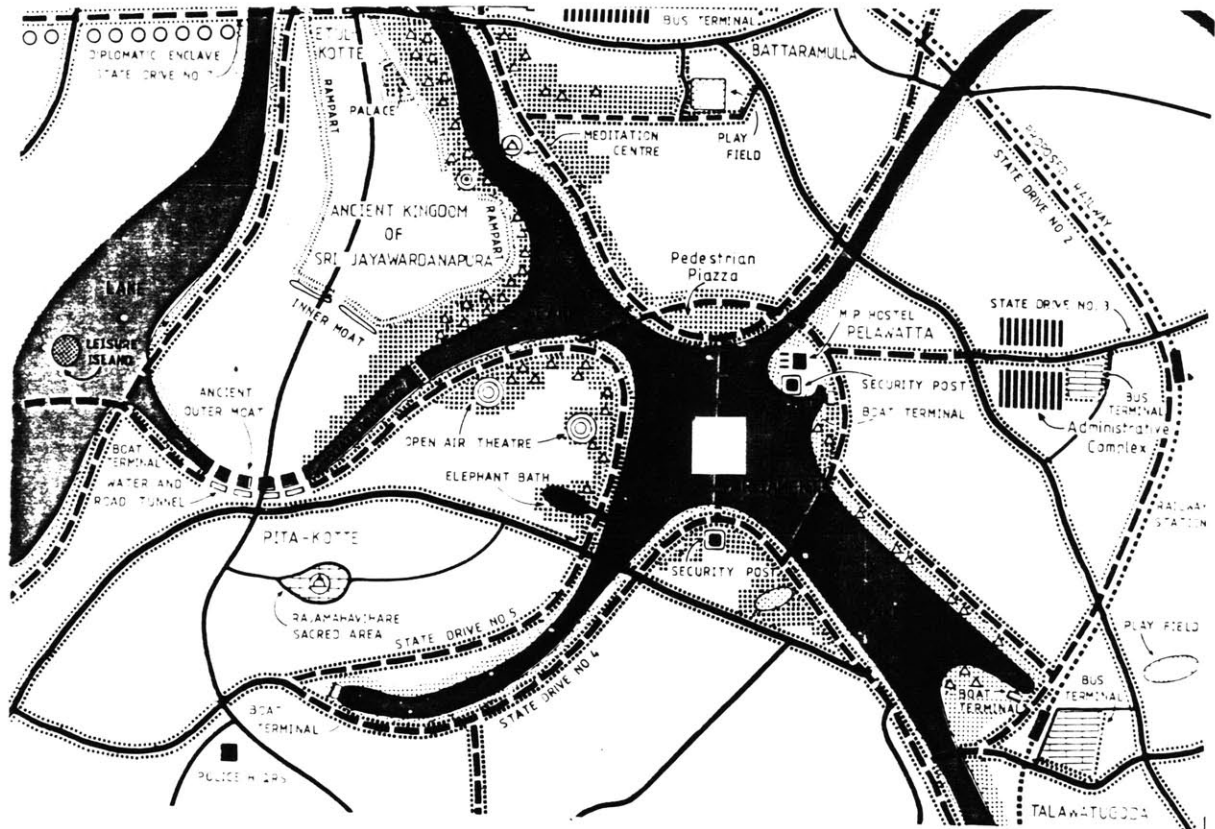
This "truly national environment" envisions the placement of most of its indigenous cultural features within the "inner moat" and ramparts of the Ancient Buddhist Kingdom [Fig. 99]. Interspersed with architectural remains that include a five-story "monastery where sixty Buddhist monks lived under the high priest" and a 3-story "temple for the Sacred Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha," it is a landscape that defies any acknowledgement of cultural pluralism. While the indigenous plantings may be "truly national," the only culture considered indigenous is Sinhalese. As the Master Plan reiterates, describing Kotte as Parakramabahu's "National Capital of Sri Lanka:"

This King brought the country under one rule during his time. Buddhism, Sinhala culture and the country developed rapidly and attained its zenith of glory during his period.²

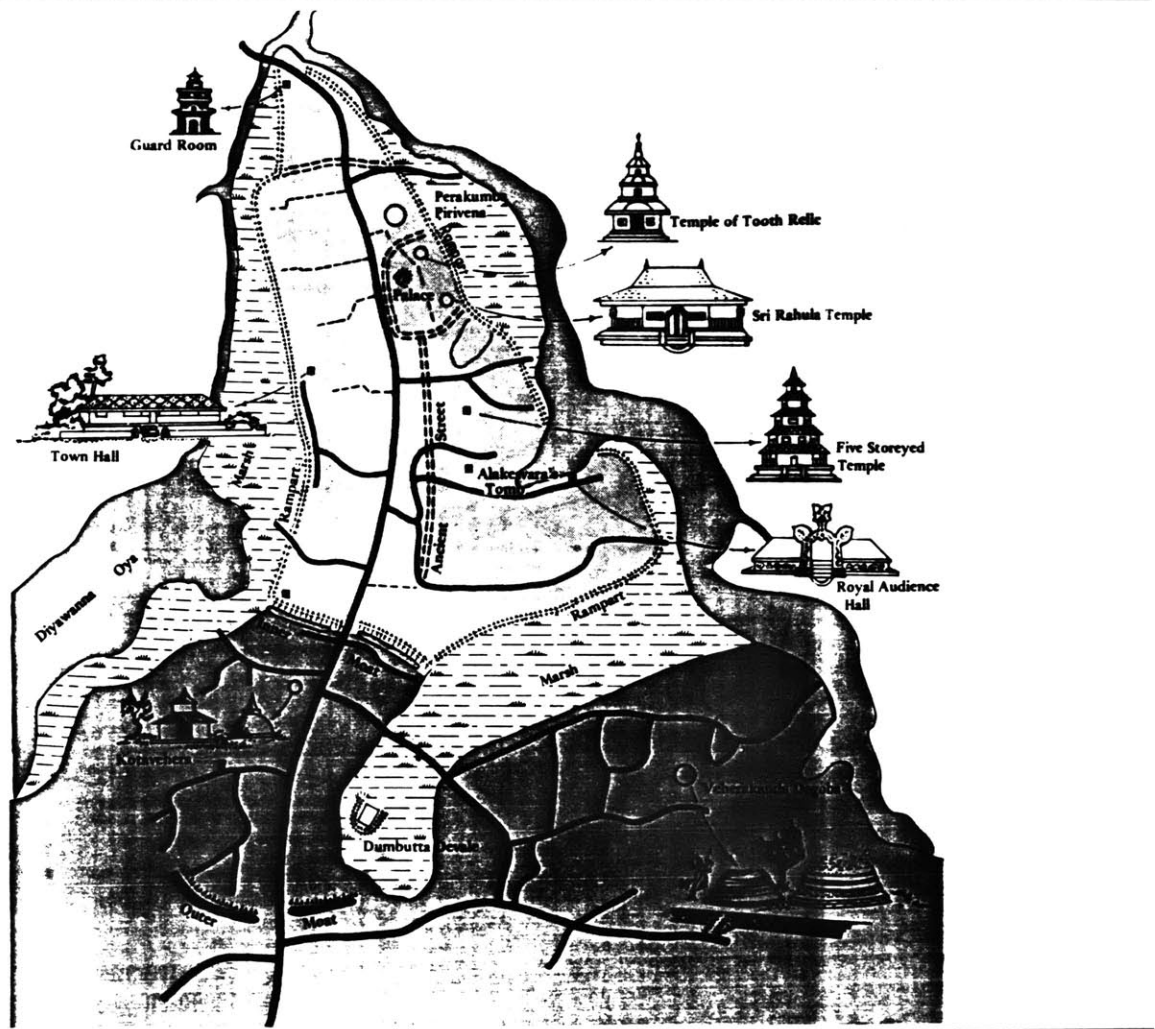
For those would reflect on this, the plan provides for a ring of Buddhist meditation centers (marked by stupas) that define the boundaries of the "Outer City." Another Meditation Center is more centrally located along "State

¹ Master Plan, p. 44.

² Ibid., p. 4.



98. Two Sinhalese Islands; One Past, One Present



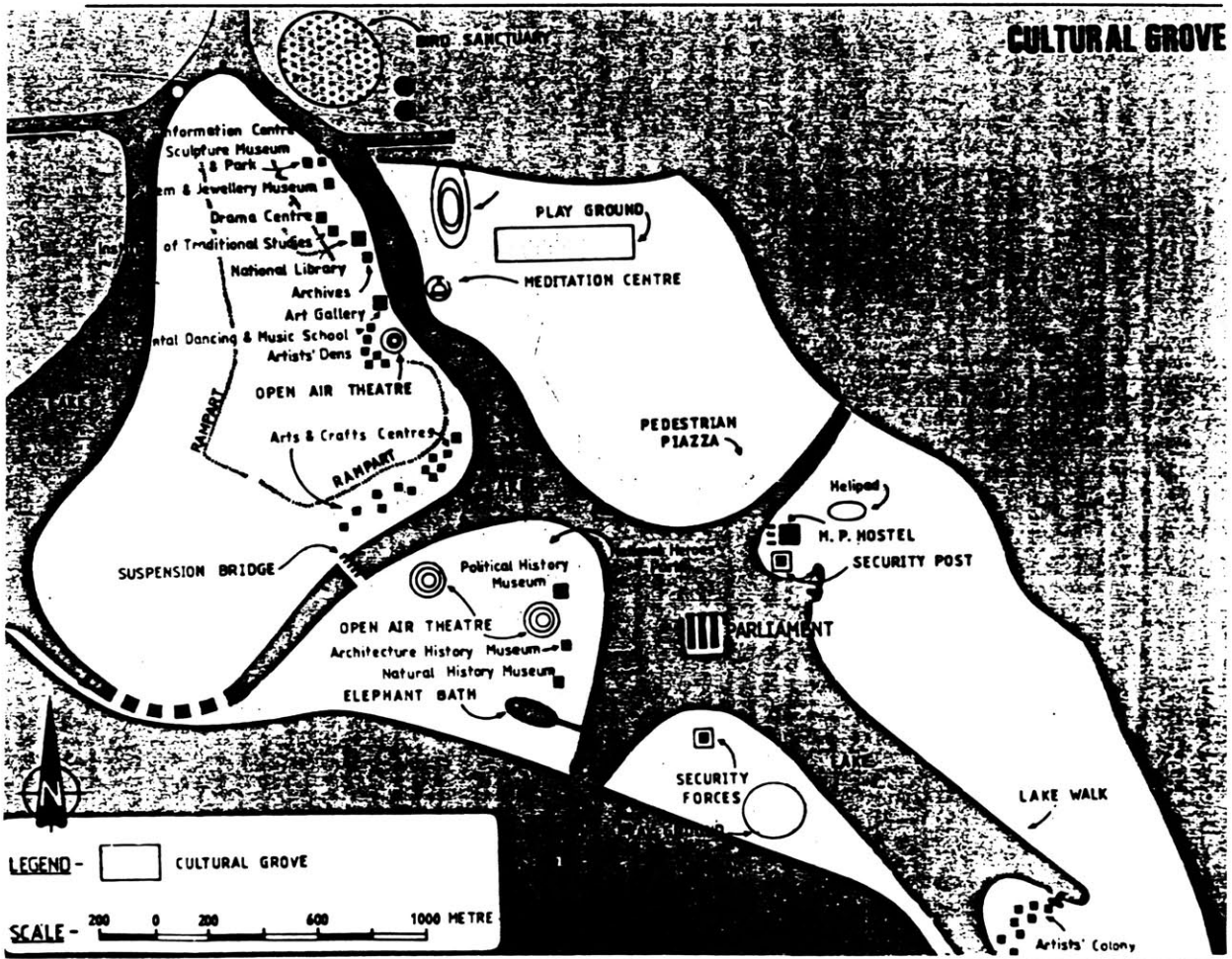
99. Architectural and Archaeological Remains of Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte

Drive No. 1" where it approaches the ceremonial causeway to the parliament and, within the bounds of the Indigenous Park itself, there is the "Rajamahavihare Sacred Area." Thus, though to his credit Geoffrey Bawa did not design the parliament to resemble a Buddhist stupa, the capitol environment as a whole is far from ethnically and religiously neutral. Even Bawa's Kandyan pitched roofs, though arguably a feature that grew out of joint Tamil and Sinhalese rule over Kandy, finds a more nearby source that is much more unambiguously Buddhist. At the center of the Kotte King's Palace is the Sri Rahula Temple, replete with a "Kandyan" double pitch.

Though it is less easy to assume a Sinhalese bias in the more secular attempts to exhibit "indigenous" culture, the Kotte Master Plan provides ample opportunity for this to occur. Between the ancient citadel (to be devoted primarily to the arts and to something known as the "Institute of Traditional Studies") and the Parliament island there is a peninsula called "Pita-Kotte" containing other components of the proposed "Cultural Grove" [Fig. 100]. Here there is to be, in appropriate proximity, both an "Architecture History Museum" and a "Political History Museum." Perhaps there is even some significance to the fact that the "National Heroes' Park" is located nearer to the latter, while the Architecture facility is sited adjacent to the "Natural History Museum" and the "Elephant Bath." In any case, according to the Master Plan, with its "lowrise traditional style elegant buildings merging with natural landscape," the Cultural Grove "will provide an opportunity for enjoying a rich variety of indigenous cultural activities at a leisurely walk."¹

¹ Ibid., p. 45.

While the development of the area around the Parliament island has not progressed far enough for any kind of firm judgment, it seems very likely that this leisurely walk will be of solace only to a Sinhalese. The government's choice of this site, so redolent with historical memories of Sinhalese hegemony, as the place for a "National" parliament, is an important reminder that architectural context has temporal as well as spatial dimensions. However inclusive the architectural references of Bawa's building, the "national identity" proclaimed by the Sri Lankan capitol complex-- like the one in Kuwait-- wishes to extend membership to only a carefully chosen group.



100. Sinhalese "Cultural Grove"

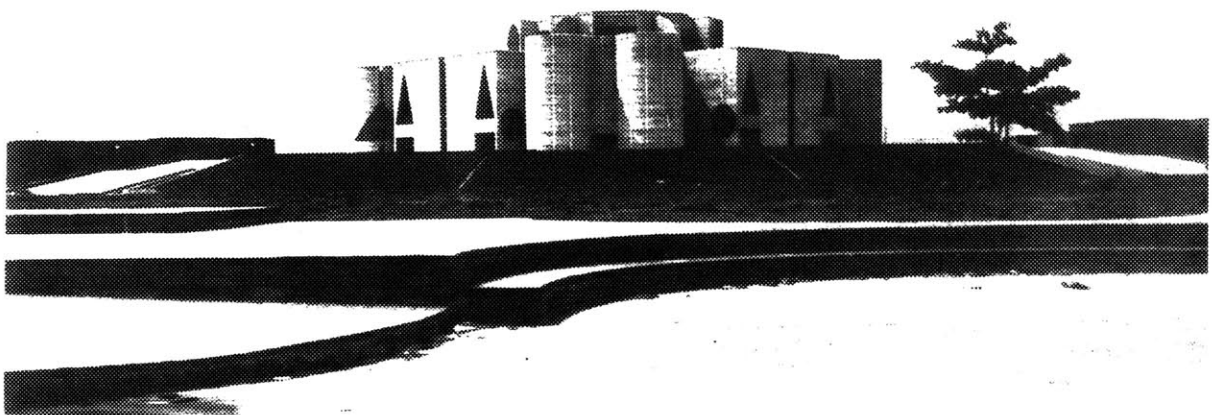
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ACROPOLIS OF BENGAL

The capitol complex on the outskirts of Dhaka is both an important facility for an emerging nation and a stage in the evolution of an architect's work; as such, it can be seen in relation to both a society and an individual's career. While this is not the place to review the whole of Louis Kahn's architectural oeuvre, it would certainly seem that the National Assembly building and its supporting structures are much more easily located in relation to Kahn's other works than they are in relation to the rest of Dhaka. That the building complex is in fact perceived as an alternative to Dhaka rather than a part of it may be judged from the persistence of references to it in Western architectural shorthand as "Dhaka" or "The Dhaka building," as if a city of three million had no other¹ [Fig. 101].

To assess a capitol complex, one must examine it both in terms of the intentions of its architect and in terms of the society it is expected to serve. By examining the discontinuities inherent in Kahn's premises and the contradictions present in the society itself, I hope to reach a more complex understanding of a building that combines the force of undeniable beauty with the trauma of radical social dislocation. To do so, I will need to examine the words and drawings of its enigmatic architect especially closely. Kahn, to a far greater extent than Hogan, Utzon or Bawa, is a figure of international renown, a source and a subject for an ever-growing amount of critical inquiry. To date, his capitol complex has probably received more critical

¹ My interest in this misuse of language was piqued in April 1987 when my letter to the editor of Architectural Review (expressing reservations about Kahn's National Assembly building) was printed under the title "Doubts About Dacca" [sic]. About Dhaka, I have no doubts.



101. "The Citadel of Assembly," Shere Banglanagar



102. Map of Bangladesh

attention than those of the rest of the post-Chandigarh/Brasilia generation combined. Yet, despite the voluminous commentary, this work has all too rarely been seen in the light of the political history of Bengal.

The 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent created not one but two Pakistans, two "wings" separated by a thousand miles of India. West Pakistan, where the new state's government, military and economic strength was concentrated, contained an extraordinarily large mixture of cultural groups, unified by an adherence to the beliefs of Islam. East Bengal (later re-named East Pakistan) also had an overwhelming Muslim majority, but the Bengalis, sharing a common language written in a different script from the "official" Urdu of the West Pakistanis, were both culturally more homogeneous and, significantly, somewhat more numerous. Ultimately, the detached and culturally distinct "wings" of Pakistan would fly in the face of any attempt to keep East and West as one nationstate. In 1971, after a civil war in which 300,000 were killed, East Pakistan became Bangladesh¹ [Fig. 102].

Though the national government of Bangladesh makes use of buildings designed by Louis Kahn, these buildings were not designed for the capital of Bangladesh; Kahn designed them for the capital of East Pakistan. This is far more than a semantic distinction or an historical curiosity, given that a civil war was fought against the original client. There are, of course, many instances where a new government, following a revolution, appropriates the edifices of the *ancien regime*. Architecture and its symbolism are never so closely wed as to prohibit divorce and eventual remarriage. The situation in Bangladesh was made considerably easier by the fact that the National

¹ Charles Peter O'Donnell, Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), p. 94.

Assembly building, while groomed for Pakistan, was not completed until after the war. Thus, its union with Islamabad remained unconsummated.

Nevertheless, certain questions remain: What happens when a building designed to refer to the unity of East and West Pakistan is instead asked to be a symbol of Bangladesh? When a building is sponsored by a government against whom a civil war was fought, is there a stigma attached to it and, if so, how long does the stigma remain? To posit a partial answer, it would seem likely that the abstraction of Kahn's architectural language reduces the time needed before the building begins to function as a positive symbol in a new political context. The lack of specific visual references to the sponsoring Ayub Khan regime or to West Pakistan's former domination makes the transition easier. Following the independence of Bangladesh, the name of the complex was changed from "Ayub Nagar" to "Shere Banglanagar" (City of the Bengal Tiger), a reference to the nom de guerre of Bengali nationalist leader Fazlul Huq.¹ This change, along with many more gradual and subtle shifts of association facilitated by the passage of time serve to confirm and intensify the Bengali symbolism of this place. In the end, it may be that the difficulties associated with the building may be tied more closely to Louis Kahn than to Ayub Khan.

In designing the parliamentary complex for East Pakistan, Kahn viewed his task as finding a spatial representation for a philosophical ideal and, as was his practice, these philosophical premises were of his own design as well. Insisting that the client's program is "only an approximation of a need,"² Kahn sought to demonstrate that "They need things they never knew

¹ James Dunnett, "City of the Tiger: Work of Louis Kahn at Dacca, Bangladesh," Architect's Journal, v. 171, no. 7 (February 1980), p. 231.

² Richard Saul Wurman, What Will Be Has Always Been: The Words of Louis I. Kahn (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 120.

they needed."¹ That such "needs" may be expensive he did not deny. Referring to his Dhaka edifices, he modestly noted that "They cost more because I reveal the truth in those buildings."²

While it may be that most architects believe that they understand the client's needs better than the client does, this seems especially true for Kahn. Each commission, for him, was viewed as an opportunity to further his own research into the nature of institutions. In the case of the capitol for Dhaka, Kahn had the opportunity to design the institution (the legislative chamber) which, he believed, was in turn empowered to create other institutions. Kahn's compositional process was highly personalized, and began with a notion of an appropriate "Form", what the building "wants to be." "Design" itself commenced only after Kahn felt he had sensed the essence of a building's Form. He viewed the building as having a will of its own, which pressed it into being in a particular way. It is this "Form" rather than the program itself which became the point of departure.

However much Kahn might wish to claim a certain inevitability about his choice of "Form," such a design methodology leaves a great deal of latitude for idiosyncrasy and intuition. When faced (as in Dhaka) with a situation where the client seems willing, even eager, to acquiesce in deviations from the stated program, Kahn was best able to operate:

What I'm trying to do is establish a belief out of a philosophy I can turn over to Pakistan, so that whatever they do is always answerable to it. I feel as though this plan which was made weeks after I saw the program has strength. Does it have all the ingredients? If only one is lacking it will disintegrate.³

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³ Cited in Alexandra Tyng, Beginnings: Louis I. Kahn's Philosophy of Architecture (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), p. 119.

The "philosophy" that he sought to bestow was, at base, centered on the idea of architecture's transcendence over politics, but this was not consistently acknowledged.

I kept thinking how these buildings could be grouped and take their place on the land. On the night of the third day, I fell out of bed with the prevailing idea of the plan, the realization that assembly is of a transcendent nature.¹

Kahn wanted many things-- he wanted the "nature" of assembly to be transcendent and he wanted to create an architecture which confirms and enhances this. He assumed a social ideal, one that is extremely tenuous in any fledgling state, and claimed to design in accordance with it. Kahn, whose clarity with words rarely approached his facility with forms, obscured his own intentions by confusing three different kinds of possible transcendences: the transcendence of architectural form over temporal and social circumstances, the transcendent nature of "Assembly" as an abstract-- almost primeval-- ideal, and the transcendent power of the National Assembly as an institution. This confusion among architectural methodology, metaphysical ideals and social realities appeared frequently when Kahn attempted to speak or write about his work. By passing beyond the level of metaphor to the level of reification, Kahn's poetics obscure the difference between what he wants his buildings to be and what the building, itself, "wants to be". However appealing, this can also be a verbal trickery used to cloak very personal design decisions in the mantle of universal law. As a design conceit it may be a perfectly acceptable manner of working, but it is surely a method with profound social consequences, particularly when Kahn was designing for a society and a culture very different from his own.

¹ Wurman, p. 50.

For Kahn, this "transcendence" was not merely to be embodied by the creation of an overpowering presence in space but also by the creation of a building capable of overcoming time, an edifice rooted in the past and hardened against the future. In Kahn's words,

What I try to insert is that quality which touches the desires of people beyond needs and that which would motivate similar desires on the part of those who may use the building after the client who orders it.... It must have qualities beyond the dictates of the moment.¹

In his Assembly building, Kahn said that he wanted to design walls "that look as though they were there a thousand years," and that "have a virility that is like the memory of a giant."² In a 1944 essay which seems to anticipate his concerns for the Dhaka capitol, Kahn defined monumentality as:

a spiritual quality inherent in a structure which conveys the feeling of its eternity, that it cannot be added to or changed. We feel that quality in the Parthenon, the recognized symbol of Greek civilization.... We dare not discard the lessons these buildings teach for they have the common characteristic of greatness upon which the buildings of our future must, in one sense or another, rely.³

As such, his preoccupations can hardly be construed in terms as narrow as a search for "national" identity or a union of East and West Pakistan; Kahn sought a "recognized symbol" that would bestow membership in a timeless and universal civilization. According to his daughter, Kahn's "triumph" with the Dhaka commission was his success in communicating his "belief that the language of form transcended cultural differences."⁴ Not all "cultural differences" can be so easily or thoroughly "transcended," however:

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³ Cited in Tyng, p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

architecture is produced not only by brilliant formgivers but also by the culture that gives it meaning and by the heterogeneous society in which it must stand.

While Kahn's complex is a product of a very personal design methodology, it is also explicitly intended to generate international recognition. As much as the capitol complex is and was put forward in the name of "national" identity (whether Pakistani or Bangladeshi), it is also a cry for international identity. As Mehmet Doruk Pamir points out,

[O]ne can regard Sher-E-Banglanagar as an investment in establishing an international medium of communication. I regard 'development' as a metonym for global interaction because it demands increasing contact with other parts of the world at different modes and levels. Until very recently about all the rest of the world knew about Bangladesh was that it was a country of human misery and social instability: floods, famines, and occasional coups. Then all of a sudden this building put Bangladesh on the roster of nations boasting the most sophisticated examples of contemporary architecture.¹

As with Le Corbusier and the design of Chandigarh, the arrival of modern architecture as practiced by an internationally acknowledged Western master was championed as a positive sign of development. Kahn's commission was for more than a group of important buildings; it was a mandate to develop the indigenous construction industry and infrastructure necessary to support this project and future ventures.

Yet the importation of Kahn brought more than Western modern architecture: the capitol complex is Kahn's attempt to restore meaning to monumentality in architecture. Asked to design a capitol complex to link East and West Pakistan, Kahn searched for forms to link "East" and "West"

¹ Mehmet Doruk Pamir, "Sher-E-Banglanagar, Dhaka: The Impact on Local Design," in Continuity and Change: Design Strategies for Large-Scale Urban Development (Design in Islamic Cultures 4) (Cambridge, Mass: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1984), p. 76.

more generally. William Curtis, in "Authenticity, Abstraction and the Ancient Sense: Le Corbusier's and Louis Kahn's Ideas of Parliament" succeeds in setting out an admirably thorough overview of the architectural sources that Kahn has digested and assimilated into his own designs. From his own Western tradition and Beaux Arts educational training, Kahn nurtured an admiration for centralized buildings and clear hierarchy, as exemplified in the villas of Palladio or Jefferson's University of Virginia campus. So too, he combined a predilection for simple and restrained exterior geometries not unlike those found in the work of Ledoux or Boullée with an almost Piranesian delight in interior geometrical complexity. As a planner in the Beaux Arts tradition, he clearly distinguished between what he calls "servant" and "served" spaces, made ample use of ceremonial axes and exhibited an almost Baroque emphasis on the diagonal.

If Western classical inspirations were at the heart of Kahn's architectural ideas, this did not preclude significant learning from his visits to the Indian subcontinent. It would seem that Kahn made thorough studies of Mogul garden designs and tombs. As Curtis puts it:

Kahn's grasp of buildings he admired went far deeper than particular elements or surface effects. The Mogul tradition held out numerous brilliant examples in the handling of primary and secondary axes, level changes, diagonal perceptions of structure, and the linking of one formal theme to another....In any of the monumental complexes of India, Kahn could have sensed an animating character, a material expression of the world of the spirit, in accord with his own search for fundamentals. Whether the particular inspirations for his centralized form belonged more to Eastern or Western traditions is not clear. The fact is that he found common denominators between the two.¹

Above all, perhaps, Kahn's love was for Western classical antiquity, a love that was as much for the ruins left behind as for the buildings as built. Kahn

¹ William J.R. Curtis, "Authenticity, Abstraction and the Ancient Sense: Le Corbusier's and Kahn's Ideas of Parliament," *Perspecta*, v. 20 (1983), pp. 191-93.

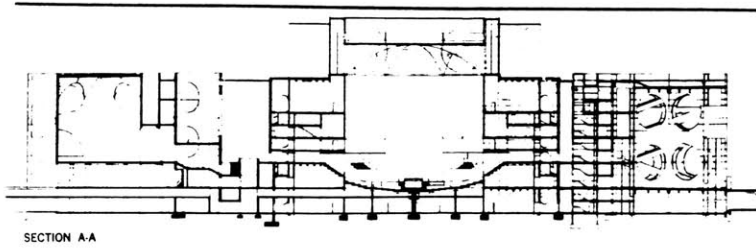
described his inspiration for the Dhaka capitol complex as "the Baths of Caracalla, but much extended."¹ And surely to top-lighting of the Assembly chamber and the mosque are intended to evoke the spatial experience of the Roman Pantheon. Again and again in his writings and his sketches, Kahn made reference to the expressive possibilities of light, as exemplified in classical ruins. It is in the mastery of such patterns of light and shade that Kahn located his concept of the eternal; it is this, for Kahn, that makes the Parthenon "the recognized symbol of Greek civilization." In other projects, Kahn stated explicitly that he was concerned with creating "ruins wrapped around buildings" [Figs. 103-104].

Though he was less direct in making such references to the Dhaka capitol, the idea of a light-controlling wrap of ruins seems undeniably present. One story told to Kahn, perhaps apocryphal, has it that the National Assembly building escaped damage during the war of because of its already-ruined appearance: "The pilots making the runs over Dacca saw this building and they thought that it already been bombed, because there were so many holes in it, so they wouldn't waste another bomb on it!"² At the base of his urge to design thousand-year-old walls that evoke "the memory of a giant" was a near-obsession with the interconnectedness of architectural beginnings and architectural ruin. For Kahn, a ruin conveys neither decay nor decline but "reveals again the spirit out of which it once stood as a proud structure. Now it is free of its bonds."³ At another point, he rhapsodized further: "The quiet

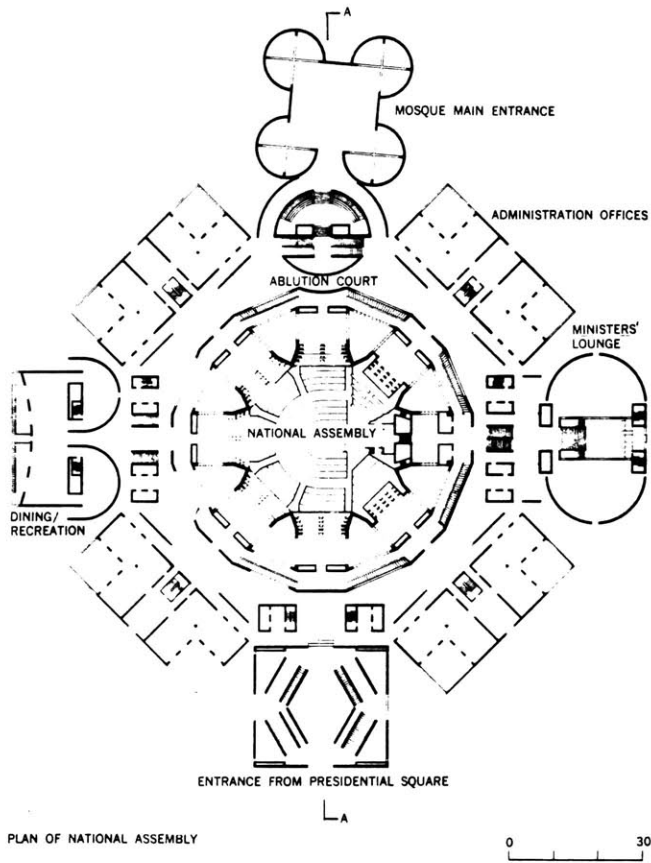
¹ Wurman, p. 106.

² "Kahn for Dacca" (interview with Henry Wilcots by R. S. Wurman) *Domus*, no. 548, (July 1975), p. i (English translation).

³ Letter to Harriet Pattison of 15 September 1964, cited in Tyng, p. 166.



SECTION A-A



PLAN OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

0 30'

103. Section Through National Assembly Building, Dhaka

104. Plan of National Assembly Building, Dhaka

ruin now freed from use welcomes wild growth to play joyously around it and is like a father who delights in the little one tugging at his clothes."¹

One cannot know how much emphasis to place upon the content of Kahn's often mystical utterances, though surely his words must be taken seriously. Henry Wilcots, Kahn's assistant (and successor) on the Dhaka project describes Kahn's visit to the site in January 1974: "The top walls had started to go up so you could see the air circulating shafts coming down and the light wells and to him[self] he said: 'I think it's finished'."² In short, Kahn was equally, if not disproportionately, concerned that the Assembly chamber be occupied by light as by legislators. While Kahn was not the first architect to delight in envisioning his buildings as ruins (John Soane actually designed such engravings and showed them to the client), the thought that Kahn-the-father may prefer his buildings "freed from use" is surely a disturbing extension of poetic license.

Whether or not the Assembly building was designed to be a ruin (a fate which nearly befell it during the twenty years it has taken to complete), it was surely designed in accordance with Kahn's own rather limited preoccupations with certain "forms" and materials. Kahn's vocabulary of "forms" seems very limited; what the building "wants to be" always seems somehow to fit with recognizable elements of Kahn's other work. While this consistency is in most ways a strength, it is also a reminder of the wilfulness that undergirds Kahn's choice of a generating idea.

It is not surprising to find that the generating form behind the National Assembly building is similar to many of Kahn's designs for religious institutions. Clearly, Kahn sought to convey a religious feeling in this

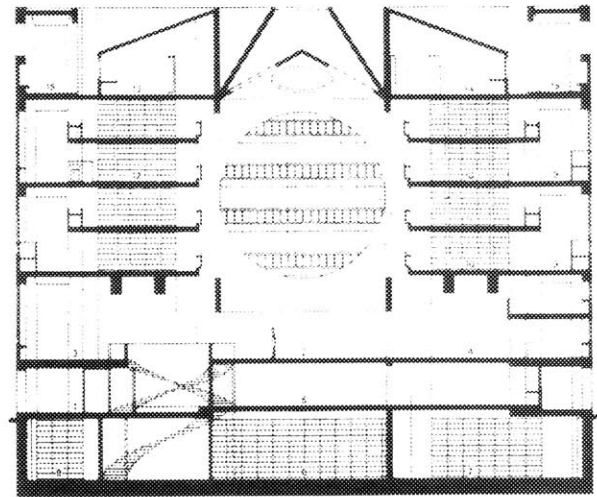
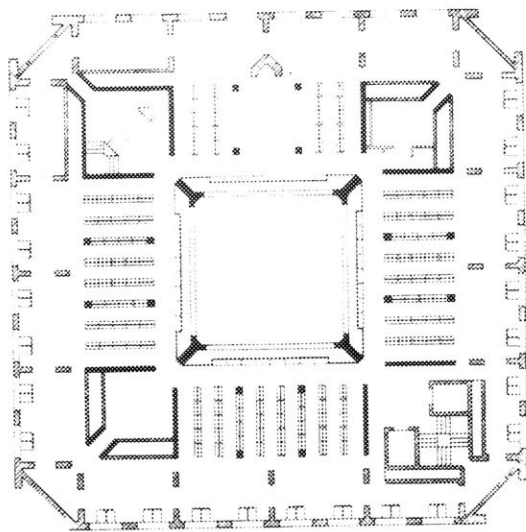
¹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 166.

² "Kahn for Dacca," p. i.

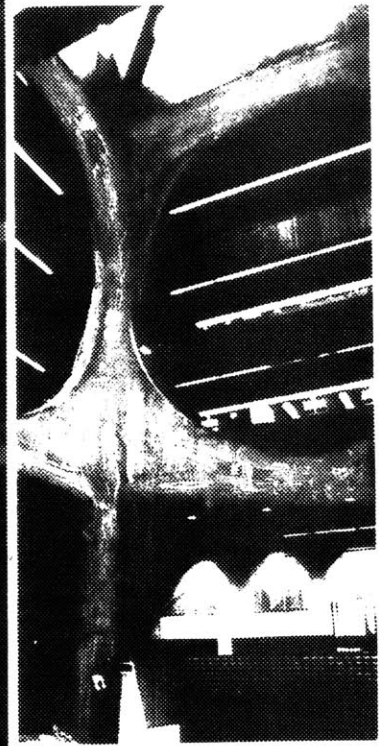
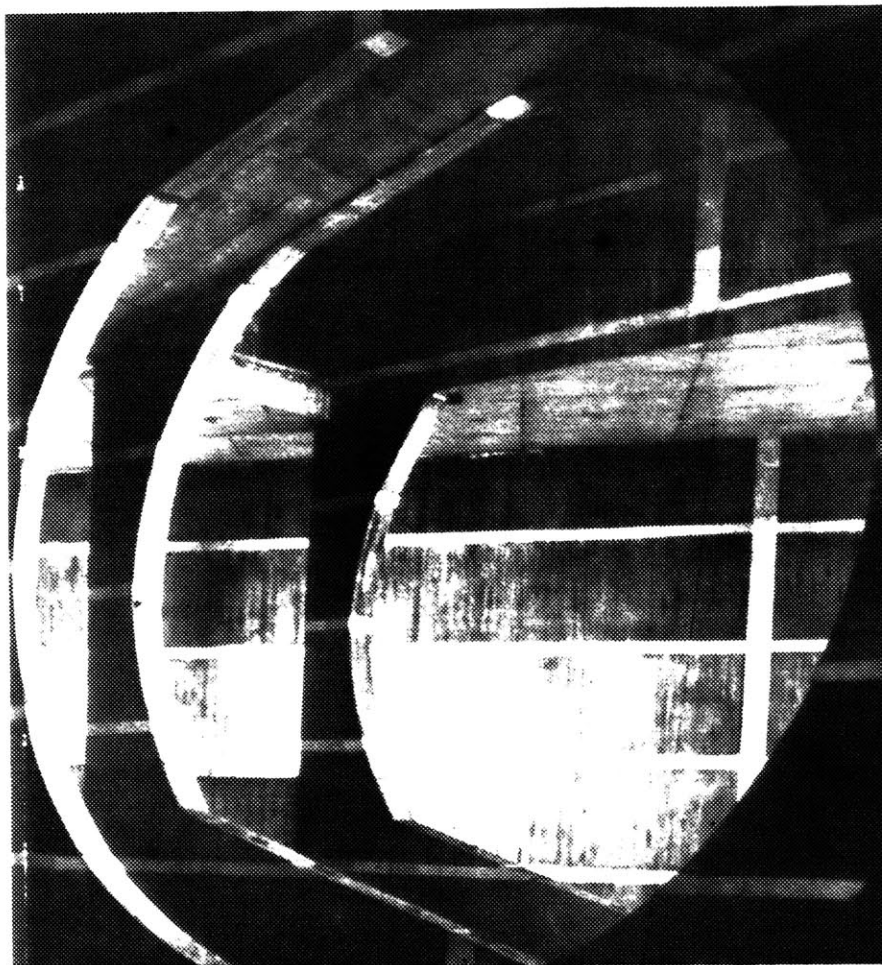
building as well. Even the language he chose to describe his design process ("On the night of the third day...") has a Biblical resonance to it. Yet, similarity to the National Assembly design extends not only to Kahn's Rochester Unitarian Church but even to his most secular works, such as Erdman Hall, a dormitory for Bryn Mawr College.

Even more striking is the similarity between the Dhaka Assembly building and the Exeter Library [Figs. 105-107]. Both appear fortresslike and are internally focused on a full-height central space and organized, in plan, as a kind of "double doughnut," where the perimeter doughnut is visually and structurally independent from the inner one. At Exeter, however, the center of the building is a great void and Kahn stresses the importance of the perimeter, the need to "bring a book to the light." In Kahn's Dhaka building, perhaps partially conditioned by the need to shield the chamber from the harsh sun and by the need to shield the legislators from harsh opposition, the center of the building is supposed to be the focal point of activity. While this is of course a major difference between the two buildings, I am struck by the ease with which the Bangladeshi legislators could be made to occupy the voided center of the Exeter Library. For an architect so concerned with discovering the essence of each individual institution, the resultant designs of these two places seem curiously similar. For Kahn, there seem to be too many "transcendent" human activities and too few forms with which to attempt to express them.

If Kahn's "forms" for expressing the nature of institutions were too caught up in his private vocabulary, a silent sign language of preferred constructs, so too his choice of materials was circumscribed by personal preference, regardless of ease or availability. As Kahn admitted,



105. Plan of Exeter Library, Exeter, New Hampshire 106. Section Through Exeter Library



107. Kahn Asks: "Who Owns the Circle?"
Answer: Both Dhaka Parliamentarians and Exeter Librarians

I got into doing brick because I could not use any other material. So I had to use it. It was self-protection to use brick in Dacca. I knew concrete would be a complete failure. But still my love for concrete couldn't be denied, so I tried to make these people a purse, let's say, out of a sow's ear.¹

In the end, Kahn noted, the decision to use concrete for the Assembly building rested on his greater familiarity with the use of concrete for large spans and the fact that brick "didn't satisfy something in me."² Still, if Kahn's love for concrete "couldn't be denied," the problems thus engendered are no less deniable.

Kahn's goal for the Dhaka capitol complex was a profound synthesis, what he termed an "architecture of connection."³ Discussing the arrangement of buildings for the capitol, he contended that,

The architect should work to bring out a relationship, the architecture of connection, of the realm of spaces, where a rapport of buildings and spaces can be felt.⁴

Yet this is only one kind of connection-- connection at the level of form, connection between solid and void. One would expect that an architect who professed to be so concerned about the meaning of institutions would consider more than formal relationships. Spatial distance and juxtapositions have social implications and, perhaps even more important, existing social relationships may imply the need for certain design constraints. In his overarching desire to design his own idealizations of the Pakistani institutions, these reciprocal social/spatial implications were all too rarely acknowledged.

¹ Wurman, p. 51.

² Ibid., p. 51.

³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

Though Kahn professed no interest in politics, he nonetheless made designs with strong political assumptions and implications.¹ While he claimed to be designing an "architecture of connection" he actually contributed to a radical spatial/social disjuncture. All architectural commissions are fraught with political problems; in this case, the epic struggle to get the capitol complex built closely parallels the political fortunes of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Kahn was commissioned to design an explicitly and avowedly political group of structures, and his design must be judged in relation to the political conditions that prompted the commission. That these political conditions have changed significantly since the commission was given makes the building especially difficult to place in its proper context. Kahn cannot, of course, be blamed for having failed to anticipate that his buildings would eventually be used by the government of an independent Bangladesh. It is, however, important to examine how the various changes associated with a change in government have necessitated alterations in Kahn's design, alterations which profoundly affect the symbolic readings of the complex as a whole.

The 1962 Constitution of Pakistan mandated the creation of a "second capital" at Dhaka; Kahn's commission was an outcome of this need, and should be seen in relation to the broader purposes of the Constitution as well. A "second capital" implies the existence of a first one-- Islamabad. Islamabad, already designated as the future home of the Central Government, was to be an entirely new city, located conveniently close to Rawalpindi, where much of the West Pakistan armed forces were based.

¹ According to Bengali architect Mazhrul Islam, "Kahn had no time or interest for politics. I tapped him on this once, and found him totally uninterested" (cited in Apunam Banerji, "Conversation with Architect Mazhrul Islam in Dhaka, Bangladesh: January 1986," pp. 2-3).

Though the 1962 Constitution signalled a return to civilian rule after several years of military control, the role of the military was still vital and the political and economic hegemony of West Pakistan over East was still secure. Nonetheless, there were growing signs of Bengali unrest,¹ and the creation of the "Second Capital" in the East must be seen as a gesture of appeasement.

If it was appeasement that laid the political groundwork for Kahn's commission, it was appeasement of a very unconvincing sort. First of all, this "second capital" was not to be a new "capital" at all; whereas Islamabad was to be an entirely new creation, the "second capital" was to be no more than a new capitol district, a few hundred acres on the fringe of an existing provincial capital. While it may well be that Kahn's magisterial designs managed to mitigate this seeming discrepancy, it seems clear that the gesture of a "second" capital did little to alter the balance of power between the two Pakistans. To understand why, it must be noted that this second capital was to be the "legislative capital" of the country, the seat of the National Assembly. The "principal seat of Central Government" (Ayub Khan's presidential throne) was to be in Islamabad, designated in the Constitution as "The Capital of the Republic."² Though President Ayub, in his "Speech Announcing the Constitution of 1962," proclaimed that "The National Assembly is the source of law,"³ the political system ushered in by the new Constitution was, in essence, an attack on the power of the Assembly and a legal justification for the consolidation of political power by the President.

¹ August Komendant, Kahn's engineer during the early stages of the Dhaka commission, notes that in March 1963 during Kahn's first visit to Pakistan President Ayub "told us that there was unrest in East Pakistan and he wanted to start with construction of the citadel before the elections in the fall" [August E. Komendant, *18 Years With Architect Louis I. Kahn* (Englewood, NJ: Aloray, 1975)p. 82].

² Choudhury, G. W., ed. Documents and Speeches on the Constitution of Pakistan (Dacca: Green Book House, 1967), p. 727.

³ Ibid., p. 791.

On 24 June, nine Bengali leaders jointly issued a statement condemning the intent of the new Constitution:

The present document is framed on a distrust of popular will, whatever be the justification put forward for that. A body of 80,000 electors have been provided for as the base of the system in a population of more than 80 million.

The Assemblies created on the vote of these electors have practically been given no power to decide anything. Nothing can be done by these bodies unless the President agrees. Whereas the President after the initial start, can rule without agreement of the Assembly both in the legislative and in the executive fields.¹

In addition to complaints about the inefficacy of the National Assembly's powers, Bengali politicians (paradoxically perhaps) also complained that they were under-represented in it, since the 150 seats were allocated to the two provinces on the basis of parity rather than population and, in 1961, East Pakistanis outnumbered West Pakistanis 50.8 million to 42.9 million.² Not surprisingly, according to a 1964 report in The Economist, 60 of the 75 East Pakistan members of the National Assembly were opposed to the 1962 Constitution.³ Under-represented in the only institution which, though majority rule, could theoretically have helped to effect a legal redress against West Pakistani power, the location of the National Assembly within their own province mattered relatively little.

While claiming to be replacing a parliamentary system with one based on the American presidential model, Ayub in fact selected out those elements of each system which best served the consolidation of executive power.⁴ Significantly, even the Constitution's preamble is indicative of this bias: it is

¹ Cited in Ibid., p. 980.

² Khalid B. Sayeed, The Political System of Pakistan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 191.

³ Cited in Ibid., p. 194.

⁴ Mushtaq Ahmad, Government and Politics in Pakistan (Karachi: Space Publishers, 3rd ed. 1970), pp. 208-13.

"I, Field Marshall Mohammad Ayub Khan," and not "We the People of Pakistan" who "do hereby declare and promulgate the Constitution"-- popular sanction mattered little.¹ In his autobiography, Friends Not Masters (1967), Ayub cites his views from 1954 as evidence of his long-held conviction about the need for a strong executive:

The President should be made the final custodian of power on the country's behalf and should be able to put things right both in the provinces and the centre should they go wrong.²

As one recent commentator put it, reflecting a broad consensus of opinion, the 1962 Constitution "reduced parliamentary bodies to debating forums."³ In lieu of power being vested in the National Assembly, "The Presidency was constructed on the theory that in the legislative as well as the executive sphere, the President was able to maintain his supremacy."⁴ If, as one commentator put it, "Ayub's main aim was to provide a constitutional facade for a dictatorial design,"⁵ can Louis Kahn be accused of providing its architectural equivalent? Tempting as it may be to castigate Kahn for complicity in this charade of representative democracy, Kahn's design methodology provides him with a built-in way out. While another architect in his place might have seen through the weakness of the institution and refused to give it monumental treatment, resigning the commission if necessary, Kahn (to the extent that he thought about such political considerations at all⁶) could maintain that his job was not to create a home

¹ Ibid., p. 222.

² Mohammad Ayub Khan, Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 190.

³ O'Donnell, p. 61.

⁴ Ahmad, p. 213.

⁵ Ibid., p. 208.

⁶ A file in the Kahn Archives at the University of Pennsylvania contains several Pakistani political documents from 1960-62 that were presumably sent to Kahn to provide him with some background on such things as "Three Years of Progress Under

for the institution that is, but to build the shrine for the institution that could be. As he has remarked, "Reality is the dream. Reality is the fairy tale...The unattainable, the yet not made, yet not said, is what motivates man."¹ Nonetheless, it is certainly at least ironic that Kahn used one architectural device after another to monumentalize the importance of the National Assembly at precisely the point in its history when its authority was being most directly undermined.

In a design which went through many different stages having significantly different configurations, one element remained constant: the visual dominance of the National Assembly building. In the words of Kahn's associate David Wisdom,

The building is centered on the site on a north-south axis and is made the focal point of interest and attention not only by its size but also by the placement of the smaller hostel buildings on diagonals to east and west, facing a man-made lake that separates them from the capitol.²

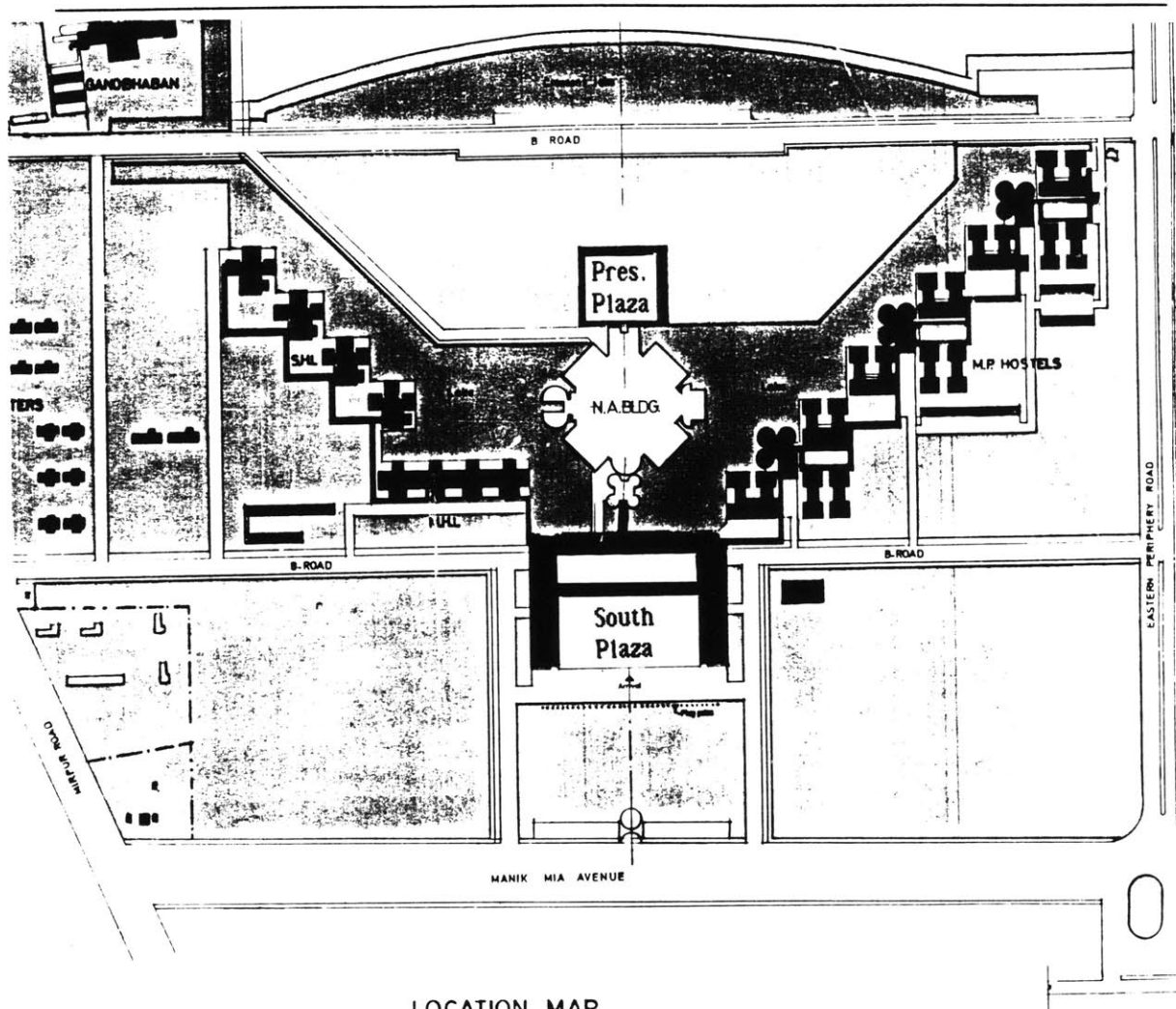
Moreover, its position atop a plinth, the large scale of its wall openings and the grey of its concrete in a capitol complex that is otherwise built of brick also serve to increase its dominant appearance [Fig. 108].

First designed in atmosphere of political unrest and skepticism about the new Constitution, it is only this central core of the project that has endured not just Kahn's death in 1974 but also twenty-five years of famine, flood, and military coups. It has survived all this plus a civil war where it was occupied at various points by three different armies who used it as a

the Revolutionary Government of Pakistan" and Ayub Khan's "Analysis of Pakistan's Ideology, Problems and Their Solution". There are no notes or markings on any of these documents, all of which are in pristine condition; perhaps Kahn never even saw them.

¹ Wurman, p. 251.

² David Wisdom, "Kahn's Building at Dacca," *Rassegna*, v. 7, no. 21/1, (March 1985), p. 48.



LOCATION MAP
OF
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING

SCALE 1" = 100' 300'

108. Site Plan Highlights National Assembly Building

warehouse, munitions depot and headquarters¹ to become a finished building more or less in accord with Kahn's original intentions.

And yet, precisely because the complex as a whole did not come into being as Kahn had wished, its central structure carries altered meanings. Mention has already been made of the symbolic shift from a building associated with West Pakistani domination and a distrusted Constitution to a building associated with the independence of Bangladesh. Such a change was not lost on Kahn:

I toured the land and saw what happened during time of war. They are very different people. They hold the state first, religion second. What held East and West together was supposedly the religious agreement, but when the East was freed from the West, they considered the country first.²

While this is perhaps the most important shift, the political restructuring had other repercussions for Kahn's grand design. First, with the independence of Bangladesh the whole purpose of "the Second Capital" was eliminated; Dhaka had already been the provincial capital and already had an assembly hall sufficient to serve for the national capital, once a separate provincial assembly was no longer needed:

[T]he new nation's National Assembly could easily fit into the old provincial assembly building. For the structures already completed, other uses had to be found. Available funds were diverted to more pressing needs, and no significant construction was attempted for some time. The symbol of unity became an embarrassment to the new nation, the unfinished project constantly reminding them both of their incapacity to finish it and of its redundancy.³

Though resources remained extremely scarce, commitment to the project was revived after 1975, interestingly enough, by a series of military regimes

¹ "Kahn For Dacca," p. i.

² Wurman, p. 234.

³ Aminul Haq Khan, "Sher-E-Banglanagar, Dhaka: Design and Implementation," in Continuity and Change..., p. 72.

who viewed the task of its completion as indicative of the new country's accomplishments. Yet the war and the extended period of construction delay had considerable financial implications and, hence, design implications:

Costs had skyrocketed. Materials were not available. Since almost 80 percent of the materials required to finish the buildings had once come from West Pakistan, it now had to be bought in foreign exchange. Corners were cut: aluminum window frames-- which Kahn had always resisted-- were used; the upper parts of the building constructed later were visibly less refined. In the assembly chamber terrazzo was substituted for marble. Other major problems were delays and the accompanying cost overruns. The roof design of the assembly chamber had to be changed, since the foundation was not strong enough to support the load of heavy concrete that the earlier proposal involved.¹

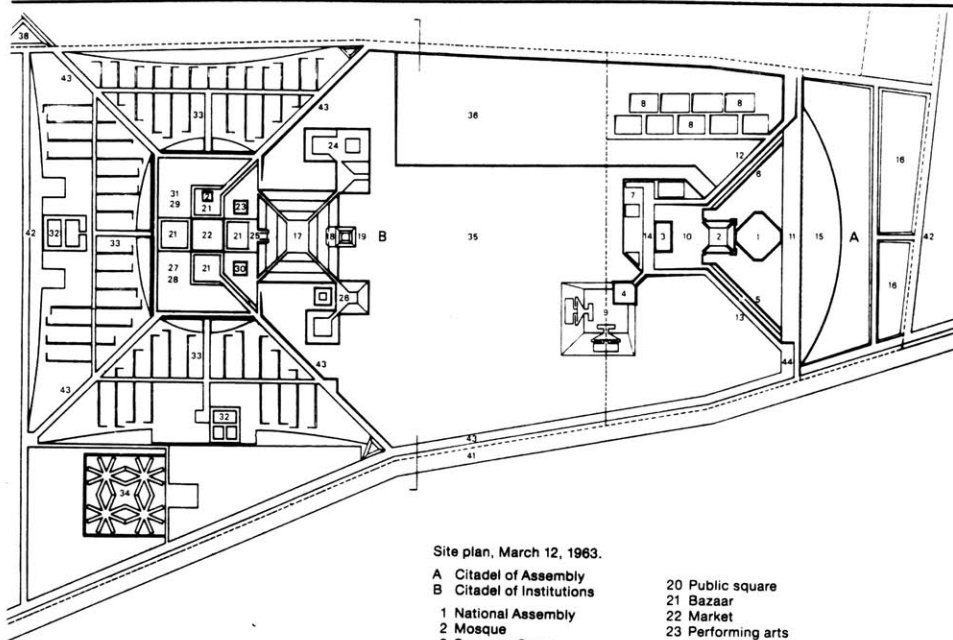
The most far-reaching design change necessitated by the emergence of Bangladesh concerned the provision of facilities to house the executive branch of government. When it was designed as "the second capital" the great majority of the executive functions were to be based in Islamabad. With Dhaka as the capital for an undivided government, there was an large and continually growing need for new construction of office space for the various executive departments. There was, however, little or no role for the concept or the institutions of bureaucracy in Kahn's original designs.

Kahn's ideogram for the transcendent polity was based on the relationship of two "citadels"-- "The Citadel of Assembly" and "The Citadel of the Institutions of Man;" this is a relationship that is problematic not only for what it symbolizes but also for what it leaves out [Fig. 109]. According to Kahn:

The assembly establishes or modifies the institutions of man. So I could see the thing right from the start as the citadel of assembly and the citadel of the institutions of man, which were opposite, and I symbolized the ~~the~~ institutions of man.²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

² Wurman, p. 105.



Site plan, March 12, 1963.

- | | |
|---|---|
| A Citadel of Assembly | 20 Public square |
| B Citadel of Institutions | 21 Bazaar |
| 1 National Assembly | 22 Market |
| 2 Mosque | 23 Performing arts |
| 3 Supreme Court | 24 School of arts |
| 4 President's house | 25 Exhibitions |
| 5 Hostels for members of National Assembly | 26 School of sciences |
| 6 Hostels for ministers and secretaries | 27 Regional offices |
| 7 House of the Speaker, Deputy Speakers, Chief Justice, and Secretary | 28 Office of the Central Secretariat |
| 8 House types B, C, D, E, F, G, H: Suites for Chief of Defence services and staff; flats and quarters for parliamentary secretaries and other staff | 29 Central Government library |
| 9 President's grounds and garden | 30 Public library |
| 10 Forecourt | 31 Police station, post office, telegraph and telephone office, civil defense |
| 11 Ceremonial promenade | 32 Primary school |
| 12 East promenade | 33 Housing |
| 13 West promenade | 34 Hospital center |
| 14 Vehicular and pedestrian court | 35 Park |
| 15 Lake | 36 Club grounds and playing fields |
| 16 Diplomatic enclave | 37 Service building |
| 17 Center for athletics and physical culture | 38 Service station and gate |
| 18 Water sports | 39 Future development of the reservation |
| 19 Arena | 40 Existing buildings |
| | 41 Mirpur Road |
| | 42 New road |
| | 43 Inner road |
| | 44 Lower vehicular entrance, under promenade |

109. Two Citadels: "Citadel of Institutions" (left) and "Citadel of Assembly" in Early Site Plan (12 March 1963)

"Does it have all the ingredients?" Kahn had asked about his plan, "If only one is lacking it will disintegrate. This is my problem."¹ And, indeed, the need to insert the missing Secretariat would indeed become Kahn's central problem. In the Citadel of Assembly, he initially included the National Assembly with its Mosque, the Supreme Court and the hostels for legislators and high officials. In the Citadel of the Institutions, he initially grouped a "center for athletics and physical culture," a school of arts and a school of sciences, a performing arts center, a public library, a hospital, a market, a bazaar a small mosque, various government offices and housing for these officials. Through ten years of designing, Kahn seems always to have felt a need to justify his juxtapositions. Since the juxtapositions kept changing with each successive version of the Master Plan, he had a great deal of explaining to do. As such, contradictions were almost inevitable.

Kahn's Misconnections

The chief discontinuities embodied in Kahn's "architecture of connection" would seem to be four:

1. The misleading emphasis on the National Assembly building as the locus of political "transcendence".
2. The excessively strong reliance on the connection between the mosque and the National Assembly, in a society where the role of Islam remains contentious.
3. The extreme disjunction between the citadels and the city.
4. The inappropriateness of a capitol design that, paradoxically, overcompensates and underestimates the demands of climate.

¹ Cited in Tyng, p. 119.

1. National Assembly and Government Hierarchy

The visual dominance of the National Assembly building in Kahn's master plan would seem to arise in part from the wish to symbolize Dhaka's originally intended role as a "legislative" capital and in part because of Kahn's belief in the "transcendence" of assembly. In the quarter century since Kahn began to think about this project, Dhaka has become the seat of government for an independent country, but the institutional power of the National Assembly has grown only slightly and intermittently, during the lapses between coups and crackdowns. Political control by a strong executive, with or without a military uniform, has been the rule for Bangladesh, as it was for Pakistan.

As a result, the discontinuity between Kahn's architectural ideogram and Bengal's political reality remains acute. Kahn premised his separation of the two citadels on the belief that "The assembly was establishes or modifies the institutions of man." In Kahn's words:

The place of assembly was really the maker of the institutions....It gave the right for the school to exist, for the place of health to exist, and even for the house of legislation to exist-- all the institutions of man.¹

Up to now, however, the creative powers of the National Assembly have been exceedingly minimal; in taking poetic refuge in an idealized view of the primal origins of democracy, Kahn did little to adapt to the contingencies of a rapidly-changing and decidedly undemocratic Bengal.

The discontinuity between Kahn's words and his ideogram seems clear in his attempt to justify his placement of the Supreme Court. Here, Kahn was faced with the decision about what do do with an institution that really

¹ Wurman, pp. 24-25.

might conceivably have the potential for the more detached, contemplative spiritual nature that Kahn wished to assign to the National Assembly. Given that the 1962 Constitution was no kinder to the idea of a powerful Supreme Court than it was to the notion of a strong National Assembly, Kahn faced two difficulties: the Supreme Court was of only secondary importance to the client's program and it was an institution with no clear relationship to Kahn's notion of transcendent "Assembly". In other words, while Kahn could easily imagine the justices "miles away just thinking of law and its relation to man in a general way,"¹ this picture seems significantly at odds with Kahn's overarching commitment to the concept of "assembly," the coming together and joining of forces. This is symptomatic of a curious dichotomy underlying the whole of Kahn's impulse for this project; he seeks simultaneously a centralized "assembly" and a detached place for contemplation, a paradoxical coming together to stand apart.

Kahn first resolved the position of the Supreme Court by concluding that "Its position had to be on axis with the assembly."² Early on in the design process, in the site plan of March 12 1963, the Court-Assembly axis is used to give special emphasis to the position of the Supreme Court-- the Court building stands between the Assembly/Mosque and the Citadel of Institutions, and is given an unobstructed axial view from both parts [shown as no. 3 in Fig. 109]. It is at this point that Kahn had his celebrated conference with the Chief Justice:

I explained I wanted to put the Supreme Court near the Assembly, and he said "Oh, no, don't. I can't bear to be near those rogues." I made a sketch of the whole complex. He looked at the mosque entrance, he looked at the Assembly, the gardens and everything else. "Well," he said, taking the pencil out of my hand, "I'd agree to put the Supreme

¹ Ibid., p. 25.

² Ibid., p. 25.

Court here," and he put it exactly where I wanted him to put it. He said, "The Mosque is sufficient insulation for me."¹

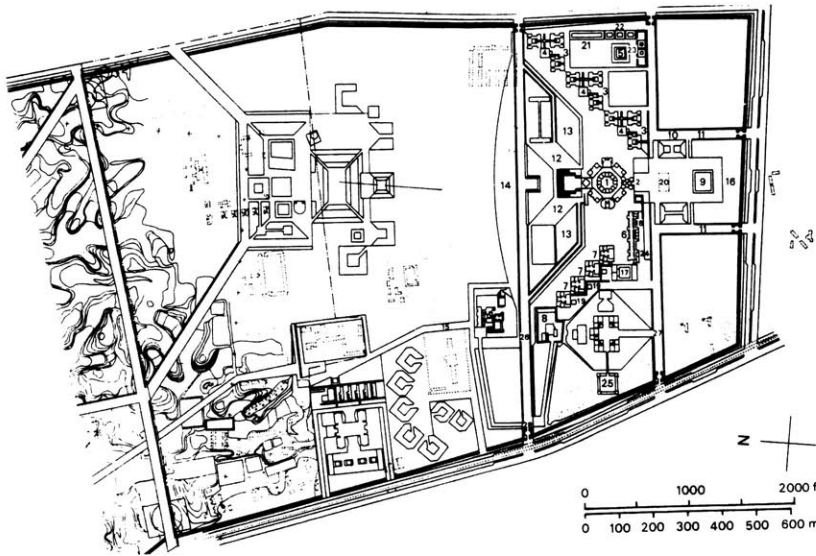
In his delight at their spatial concordance, Kahn failed to see that he and the Justice were not necessarily favoring the placement for the same reasons.

Kahn, at least in part, placed the Court where he did in order to define an edge of a courtyard; the Justice is interested in maintaining a social-- as well as spatial-- distance, yet does not apparently wish to sacrifice the prestige of a spot on the Assembly citadel's plinth. Though Kahn did maintain the axial relationship between the Assembly building and the Court in his site plan dated 10 May 1964, the "insulation" of the large mosque is gone [Fig. 110]. By February 1966, the axis is still there and the edges of the south courtyard are still defined but the Supreme Court building has been shifted to one side [Fig. 111]. On the spot opposite the Assembly Building where Kahn had once dogmatically insisted on placing the Supreme Court, he now substituted a museum. If this building, too, "had to be" on axis with the Assembly, Kahn offered no new theory of paired transcendences to justify the shift. Kahn claims that "the architect should work to bring about a relationship, the architecture of connection, of the realm of spaces, where a rapport of buildings and spaces can be felt."² Yet clearly, as his willingness to shift the placement of major institutions reveals, the need to improve spatial order takes precedence over the need to maintain social and political hierarchies. Not surprisingly, in the January 1973 Site Plan (Kahn's final published version), the Supreme Court building is tucked in behind one end of the massive Secretariat complex, with neither axis nor sight line to connect it

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

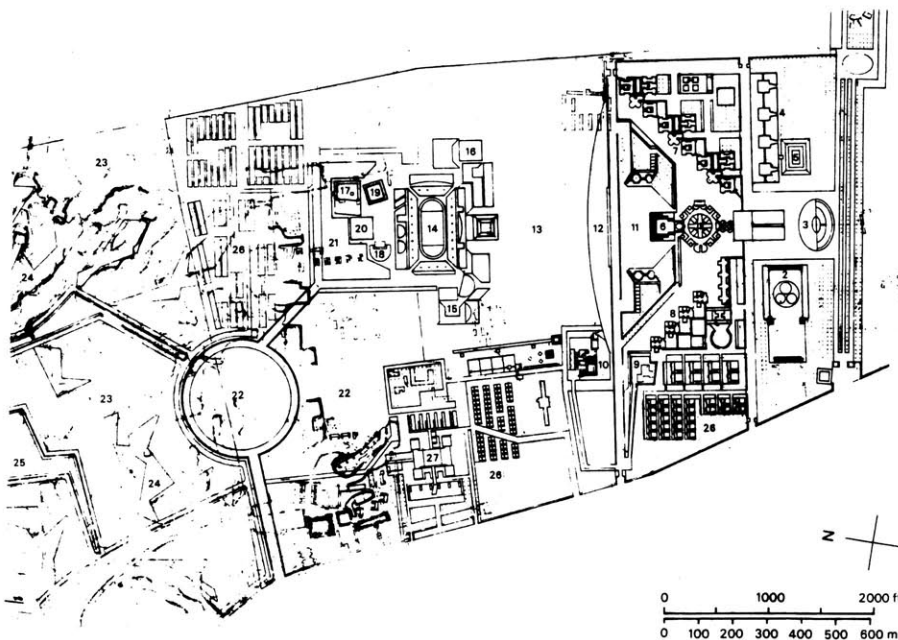
² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Site plan, May 10, 1964, (revised: July 6, 1964).



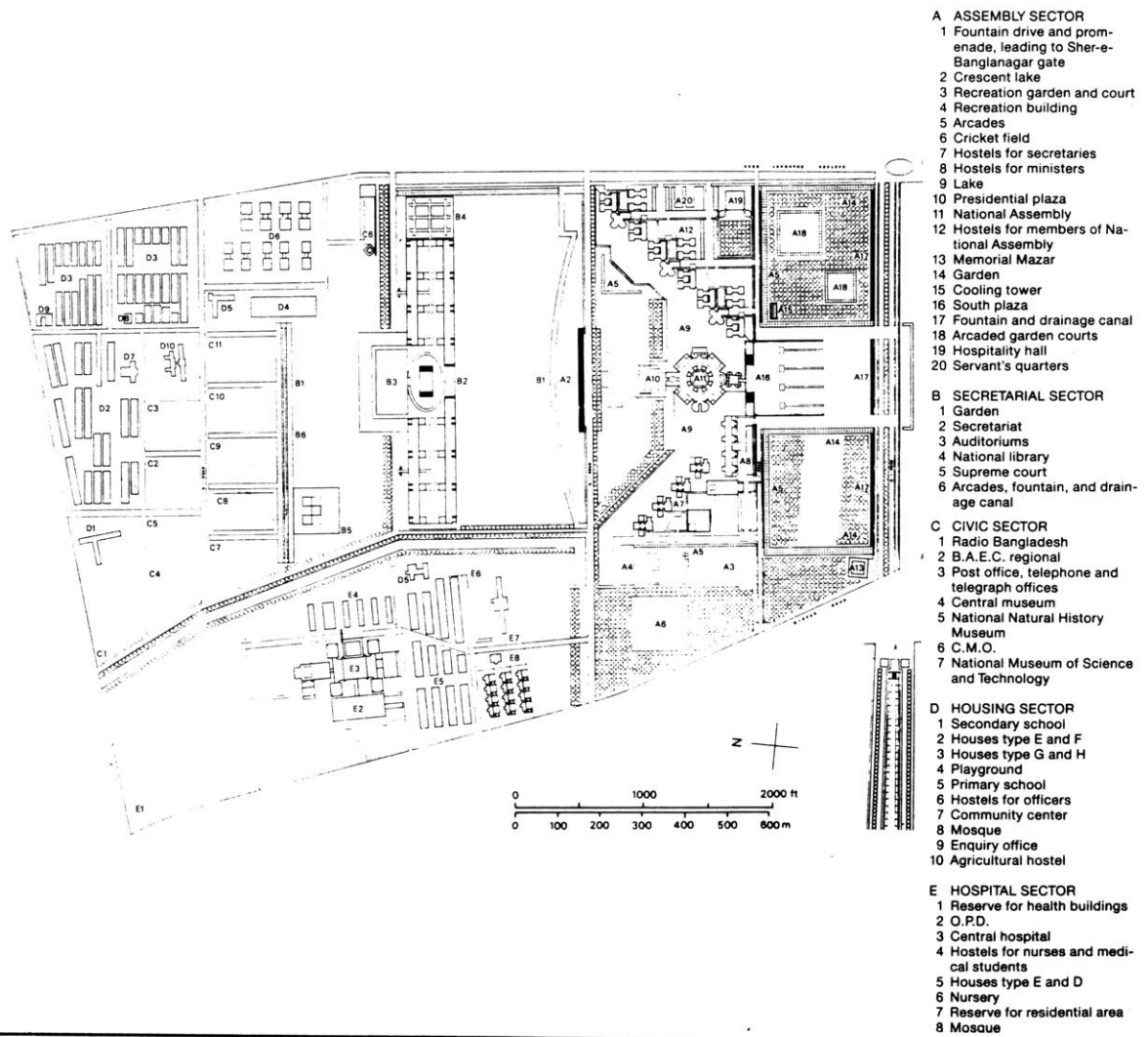
- 1 National Assembly
- 2 Prayer hall
- 3 Hostels for members of National Assembly
- 4 Dining room, lounge, and kitchen for members of National Assembly
- 5 Committee room and party rooms
- 6 Hostels for ministers
- 7 Hostels for secretaries
- 8 Hostel for judges
- 9 Supreme court
- 10 Central Government secretariat and library
- 11 Approach roads
- 12 Lower ceremonial plaza
- 13 Gardens
- 14 Lake
- 15 Waterway
- 16 Aeration lake
- 17 Dining room, lounges, and kitchen for ministers, secretaries, and judges
- 18 Additional offices for ministers
- 19 Parking garages
- 20 Mechanical plant
- 21 Garages for members of National Assembly
- 22 Servant quarters for members of National Assembly
- 23 Common kitchen and services
- 24 Garages and private kitchen for ministers
- 25 Servant quarters for secretaries and judges
- 26 Approach promenade
- 27 Interior entrance road
- 28 Control gate house

110. Site Plan of 10 May 1964 (revised 6 July 1964), Revealing Reduction of "Prayer Hall" and Loss of Supreme Court's "Insulation"



- 1 National Assembly
- 2 Supreme court
- 3 Museum
- 4 Secretariat
- 5 Library
- 6 Ceremonial plaza
- 7 Hostels for members of National Assembly
- 8 Hostels for ministers and secretaries
- 9 Speaker's house
- 10 President's house
- 11 Gardens
- 12 Crescent lake
- 13 Park
- 14 Stadium
- 15 School of sciences
- 16 School of arts
- 17 Mosque
- 18 Performing arts
- 19 Public library
- 20 Market
- 21 Police station, post office, etc.
- 22 Future institutions
- 23 Residential estates
- 24 Garden reservations
- 25 Lower gardens
- 26 Housing
- 27 Ayub Central Hospital

111. Site Plan of February 1966: Supreme Court (no. 2) Now Off-Axis from National Assembly



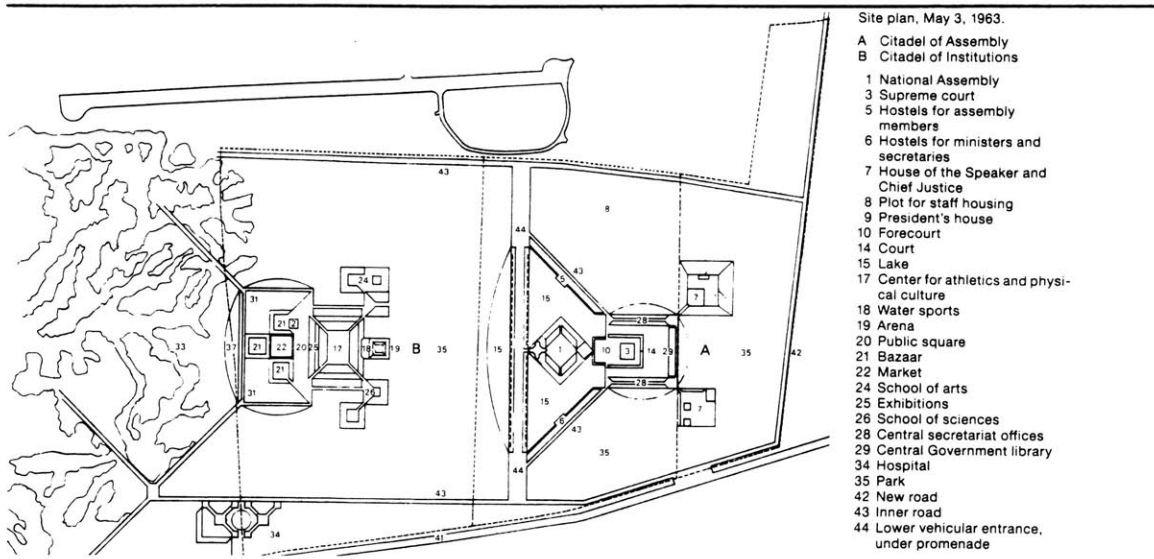
112. Site Plan of January 1973: Supreme Court (B5) No Longer Very Supreme

with the Assembly functions [Fig. 112]. Progressively shunted aside in the drawings, it has remained unbuilt.

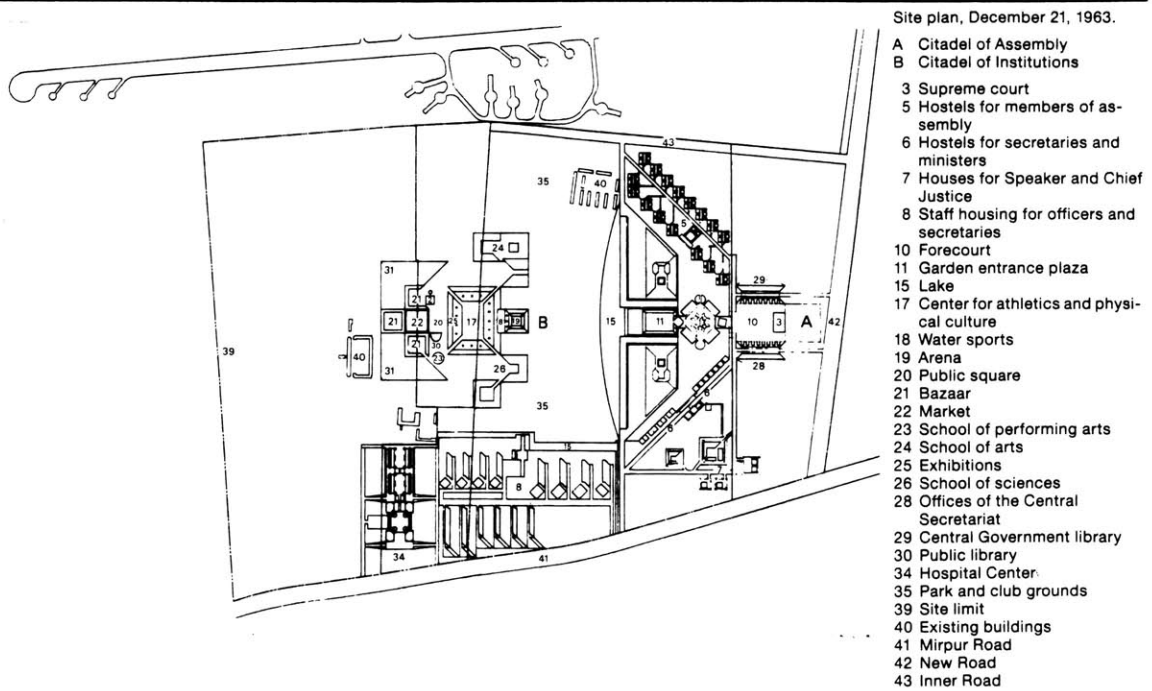
It is the Secretariat complex itself, taking the position in the Master Plan long reserved for Kahn's "Citadel of the Institutions of Man," that provides the greatest social/spatial irony of all. The high drama of Kahn's division of the capitol complex into two citadels is completely subverted. Across from the Citadel of Assembly stands only the potential for a Citadel of Bureaucracy.

Though Kahn did not initially plan for the large bureaucracy that would come about following Dhaka's promotion to full-fledged national capital, he did make provision to house the President. Given that the capitol complex was initially intended as the seat of legislative government only, and given that Ayub Khan wished to stress publicly the importance of the National Assembly, the placement of the chief executive within the plan was surely a matter calling for great sensitivity. What to do with the President, a political force that had nothing at all to do with Kahn's notion of "assembly" but a force that controlled both the government and Kahn's commission, was an issue of special importance.

The answer, cleverly enough, seems to have been to go ahead with planning for an elaborate presidential residence but not to label it in the drawings! While the "President's house" and "President's grounds and gardens" are included in a prominent position on the initial site plan (12 March 1963 [Fig. 109]), all documentation of the presidential presence would soon cease. In this first printed version, the palace complex appears on its own island with a roadway bridge to the rest of the Assembly plinth, like a citadel's corner battlement/watchtower. In the plans of 3 May and 21 December 1963, however, it is nowhere to be found [Figs. 113-114]. Yet, in



113. Site Plan of 3 May 1963: The President is Missing

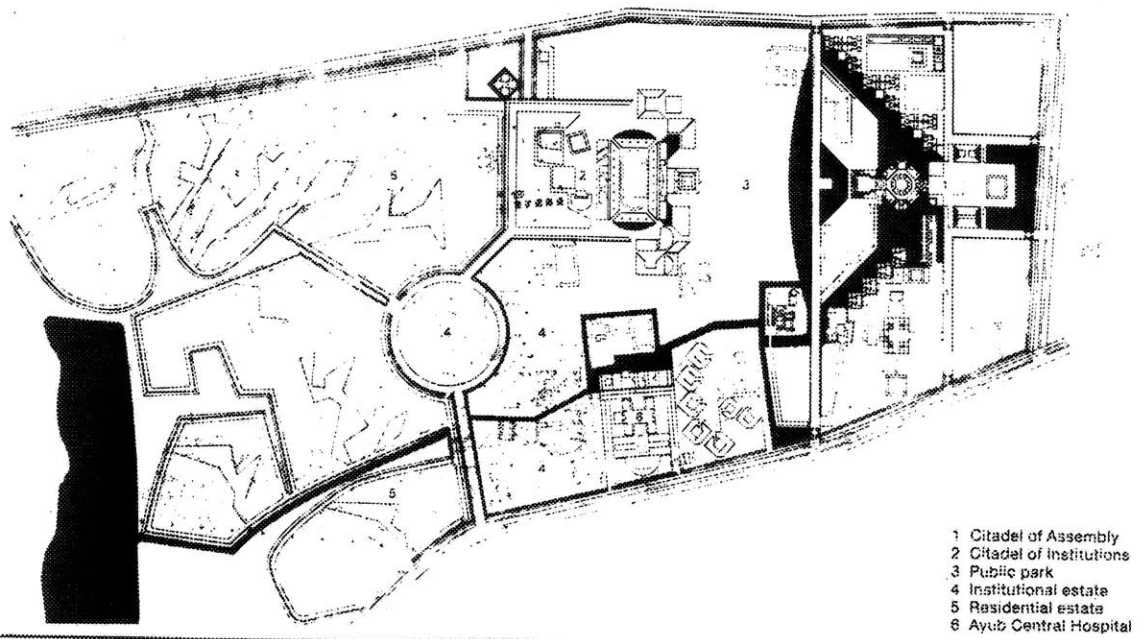


114. Site Plan of 21 December 1963: The President is Still Missing

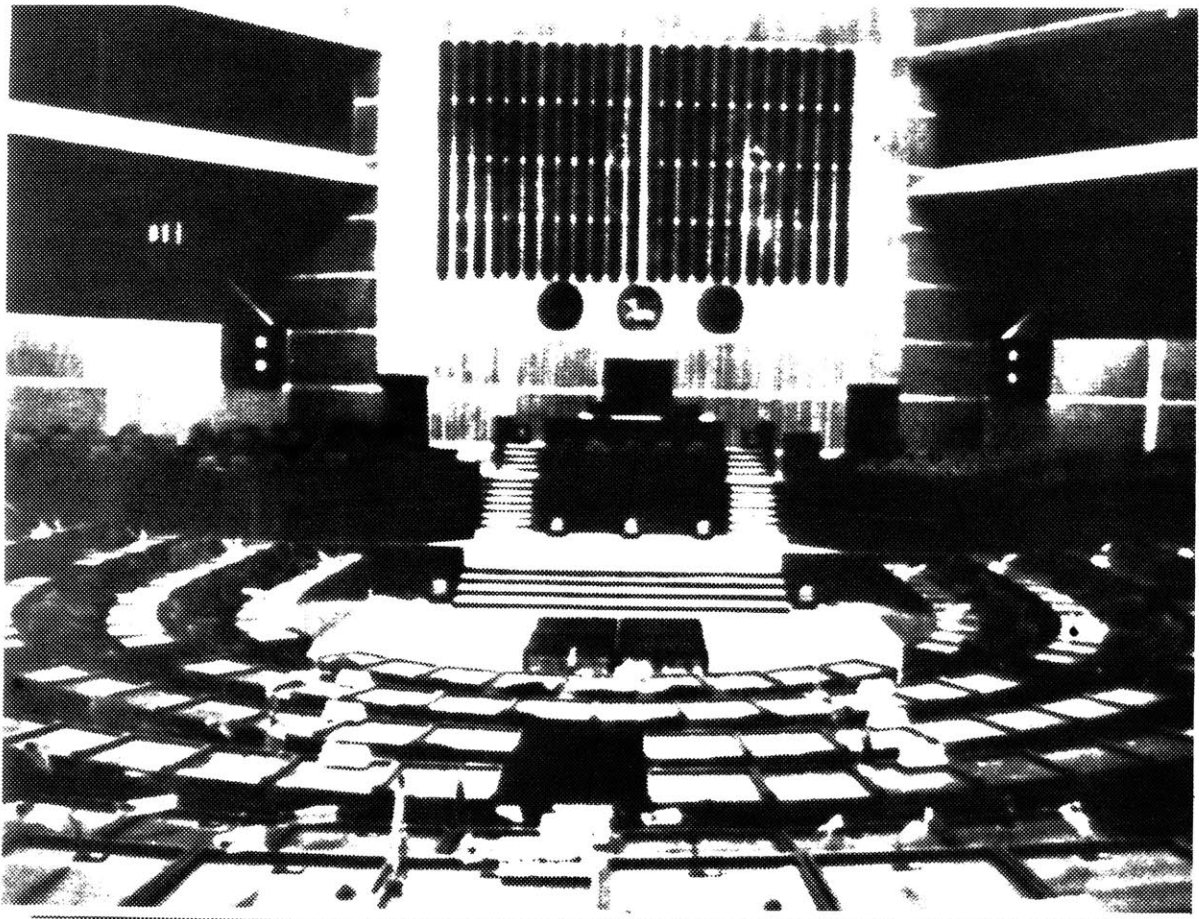
the 10 May 1964 version [Fig. 110], the presidential presence returns with a vengeance, in exactly the same position it occupied initially, though now no longer joined by bridge to the Assembly plinth. Severed from the rest of the Citadel of Assembly, it rises from an island as large in area as the National Assembly building itself and is surrounded by a kind of moat crossable by a single bridge at the end of a private roadway leading from the "control gate house". And yet, in a drawing that is otherwise meticulously labelled, the presidential island receives no mark of explanation. In the August 1964 site plan "showing lake and waterways" it is again unlabelled, but stands out sharply as an island between the two citadels [Fig. 115].

Only with the February 1965 site plan is it labelled again,¹ though the key makes no separate mention of "presidential grounds and garden" [Fig. 111]. In Kahn's final site plan of January 1973, drawn after the overthrow of Ayub and the subsequent independence of Bangladesh, all evidence of a presidential palace island disappears once again; the only visible presence of a chief executive is the vast "Presidential plaza" to the north of the National Assembly building [Fig. 112]. It is difficult to know how much to make of this inconsistency in the provisions made for the President and the curious absence of labels on some of the drawings. While one cannot be certain of the specific reasons for each change and omission-- how much was due to Kahn's indecision and how much was due to the changing whims of the client-- it does seem clear that Kahn had difficulty in resolving what to do with an element that simply would not fit with his vision of transcendent assembly.

¹ It is this same drawing that first specifies that the large hospital complex is called the Ayub Central Hospital.



115. Site Plan of August 1964: Presidential Island Between the Citadels



116. Dhaka Assembly Chamber: An Anti-climax



117. High Drama of the Ambulatories, Dhaka Assembly Building

Even more curious than Kahn's indecision about what to do with the one political force in Pakistani politics that did hold supreme power was Kahn's treatment of the interior of the building he put forth as the alternative source of transcendence. Even though the National Assembly building dominates the site (if not the whole city of Dhaka), the core of the building-- the assembly chamber-- is an anti-climax. Despite all of his efforts to give primacy to the building in plan and in massing, the actual chamber seems small and quiet [Fig. 116]. And small it is, with little provision for expansion despite the likelihood of persistent rapid population growth. Interviewed by Apunam Banerji, Bengali architect Mazhrul Islam suggests that this lack of foresight may someday pose a serious problem:

...[L]et me whisper something to you now. This building, the National Assembly, will be unsuitable for Bangladesh. Going to be unsuitable. It is designed for only 350 members. Today Bangladesh has 100 million people. Very soon there will be need for 1000 representations at the Assembly. The current Assembly space is unable to accommodate that. So, paradoxically, because of the limited capacity of this National Assembly we have got to keep the number of its members at 350!¹

Though Banerji, in turn, exclaims "Good news! At last architecture is controlling politics!" it may be that the decision to limit the size of the chamber was, at base, a political one.

Quite apart from its size, the Assembly chamber pales in comparison to the drama of the island setting and the mysterious simplicity of the building's deep facades. More immediately, the Assembly appears as a static disappointment after the Piranesian flourishes of the 100-foot high ambulatory that surrounds it, expanding and contracting as one moves around² [Fig. 117]. Kahn readily admitted to a long struggle over the design

¹ Banerji, pp. 12-13.

² Dunnnett, p. 234.

of this room, especially its roof system.¹ The roof as built seems of an entirely different architectural vocabulary than the rest of the building and fails to make possible the "columns of light" that Kahn wished to introduce into the chamber. Though Kahn fell short of creating the modern pantheon by means of dramatic top-lighting in the chamber, he never ceased trying to infuse his design with a grand spiritual mission.

2. National Assembly and National Religion

It would seem that Kahn's initial inspiration for the separation of the program into two "citadels" was some notion of the need to symbolize the duality of man's spiritual and physical nature. Given his belief in the "transcendence" of assembly, whatever weakness it might have had in the 1962 Constitution, Kahn insisted that:

The institution of assembly would lose its strength if its sympathetic parts were dispersed. So this Citadel of Assembly came about to express the psychological interplay of parts which leads to inspiration...²

Kahn's search for capitol design that will inspire the legislators carries an explicitly religious impulse:

A house of legislation is a religious place. No matter how much of a rogue you are as a legislator, when you enter the assembly, there is something transcendent about your view.³

Kahn's association of religious inspiration and legislative inspiration as joint creators of man's secular institutions and physical well-being is unyielding; trouble arises when he tries to translate this into an architectural plan.

¹ See Florindo Fusaro, "The Dacca Assembly Building and New Capital," trans. Annabel Parkes, *Rassegna*, v. 7, no. 21/1 (March 1985), p. 37.

² Wurman, p. 50.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

In Kahn's first design, the focus of the Citadel of Assembly was an enormous mosque with four minarets rather than the National Assembly itself; Kahn called this mosque "the pivotal center of the plan, the center of life."¹

Observing the way of religion in the life of the Pakistani, I thought that a mosque woven into the space fabric of the assembly would express this feeling. It was presumptuous to assume this right. How did I know that it would fit their way of life. But this assumption took possession.²

In this initial scheme, Kahn stressed the primacy of Islam in a way that went far beyond anything that his client would have dared to request. Whereas the initial program contained "a note which said that there should be a prayer room of three thousand square feet, and a closet to hold rugs,"³ Kahn proposed a dramatic alternative:

I made them a mosque with thirty thousand square feet, and the prayer rugs were always on the floor. And that became the entrance, that is to say, the mosque became the entrance. When I presented this to the authorities, they accepted it right away.⁴

While it may well be that the authorities accepted this "mosque entrance" idea "right away," Kahn neglects to point out the second thoughts that were soon to follow.

The role of Islam in relation to the state of Pakistan (or Bangladesh, where it is not an "official" religion) has never been a matter where consensus is clear, and it would seem that Kahn underestimated the enormity of this controversy. Though Kahn was raised in a country that

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

² Cited in Heinz Ronner, Sharad Jhaveri and Alessandro Vasella, eds. *Louis I. Kahn: Complete Work 1935-1974* (Stuttgart: Birkhauser Verlag, for the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, 1977), p. 230.

³ Wurman, p. 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

prides itself on its separation of church and state and though he himself was a member of a religious minority group, he seemed very willing to abandon sensitivity to these issues when asked to design for Bengal. Explaining this genesis of the "mosque entrance," Kahn comments that he was "inspired by the devotion of the Moslems to their prayers five times a day" and that "the mosque was a citadel of the assembly around which the members would gather."¹ While Kahn was doubtless correct to note the devotion to Islam of many of the Pakistani leaders, the "mosque entrance" idea was surely shortsighted in view of the cultural and religious diversity of a place that is, at present, 12% Hindu.

Komendant is more forthright than Kahn on this matter of representing Islam in the capitol. "The Pakistani authorities," he notes, "... were fascinated about Kahn's work and his ideas," but "their ⁱman concern seemed to be the Islamic features of the building and of the mosque, its location and orientation."² Far from being immediately acceptable, Kahn's mosque entrance inspired great controversy.

They argued among themselves; there was no agreement. Back in our hotel we considered the question. Even though most government officials were Moslems, they had no right to ignore the other religions. Finally we agreed that the only solution possible will be to provide a meditation place for everyone, regardless of religion, where even an atheist could enter. It could be oriented toward Mecca but should not look like a typical mosque.³

In the solution, as built, the entrance to the National Assembly building is a passage under a much scaled-down prayer hall [see Figs. 102-103]. As such, it is but a vestige of Kahn's initial epiphany, although the revised "mosque entrance" remains strongly articulated. With its curvilinear corner

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

² Komendant, p. 79.

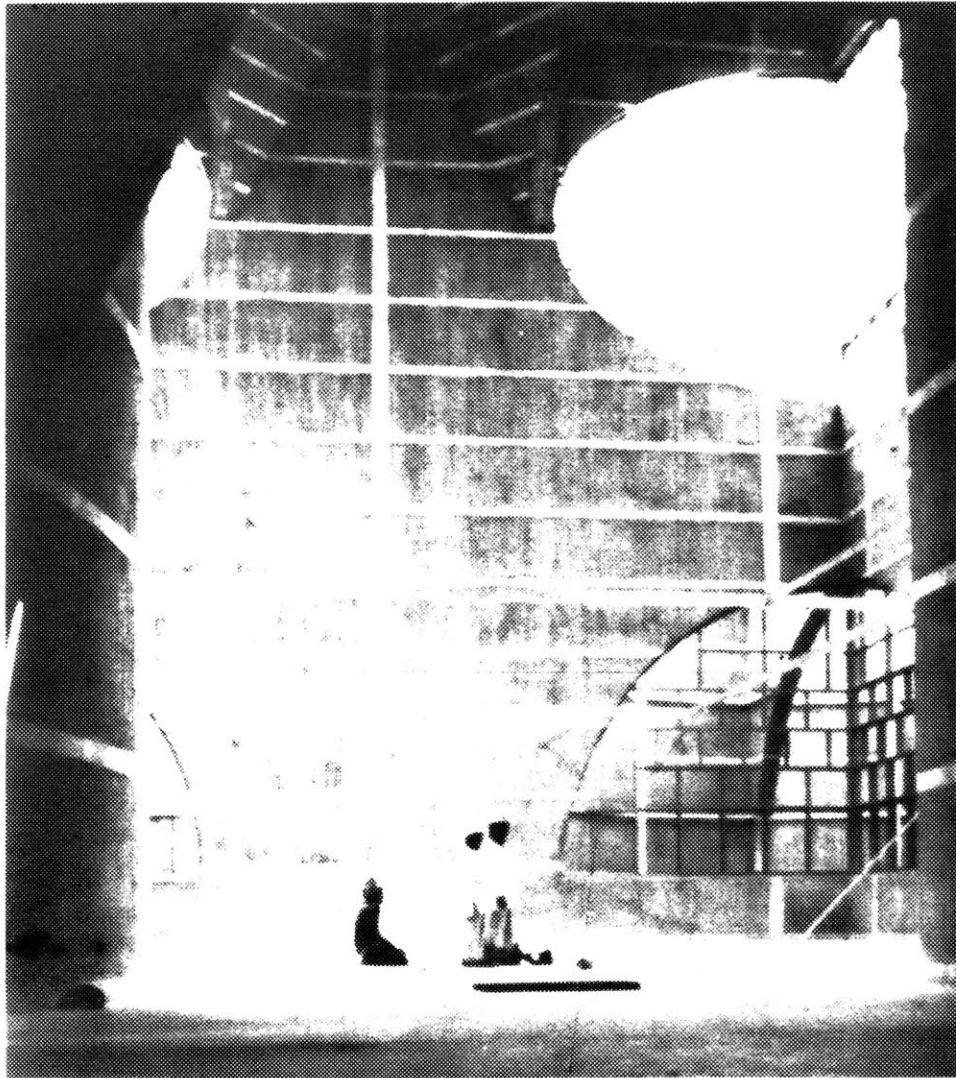
³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

light shafts and its inflection towards Mecca, it constitutes a highly visible break from the prevailing rectilinearity of the massing and the symmetry of the plan.¹ Whether, as Komendant and others have suggested, this redesign transforms the mosque entrance into a "prayer hall" capable of functioning as a spiritual place for persons of all faiths or whether the changes merely render it a mosque with a more neutral sounding name, is a matter best left to the individual worshipper.² To the extent that Kahn has succeeded in creating a space that overcomes religious divisiveness, it may be that this hall, with its complex play of light from above, is a far greater evocation of the transcendent spirit of "assembly" than is the legislative chamber itself [Fig 118].

Yet the scaling-down of the mosque/prayer hall has another important implication, less often considered. Kahn's initial design of the immense "mosque entrance" with its four corner minarets [see Fig. 109] is indicative of his early commitment to the public character of the capitol complex, a commitment that would soon come under challenge. The minaret, as an element in Islamic design, has usually served two purposes-- it is both a sign of an Islamic presence that can be seen from afar and it is a platform from which the muezzin can best call the surrounding public to prayer. While the first purpose was surely at the heart of Kahn's early attempt to convey the

¹ Though the angle of inflection of the prayer hall portion towards Mecca is a relatively minor departure from the orthogonals of the rest of the Assembly Building plan, Kahn takes care to emphasize the shift, by setting up a strong axial symmetry in the adjacent ablution block which is then skewed by the view into the prayer hall beyond.

² In the labels on drawings and in the office correspondance between Dhaka and Philadelphia there remained frequent references to "the Mosque" rather than "the prayer hall" well after it had been scaled down and been incorporated into the massing of the Assembly Building. ("R[oy] V[ollmer] Report," Report sent from site to Kahn office in Philadelphia, dated 18 March 1965, Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania).



118. The Prayer Hall/Mosque: Light From Above

power and importance of Islam, the element of prayer-call could have little function in a mosque connected to a National Assembly building on an island. The four minarets and the 30,000 square feet of space suggest that a large crowd would be called to prayer, a crowd far exceeding the number of high government officials for whom the capitol was designed.

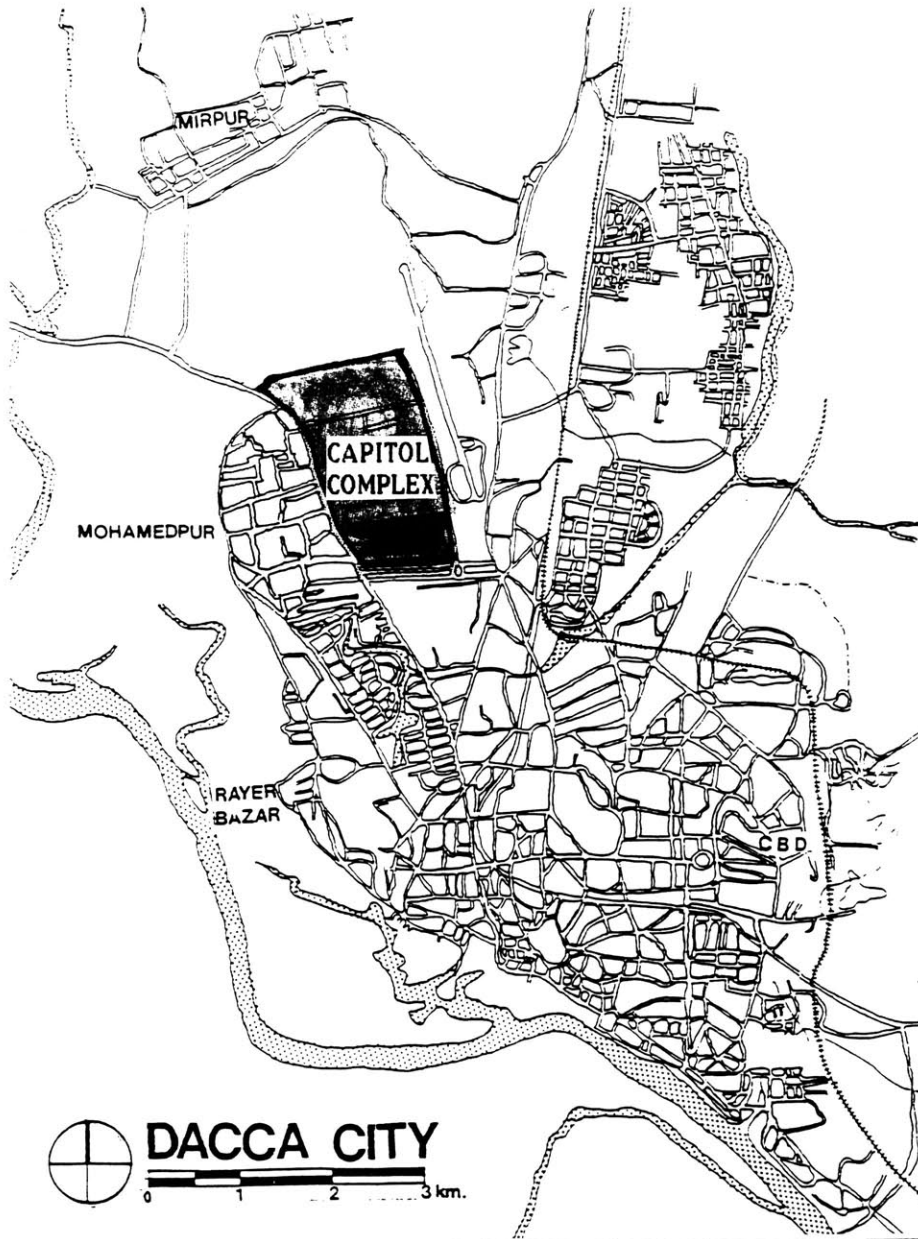
To bring together this larger community was, perhaps, central to what Kahn most wanted, yet this impulse was contradicted both by the need for high security in the Assembly building and by the variety of ways that Kahn's master plan emphasized the detachment of the capitol from the rest of the city. The move, in subsequent designs, to a less public articulation of the mosque component was thus a recognition by Kahn that this most central precinct of the capitol was intended to be used by a considerably more limited and controllable clientele. Kahn's notes from 20 May 1964 confirm this recognition: "Mosque now interrupts entrance. It should not be for general public. Therefore, it can be raised to connect with Assembly on a higher level."¹ Unfortunately, Kahn's search for "higher level" connections did not seem to include much connection to the rest of Dhaka.

3. The Citadels and the City

Though many aspects of the unbuilt "Citadel of the Institutions" might have helped to tie the capitol complex to the rest of Dhaka, Kahn seems to have regarded this district as a separate entity. He viewed the commission for the capitol as a chance to build a "world within a world."² If the outer

¹ "Lou's Notes," 20 May 1964, Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania.

² Cited in Tyng, p. 119.



119. Map of Dhaka, Showing Capitol Site

world was Dhaka, however, Kahn's inner world was to grow not within it but beside it, more than 5 miles from the city center [Fig. 119]. This shift outward to form a new center was in keeping with the history of new sector formation in Dhaka, and was probably inevitable in order to find a large parcel that did not involve enormous relocation of population. Though Kahn did not choose the site, a largely undeveloped area used by an agricultural college, he seems to have had contradictory ideas about the degree to which he wanted his citadels to relate to the rest of the city.

On the one hand he described the capitol complex as "a thousand acre reservation" and said that he sought to "give self-containment to an inspired way of life."¹ Yet, on the other hand, it also seems clear Kahn felt strongly that there be a close connection between the general public and these government buildings. As the architect phrased it, with no shortage of mystifying abstractions:

I felt that there was in the village a lack of the nation's sense of the institutions of man. The seat of the institutions of man is the measure of a city....The institutions that are there; the availability of these institutions; the exchange of them; the architecture of connection which connects them in which the garden being the private place, the court being the place of entrance, the plaza being the place of meeting, the court being the boy's place, the place of meeting being man's place; city hall is an exchange of the desire for the extension of the talents of the individuals.²

If one tries to sort out his multiplicity of evocative images, it would seem that Kahn wanted both a "reservation" and "available institutions;" he sought both "self-containment" and "connection." And, in the end, it may be that he failed to sense the full contradiction between these impulses.

¹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 119.

² *Wurman*, p. 92.

Though the city of Dhaka has by now grown northward far enough to encompass Shere Banglanagar, its embrace is a cautious one. Access to the now-completed Citadel of Assembly varies according to the winds of a perpetually stormy political climate where security and crowd control are necessary priorities. The capitol complex is, perhaps, most clearly integrated with the area around the airstrip immediately to its east, a zone which currently contains the military cantonment where the true source of political power in Bangladesh most often resides. Though the day-to-day relations of the capitol to the capital are certainly a product of political decisions, Kahn's design choices contribute mightily to this perception as well.

Exactly why it is that Kahn chose the rather provocative term "citadel" to characterize his architectural ensembles is far from clear. Surely citadel as a term has never had connotations of "assembly". On the contrary, it has most often been associated with decidedly undemocratic forms of military control.¹ Why would Kahn go out of his way to build in such an association, especially given that his commission came at a time of growing political unrest? Was he, perhaps, seeking to capitalize on the uneasiness of his Pakistani clients with a reminder of greater security to come? Maybe Kahn interpreted the word "citadel" more literally-- as the Italian diminutive of citta-- and saw his citadels as this, a little city, a "world within a world."²

¹ At the time Kahn was designing the Dhaka capitol, another connotation of the word "citadel" was gaining currency. In Britain's "Spies for Peace" scandal, where several persons were punished for revealing the existence and location of underground nuclear shelters for government officials, the bunkers were decried as "citadels" affording an unfair and undemocratic kind of protection. Of course, Kahn may well have been unaware of this chiefly British usage of the word.

² As evidence in support of this "little city" notion, one may note Kahn's response to a question about designing a city: "I didn't design a full city, but in the capital of Pakistan there's a reservation in the town which contains all the buildings that serve as a legislative capital" (Wurman, p. 167).

Either or both of these speculations might provide a partial explanation for what seems to be a typically odd bit of phraseology. In any case, what seems undeniable is that Kahn's National Assembly building does stand very much as a citadel, even without its architect's appropriate annotation.

Other than the castle-like massing, what is most central to the perception of the building as a "citadel" is Kahn's treatment of water. Kahn's use of water, in combination with his insistence on other large open areas of grass or stone, heightens the perception of distance, both among the parts of the complex and between the capitol complex and its city. Such accentuation of distance is surely deliberate, though Kahn fails to make it clear how this may be reconciled with notions of "assembly" or "connection." Defending his initial grouping of the assembly, hostels and supreme court into the "Citadel of Assembly," Kahn said that together they "suggest[ed] a completeness causing other buildings to take their distance."¹ To intensify this "suggestion" to the point of insistence, Kahn reinforced the separation by the creation of artificial lakes.

The deliberate creation of artificial lakes on a flood plain in a country with a long history of devastating floods was, not surprisingly, a controversial decision. At issue was far more than cost, though this too was considerable. According to Kahn's associate David Wisdom, "In a country where people sometimes see too much water in the form of rain and floods, retaining it in any form seemed to insensitive to the Building Committee...." But Kahn overcame such objections "by showing that the control of water is what is important, especially where there is much of it. His walled lakes are interconnected with drains and canals in a complete system that collects and

¹ Wurman, p. 127.

leads rainwater away from the site and into the Brahmaputra River.¹

According to office notes from May 1964, however, Kahn himself was not entirely convinced of his own response:

Lou justified the lakes to the committee. In the end he said he had the lakes because he wanted them. They were satisfied. But Lou isn't. We need our experts to help us justify lakes.²

While such a glimpse into design negotiations provides still further evidence of Kahn's sensitivity and his frustration over his inability to explain fully his design impulses, he did give another partial explanation for the lakes:

Because this is delta country, buildings are placed on mounds to protect them from flood. The lake was meant to encompass the hostels and the assembly and to act as a dimensional control.³

Exactly how Kahn wanted the lakes to control "dimensions" as well as water, he does not make clear, though it would seem to have the contradictory effect of making the buildings seem both more inaccessible and, because of reflections, less distant.

Setting off buildings by the use of lakes, moats and bridges, (however much Kahn's "experts" might have been able to justify these in terms of Mogul tradition), contributes to the overall perception of capitol complex as a series of vast empty spaces. In part, this unpeopled purity seems to be intentional, as if Kahn wanted to extend his play with form and light to include not only his buildings but the whole of their site. When asked, in an interview published not long before his death, about the spareness of his landscaping, Kahn replied that he wanted "nothing but grass as a setting, a great carpet in front of a strong geometry." "But," his interviewer countered, "the people who live there might want some trees." To which Kahn replied:

¹ Wisdom, p. 48.

² "Lou's Notes," 20 May 1964.

³ Wurman, p. 127.

"If they want trees, then that's their concern. / must make it so strong that they *don't* want them."¹ In this surprisingly sharp exchange, Kahn's ambivalence surfaces; here it is posed as the tension between "form" and habitation, but lurking beneath is the struggle between the desire to promote assembly and the need to control it. Without its stadium or other truly "public" institutions, Kahn's capitol is still a "reservation" rather than a place of "assembly"; it is an island above the city rather than a district within it.

4. Response to Climate

Kahn's insistence upon new lakes for a floodprone capital is indicative of a larger design attitude which seeks to romanticize climate rather than design in accordance with its demands. While Kahn is certainly to be praised for being in the vanguard of modern architects who sought to alter design to accommodate local climatic conditions and who sought to learn from traditional methods of environmental control, it would seem that much of this effort was misguided in the designs for the Dhaka capitol. It is not only that Kahn tried to design in accordance with the Dhaka climate and failed, it is that he tried so extravagantly and failed with such enormous social and financial consequences.

Just as his initial "devil of an idea" to provide a 30,000 square foot "mosque entrance" was an overreaction to the role of Islam, his artificial lakes and deep porches were an overcompensation to the demands of climate. And, just as he misjudged the resistance to the monumental mosque, so too he underestimated the forces of the monsoon. This

¹ John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz, "Louis Kahn," in Conversations with Architects (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 178.

paradoxical overcompensation and underestimation of climate takes many forms, all of them both expressive and expensive. Not content simply to elevate the structures above the floodplain, Kahn's elaborate system of waterways provided a means for preventing the actuality of floods while preserving and domesticating their memory. While for the rest of the country the monsoon would remain an annual peril, for the capitol rising out of its placid reflecting pools, water was an extension of sculpture.

In a similar way, Kahn's deep facades became a sculptural barrier against the joint forces of sun and rain. As he put it, "In the capital I recognized the fact that a deep porch was the answer to the serious sun problem. One deals with the coolness of a shadow before you get to a window."¹ While this is a poetic reminder of the ill effects of excessive heat gain, one may also note that the facades of National Assembly building are not differentiated according to orientation; no "serious sun problem" could explain the need for porches on the north.

Moreover, in his battle to control the adverse effects of sun and rain, Kahn neglected to account for the frontal assault of their erstwhile allies, wind and humidity. With exposed brick streaked white by uncontrollable efflorescence, with reinforced concrete blackened by tropical fungi, with dripstone courses overwhelmed by the volume of wall-staining water, with walls behind even the deepest porches drenched by wind-blown rain, Kahn's buildings were surely ill-clothed for battle with the tropics. The provision of air-conditioning throughout the assembly building was a pre-admission of defeat, revealing the deep and uninhabited porches to be a largely formal

¹ Wurman, p. 171.

device, a mere gesture to the exigencies of climate.¹ While it may be true, as Kahn's collaborator Anne Tyng claims, that "the double walls of Dacca provide 'air conditioning' in the extreme heat of Bangladesh,"² they provide very little cooling in comparison to the real air-conditioning inside. One may well then ask: why even bother to give a pretense of passive environmental control in a building whose energy consumption, a few years ago, was estimated to be equal to that of half of the rest of Dhaka?³ Perhaps the stark outer walls are less an attempt to shield sun and rain than a means to mask the high-tech high energy consumption of the modern building within.

However one may assess the climatic impact of Kahn's deep porch double facades, they did have a significant impact upon the amount of useable space in the building. As such, the spatial extravagance of Kahn's response to climate had a substantial effect on the cost of the building. Kahn defended his decision with a warrior's language: "it costs money to fight the sun."⁴ While this is surely true, it is especially costly to fight the sun by trading off precious square footage. Kahn, however, staunchly defended his unusually high percentage of unuseable space as necessary for what he called "full expression:"

I offered the Pakistani a way of building a house. I did it much beyond the objections of everyone there. They gave me particulars, like the plinth, the platform of a building, can have fifty percent useable and fifty percent unuseable. They would add corridors and porches on the plinth. In my buildings, there is a hundred and twenty-five percent unuseable space, not fifty percent, because the only way I could express it was with deep porches....

¹ According to David Wisdom, Kahn did have hopes that the mosque could be naturally cooled by a system of ventilation and open-air screening. The system failed, however, and this part, too, had to be fully air-conditioned (Wisdom, p. 48).

² Anne Griswold Tyng, "Kahn text," *Architectural Forum*, v. 138, no. 1 (January/February 1973), p. 9.

³ Dunnett, p. 233.

⁴ Wurman, p. 97.

The idea was very attractive to them because they don't have to answer to the people politically. I think those who have representation and control over budgetary conditions would have objected to it very strongly, and I probably would have failed to have full expression made. But where opportunity is, let's just be done.¹

For the Assembly building, Wisdom notes, Kahn successfully persuaded the Building Committee "to raise the proportion of gross area of building to net programmed area" out of a recognition that the "meager allowance" was "too restrictive for a good plan."² The spectacular ambulatories of the Assembly Building attest to Kahn's ability to make grand use of such extra floor space, though the undersized chamber remains a reminder of yet another form of his overcompensation. This overprovision of unuseable space in deference to climate reached its hypercompensatory climax in Kahn's design for the Ayub Hospital, where the cost of constructing the deep entry porch absorbed much of the budget, leaving all but the outpatient facilities not only unfinished but unbegun.

Misconnections: The Costs and Benefits

If Kahn's claims for an "architecture of connection" are undercut by political, religious, urban and climatic discontinuities, so too the capitol complex both produces and perpetuates socio-economic disjunctures. While there are always disjunctures in a developing country when new institutions (and new forms for housing them) are introduced, the problems were exacerbated in Dhaka by Kahn's rhetoric and designs. It is too simple to dismiss or discredit this building venture purely on the grounds of its extraordinarily high cost. Though one may surely question a \$150 million expenditure in one of the most impoverished nations on earth, the high costs

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

² *Wisdom*, p. 48.

were as much a result of construction delays as they were the outcome of the architect's extravagance. Moreover, the epic tale of the Dhaka capitol is about far more than the provision of expensive buildings to house government officials.

To judge the true costs and benefits of this project one must try to view it in its larger context-- as an attempt to bring international recognition to Dhaka and as an effort to develop a modern building industry in the city. Komendant points out that, because of this larger agenda, Kahn was to receive a 7% commission (instead of the customary 5%). In this memoirs, Kahn's engineer recalls his 1963 justification of this to the finance minister:

First, we will use local architects and engineers and teach and train them from the design phase to the finished structures. Second, we will use construction methods and equipment which could be used after our work is finished. We have studied your situation, the materials and labor available. The first thing we will do is to establish a precasting and prestressing plant to produce the carrying elements required so badly in your country and train your engineers and workers to run it. In connection with this plant there will be a batching plant and ready-mix trucks for delivery of concrete to any place in Dacca. If you like, we could even design and build you a cement factory which is badly needed and also deliver some cranes and excavation equipment to stretch sand from riverbeds. You can be sure that after the capital buildings are finished East Pakistan would be, in construction matters, the most advanced country in this part of the world.¹

A full evaluation of either the desirability or the success of this ambitious technology transfer goes well beyond the scope of this chapter, though a few observations may be set out at this time.

The construction of the capitol has certainly provided the Bengali building industry with an education in modern techniques for using concrete and exposed brick. Of the two materials, it is only the latter that seems to have come into widespread use, as yet. As Mehmet Doruk Pamir notes, brick

¹ Komendant, p. 78.



120. Building National Assembly With Concrete, Dhaka

"flourished" in the immediate aftermath of its use for the capitol hostels and other buildings and "by now it is so extensively used that it has become a kind of official building material."¹ The story of concrete, however, is quite different. In his 1983 assessment of the capitol's "Impact on Local Design," Pamir concludes that exposed reinforced concrete was both inappropriate to the extremely humid climate and "too expensive" for the local economy, since "all its ingredients, including the forms, had to be imported."² Moreover, it would seem that many of the workers trained to build with the concrete of the Assembly building have had to leave Bangladesh in order to find further (and more lucrative) employment in the industry. Perhaps the "love for concrete [that] couldn't be denied" was as much the infatuation of a government desiring a "modern" building industry as it was the romantic urge of Kahn [Fig. 120].

In any case, Kahn's use of concrete leaves a mixed legacy. While its future use may be in doubt, the herculean effort to employ it remains a stunning gesture in form and technique. The white marble bands on the Assembly walls are not arbitrary lines: they represent the maximum height of a concrete pour in a single day, celebrated by a multifunctional strip of marble. With marble and concrete conjoined, the 5' human scale may be read both literally and metaphorically. As Kahn phrased it, "The concrete is made like rotten stone. The marble inset mixes the fine with the rough, and the fine takes over."³

¹ Pamir, p. 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 74. Fred Langford's 1966 report on concrete technology contains a thorough overview of the availability of various materials and provides a detailed discussion of the many ways the whole process was adapted to meet the circumstances of Bengal (reprinted as "Concrete in Dacca," *MIMAR* 6 (1982), pp. 50-55.

³ Wurman, p. 232.

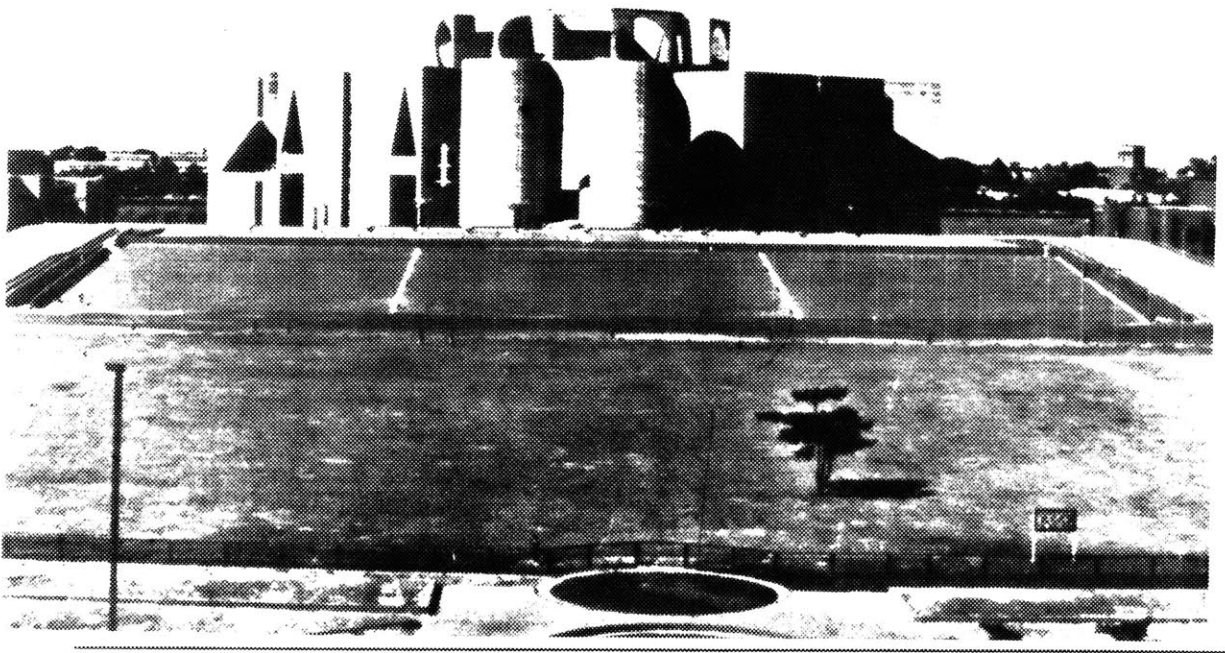
Resisting a Conclusion

If the various misconceptions explored thus far tell us anything, they suggest that this is a building complex that cannot properly be judged for a long time. Though Kahn has claimed that his buildings were expensive because they "reveal the truth," Kahn's eternal verities seem very distant from the various forms of authoritarian rule that have characterized Bengal in the quarter century since the architect first rhapsodized about the "transcendent" nature of "assembly." In December 1987, with many leaders of opposition parties under house arrest, the Bangladeshi parliament was again dissolved.¹ How can one yet form a judgment about the quality of a building that grants such an intimidating monumentality to such a timid institution? What sense does it make to try to single out qualities that are somehow exclusively "architectural" when even the architect himself professed to be so concerned with the meaning of institutions?

Is the challenge posed by Kahn's idealistic formalism too great for any government? As James Dunnett has asked: "Could any delegates be good enough, heroic enough, for the building. Will the architecture belie the mundane business of the Assembly?"² How can there not be discontinuities when a Western architect brings a Western system of construction to house a Western idea of government? And what of the parliamentary chamber itself? It is a space of contemplation and silence for an institution of rancor and contentious debate, already too small even before it has had the chance to be used on a regular basis.

¹ "Bangladesh Parliament Dissolved," Boston Globe, 7 December 1987.

² Dunnett, p. 234.



121. The Acropolis of Bengal

Kahn's wish seemed to have been to communicate a spirit of assembly to everyone, but the building is seen very differently by the average citizen, as the citadel rising from the water, than it is-- by the legislator-- as a penetrable volume. The image (whether rooted in the East or in the West) is a familiar one-- magisterial authority, distant yet full of intrigue. Kahn's geometric cut-outs screen out more than the sun; they deny the proximity and the scale of the city as well. How can a building that denies access (both literally and figuratively) be construed as an image of democracy? [Fig. 121].

And yet it seems too easy to see the Dhaka capitol as some sort of oddly appropriate military citadel. The complex, having already taken on a complex series of meanings and associations, is already much more than this. Kahn's connotations of "citadel" may be less that of an army stronghold or even that of a little *citta*; it may be that his image of citadel is that of the "acropolis" and, indeed, the two words were historically translated as synonyms. Surely, Kahn's incantations in light and space and his arrangement of forms on plinths owes much to his love for the Parthenon and its neighbors. And yet, if this is the Acropolis of Bengal, where is the polis? If these capitol buildings are temples, who are the gods?

As Kahn's words fade, the disturbing resonances of his almost Speerian evocation of "ruin-value" begin to recede. Though verbal annotations and political connotations never fully give way, the buildings persist, waiting patiently in "the coolness of a shadow." Over time, the manifold shortcomings and misconnections may dissipate. Some semblence of democracy may come to the chamber; religious harmony may make a mosque more truly a prayer hall; a city may grow among the island edifices; humans may occupy the empty porches of climatic overcompensation. And the Acropolis of Bengal may truly become a place of "Assembly."

PART THREE
DESIGNING NATIONAL IDENTITY

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, and seen in relation to the history of designed capitals, the capitol complexes in Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh constitute a broad array of responses to the challenge of designing "national identity." If the range of conceivable architectural approaches is envisioned as a spectrum encompassing everything from the most willfully international to the most obstinately local, then all four capitol designs fall somewhere in the middle. Yet surely they do not fall easily together. Before attempting to distinguish among the buildings that exist in the middle ground, some comment about both extremes may be of assistance.

It may well be that one extreme-- the ultra-internationalist position-- is actually an invisible part of this spectrum. A work that is in every respect "international" is a logical impossibility to design, since no building that is actually constructed can avoid being a product of its place. Even the most positive interpretation of an internationalist stance-- one that views "international" as synonymous with universal applicability rather than as equivalent to some active denial of local influences-- does not fully negate the power of local construction labor, local climate and local culture to transform both the appearance and the meanings of a building.

The opposite extreme-- call it the infra-local-- may also be considered as outside of the visible spectrum, though in a different way. At this extreme, the modern architect's intervention is, in theory, absolutely indistinguishable from some part of the existing vernacular built environment. This, too, would seem to be a logical impossibility. Even the existence of the term

"vernacular" implies a supra-local influence capable of defining it. Moreover, vernacular architecture is itself in continuous evolution, especially in heterogeneous societies subject to ever-increasing architectural cross-pollination. As new technologies, new functions and new forms are introduced, new meanings evolve. In the modern world of global communication, the local is almost inevitably influenced by the supra-local, while any movement toward the international remains tempered by the more narrowly provincial.

In the four recently-completed post-colonial capitols discussed in Part Two, the architects seem-- in varying degrees-- to have adapted their designs to the challenges of cultural pluralism. In each case, these architects have made clearly visible assumptions about the social and cultural preferences of their clients. Each stands caught in Ricoeur's paradox of "Universal Civilization" and "National Cultures," trying to deliver both but at least partially aware that either extreme is an impossibility. Which forms, if any, are "universal" ones? Which culture is the "national" one when there are many contenders? These are questions that remain unstated but ever-present, necessarily implied by a building type which is asked to symbolize a country both to the world and to itself. In confronting the twin pulls of the international and the local, each architect looks first at one, and then back to the other. In this thesis, I have tried to distinguish between the superficial glance and the meaningful stare.

The very diversity of these recent capitol complexes suggests that any notion of a "style" for government buildings-- whether international neo-classicism or its mid-twentieth century bland equivalent-- has been rejected, even transcended. There are, however, many different kinds of

transcendence, and many non-stylistic ways in which parliament buildings remain supreme articulations of nationalist political power.

The problem of representation in a capitol complex is at least two-fold. First, there are decisions to be made about how to represent the diversity of cultural groups that may coexist within a single state, a heterogeneity that is prone to factional in-fighting especially in many newly independent countries. Second, there are decisions about how to represent spatially the political system of the country, judgments about how to depict the legislature in relation to the city and in juxtaposition to other institutions, both civic and governmental.

Given the weakness of most parliaments as institutions, it would seem that architects can respond in three general ways to the joint problems of symbolizing an unstable political system and depicting a pluralist state. As one approach, the architect may claim to be completely disinterested in the political role of the building, now and forever. Second, the designer can accept the insignificance of the legislature and minimize the monumentality of its architectural treatment, both in terms of its siting and its massing. This concern for presenting the capitol complex as a microcosm of the nationstate places a premium on accuracy of representation. Such a concern for microcosmic accuracy, taken to the level of iconography, would tend to deny pluralism, and stress the presence of some dominant group. As a third option, architects may wish to look toward a more sanguine future, free of factional discord. They may think that they can anticipate (or even encourage) the potential centrality of representative democracy by allowing the visual importance of the building to prefigure its future institutional weight. Similarly, by declining to provide obvious preferential treatment to the architectural and urban design traditions of the most influential groups,

the architect may hope to anticipate (or encourage) a more equal sharing of political power. The three approaches may be categorized as follows:

1. Capitol Complex as Beyond Politics
2. Capitol Complex as Microcosm
3. Capitol Complex as Idealization.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss each of these and conclude by offering the outline of a fourth approach that draws upon the implications of these three.

Approaching Capitol Design

1. Capitol Complex as Beyond Politics?

This first approach is fundamentally flawed. When one is designing a building to serve the needs and symbolize the aims of political leaders, an architect's protestations of political disinterest sound either hollow or insincere. This does not at all mean, however, that architects need to promote some unequivocal political "message" through their buildings. Nor does it mean that architects must themselves play an active role in ongoing political conflicts. What it does mean is that, though architects must decide whether to accept or refuse a commission based on a large variety of factors, they should make a concerted effort to study the politics and the cultures of the country they are asked to symbolize. Unless the architect attempts to become aware of the group-based biases of the client and the degree of honesty with which this client pursues the aims of parliamentary democracy,

the architect may end up with a building that is, at best, elegant but irrelevant and, at worst, overbearing and inflammatory.

The architecture of government buildings is political architecture. To its clients, it is often about putting the best possible face on whatever exists, a wide means to serve narrow ends. Capitol architecture is inexorably a product of the political conditions prevailing at the time of the commission (though this hardly need be the only force affecting design). All buildings are politically engendered but some buildings are, arguably, more political than others. Buildings, such as capitols, that seem to be an important part of the public realm should be judged by broader criteria than those which attend to more narrowly private interests. Unlike a hotel, for example, parliament buildings are brought into being by forces closely related to the institution that is housed within. Capitol complexes are produced by ascendant groups wishing to give evidence of ascendant political institutions.

Another dimension linking architectural and political design is the close identification between politicians and public works. The architect is not the only person whose reputation rides upon the outcome of a new capitol or new capital. Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" did not last long enough for most of its intended monuments to be built, despite well-developed plans and models for a vast capitol complex with buildings of unprecedented scale. Other rulers have tried to get an earlier start. They have worked hard to get their architectural visions of government built during their own political lifetimes. In the decades of post-fascist backlash, the dreams of Hitler and Speer for a monumental new Berlin have been supplanted by equally audacious plans for modern capitals under political systems as diverse as those in Brazil and Nigeria. Hitler claimed to be re-building Berlin not to bolster his own rule, which he knew to be limited in time, but as an imposing

backdrop for the führers of the future who might need this most solid form of support. While this future-orientation might well hold true for any government leader contemplating the wholesale creation of a new capital or even, as in Berlin, what amounted to a very largescale capitol complex, there remains a remarkable degree of identification between the new capital and its government sponsor. Kubitschek and Brasilia, Nehru and Chandigarh, Banda and Lilongwe, Nyerere and Dodoma--the power pairings continue.

In the case of capitols that do not involve the abandonment of an old capital and the creation of a new one, the identification between the regime and the complex is equally close. Both new capitals and new capitols involve visions of inordinately rapid development; the slow growth that characterized the early decades of Washington and Canberra is an anathema to those who commission capitals and stake their political reputation to do so. While some architects-- notably Kahn-- have managed to resist the pressures to design and build rapidly, more often-- Bawa's case is an extreme-- the quality of the architecture has been compromised by the political demands of expedience. In this way, too, no architect of a parliament building can fail to be deeply connected to the demands of politicians.

In insisting that capitol complexes must be judged together with the institutions they house and with the city in which they constitute a part, I am not asking that these buildings be judged only-- or even primarily-- in terms of the political freedom of their sponsoring regimes. It is enough to stress that they are a product of these conditions, and that their political pedigree is made manifest in the choice of site, in the relationship between capitol and capital and in the partisan iconography of the architectural forms. If architecture is to retain (or regain) a position as an integrated and

integral part of culture (rather than a detached club for aestheticians), both architects and architecture critics must probe the dynamics of the relationship between a building and its society. To judge a "public building" one must understand something about the "public" as well as the "building." Whether or not the architect claims to care about politics, many politicians use architecture as a political instrument.

2. Capitol Complex as Microcosm?

To the extent that an accurate microcosm reflects poorly on the status of the parliamentary institution or gives symbolic credence to groups who are opposed to the government, this second approach is very likely to be unacceptable to the government leaders who sponsor architects. Most government clients have vested interests in promoting the idea of a national assembly, and wish to see their own biases enshrined. Regimes that commission new capitols and capitals do not wish to minimize the presence of the branch of government most belonging to "the people." Whether they support the monumentality of a new parliament building as a genuine move toward democracy or as a form of appeasement, masking the consolidation of executive power, remains open to question and, I believe, it is a question that architects should ask.

Perhaps it is a deeply-rooted condition of contemporary professionalism that architects-- like advertising executives and lawyers-- need not believe in the aims of their client to serve, and serve well. Yet, if true, this sad fact should not linger unexamined. The mention of law and advertising may act as reminders that, at least from the client's point of view, the design of

capitols and capitals is fundamentally about promoting and defending the corporate power of a government.

Is it even possible to develop a capitol complex that would be an accurate microcosm of extant political relations, both among institutions and among cultural groups, a juxtaposition that revealed the true hierarchy of rule (and misrule)? Who would be the judge of accuracy? How would the system accommodate change?

It is, perhaps, conceivable to envisage a capitol complex as a series of interlocked but moving parts, with the institutions housing executive, legislative and judicial government able to change in relative positions according to the political developments of the day, month or year. Such a sensitively calibrated capitol complex could project not only institutional relationships but also cultural pluralism. It is possible to imagine a parliament building whose facade was a video screen, communicating whatever balance of images the leadership desired, a kind of travelogue and cultural inventory that emphasized the dominant presence of certain privileged groups. What if the form of the whole city changed immediately upon the advent of a major political change such as a coup or a dramatic election victory? This, of course, is just not the way things tend to happen. Most cities change only very slowly, and in response to many factors only indirectly tied to political leadership. To increase the number and the speed of physical reconfigurations would be prohibitive in terms of cost and logistics.

But it could happen on the drawingboard. What if the designers of Abuja, for example, had adjusted the scheme for the Central Area to respond to every coup and counter-coup? To some extent, as I have indicated, they actually did this-- moving the presidential palace away from the National

Square. Yet what if it had been carried further? What if the building at the terminus of the grand axis had been changed from the National Assembly to the offices of the military leader, with the National Assembly building shunted off to one side? Surely this would be the most accurate representation of the country's current political realities.

Would the United States be any less democratic if L'Enfant had switched the sites of the Executive Mansion and the Capitol? Would Nixon's "imperial presidency" have survived longer if it had been managed from the top of the hill? Probably not, but surely such an alternative juxtaposition between President and Congress seems ill-fitting to us now. Most Americans, perhaps, still want their President to have to fight an uphill battle against the Congress. Under conditions of a stable democracy, Congress on the crest of Capitol Hill symbolizes government "of the people, by the people and for the people" (even when so many of the people seem to govern from the five-sided building --another idealized form-- located across the Potomac).¹

While these examples may seem farfetched, their implications are not. In most political circumstances, major government buildings tend to remain in place; it is the meanings associated with such buildings that do not always remain static. Lutyens' Viceregal palace can be re-used in an independent Indian democracy. Battista's palace can be adopted to serve Castro's Cuba. A parliament house designed for East Pakistan can later, perhaps, come to symbolize independent Bangladesh. Throughout history, buildings have

¹ If one were to pursue the demand that capitol symbolism accurately reflect the workings of government, it may well be that the U.S. Capitol itself would not occupy the most prominent spot. Congressional floor debate as the central process of government is a long-outdated method; nearly all of the most important groundwork behind a legislative decision is accomplished by small committees, in far less ceremonial surroundings.

taken on new functions and been judged in new ways under changed contexts. Where the institutions of government are in flux, as they are in most new countries, the symbolic role of a parliament building alters more rapidly than it does under more stable conditions, changing with the reputation of the institution it houses. It is impossible to measure the relative influences of the various factors that bring about a change in the symbolic role of a building. While I do not claim that a parliament building's partisan iconography or its location within a city or capitol complex is the decisive factor in how it is perceived, these acts of deliberate symbolism cannot be discounted. Especially since there is no way to build a microcosm-- of either political institutions or cultural groups-- that is both politically feasible and "accurate," the symbolism of capitols is a matter of some significance. Architects must be made conscious of the gulf between the hegemony of their client's preferences and the more inclusive promises implied by a building that is called a "national" assembly.

3. Capitol Complex as Idealization?

If the changing and often unflattering nature of existing power politics makes the task of designing a microcosm either impossible or undesirable, should the architect attempt instead an idealization of political institutions and inter-group relations? In attempting to address this question, one may begin by observing that every design solution is, to some extent, an idealization of the political realm. The more basic and pressing issues are which ideals are pursued and who gets to decide. One must analyze both ideals and their architectural depiction very carefully. A capitol complex is always a kind of crude diagram of power relations, but there is no direct

correlation between a particular diagram and a particular form of political organization. The danger here is that idealization will be used not to anticipate some more perfect future order but to mask the severe abuses of power in the present. Just because the Soviet Union includes an enormous assembly building for the Supreme Soviet in the heart of the Kremlin does not mean that a democratically elected legislature controls the major decisions of the country.¹ Nor does the conception of government organization and balance that is implied by the design of a "Three Powers Plaza" or a "Three Arms Zone" do much more than cloak the reality of a strong executive in a seemingly more democratic mantle. This ideal, exemplified by Chandigarh, Brasilia and Abuja, comes across as a mixed message at best. The professed desirability of separating executive, legislative and judicial functions as the spatial representation of some constitutionally-assumed "separation of powers" is contradicted by the actuality of the plans which group the three powers together, separated from the rest of the city. Thus, even if the idea of the Three Powers separation is justified as a future ideal rather than an achieved reality, the physical form of the triple grouping insures that the ideal can never be met.

Questions about the formal depiction of political ideals raise issues relating to ideals of cultural pluralism as well. While Kahn thought it a great inspiration to expand both the size and the importance of the mosque and ablution block well beyond what the client had expected, how does one justify this presence to Bangladesh's twelve million Hindus? If a village

¹ It would seem no coincidence that American television only very rarely includes a view of this Assembly building. For American consumption, the Kremlin is best presented as a mysterious walled fortress to be regarded warily from below its ramparts.

Men's House is thought to be an appropriate ideal on which to base a modern parliament, how is this choice to be explained to women?

To ask how a designer chooses certain spatial forms as appropriate to accompany a given political ideal or preferred model of cultural pluralism raises an even more fundamental question: who decides which ideals are to be pursued? In most of the cases that I have analyzed, new capitols and new capitals are commissioned in close relationship with new constitutions. The architect is implicitly charged with designing buildings that fit with this text. In Papua New Guinea, portions of the text appear literally on the facade. The issue becomes more complex when the architect himself has political ideals of his own. In the case of capitols, this has occurred most clearly in the case of Corb and Kahn; in each case, the architect had strong ideas about the cosmic role of government that bore little relation to the words of any constitution. In the case of Kahn, this resulted in a work of high drama for an institution of low priority. Ignoring the clearly-stated executive bias of the Pakistani constitution that mandated the Dhaka project and made clear the parliament's institutional subservience, Kahn designed a building for his own ideal polity instead. Kahn, in asserting his own agenda beyond those of his Pakistani and Bangladeshi clients, cannot escape complicity with the persistent irrelevancy of the result. His complicity is, however, of a different nature than that of those who symbolize the iniquities within cultural pluralism more literally. In his otherwise admirable insistence on transcending the timebound parochialism of political conflict, Kahn may well have gone too far. Surely the denial of all conflict in the name of transcendent assembly is no less a lie than the invocation of partisan symbolism in the name of "national identity." The only difference is that, should political conditions improve, Kahn may yet be proven wise.

4. Capitol Complex as Critical Synthesis?

Ultimately, architects have a power that politicians lack. While the notion of the "political promise" may have as long and checkered a history as anything known to man, the promise of architecture need never be so literal. In democratic societies, politicians are always being asked to clarify their positions on the issues. Clarity is also a virtue in architecture, but it is not the only virtue. A great building is not only the result of its architect's critical imagination; it must also reward the critical imagination of those who come to see it and question it. As Emerson put it, "not the book but the reader need be the complete thing." The building need not provide all or even any of the answers, but it must, to be effective, pose questions and frame them in a new way. Yet for rulers of fledgling countries, where questions are too many and answers are at a premium, the prospect of a building that fails to contribute unambiguously to the consolidation of rule may well be unsettling. In consequence, architects in government employ are not likely to work against the aims of their clients, but they may-- through their buildings-- raise important objections.

If architects are well-informed about the institutional and group relations that exist at the time a capitol complex is commissioned, the architect may be encouraged to design more flexibly. Only if the building is able to change along with the rapidly-changing society around it can it avoid being the projection of some frozen moment in political and cultural history. The building need not literally be able to move or to have interchangeable facades like some grand opera set, but its architect must be conscious of the gap between the present and some more hopeful future. If the architect is

too literal in adapting the iconographic preferences of some politically ascendant elite, the building may enshrine for generations an image that no longer retains the initial iconographical associations that inspired it. To some extent, this alteration of meaning over time is beyond the architect's control. This is, as a matter of course, what happens to most complex buildings that outlast the society and culture that produced them-- few persons know how to interpret a classical frieze or a medieval cathedral's stained glass, though once these served as far more than mere decoration. Within this issue of changing meanings there is a central question for the designer of a parliament building to consider. The alternatives need not be a bombastic representation of the status quo in all of its iniquities versus a pristine and abstracted vision of some distant future ideal. There are other options.

The central problem with a concrete Haus Tambaran is not that it is concrete or that the Haus Tambaran facade was re-used in a parliament building. The problem is that the form is presented so literally that, when it reappears, it does so merely as a sign. There is no rethinking of the Haus Tambaran (or the Highlands roundhouse); the village structures are treated merely as decorative shells in which to house a modern program that is totally unrelated to the original purposes. The barkcloth designs of the villages are (or at least were) the outcome of prodigious powers of abstraction and the dynamic absorption of outside influences; no similar imaginative leap is made or called for in the design of the PNG parliament building. Each piece of art and architecture, deprived of its integration with a system of meaning and a way of life is reduced to mere illustration. While the PNG parliament building may well be a place of learning for the visitor, it provides an enervated version of the cultures it depicts, and does so in a way that is as expensive as it is cheapened.

It is too easy to convey the cultural strains caused by rapid development through the simple formula of traditional designs executed in modern materials with the aid of modern technology. Such a tactic shows strains but not development. There are more difficult questions here. If the art and architectural traditions of the villages are valued enough to be included in the design of a parliament building, what is it about them that is valued? Are they measures of distance already travelled? Or evidence of some psychosocial need to remember roots? If roots are to be valuable, they must nourish new plants and new growth.

There is value in using architecture to help component peoples see themselves in the new nation. But what do they see when they see the ceiling mural of the Ambunti courthouse refabricated to resemble "coarse velvet?" What does it mean that the nomad's tent now shelters forms of transport that have no hump? What does it mean that the Sinhalese are resurrecting a Lost Kingdom while the present one is being gradually but inexorably peeled back? The trick to forging a national identity is, as Geertz puts it, "to make the nation-state seem indigenous."¹ The result, more often, has been to make the indigenous seem more like the nation-state. In Sri Lanka and Kuwait there is discriminatory symbolism; in PNG there is cultural rape; in every case there is architectural perjury. While no one, including me, may wish to prosecute these capital crimes, there is clearly room for improvement.

The search for architectural forms to symbolize incipient democracy and pluralist nationstates yields many solutions and even more questions. On the question of portraying pluralism, Hogan's Parliament House in PNG

¹ Geertz, "The Politics of Meaning," in The Interpretation of Cultures, p. 318.

seems almost obsessively concerned with a near-literal representative documentation of the art and architecture of the country's multitudinous component cultures, brought together under one roof (like a shopping mall). At the other extreme, Kahn's Dhaka Citadel of Assembly pursues a national identity only at the highest levels of abstraction. Hogan treats architectural representation as analogous to the process of political representation though, as I have emphasized, it is a representation gerrymandered to favor the claims of Sepik-based ministers and a Sepik-aware international constituency. His building is a collage without the necessary overlap of pieces. The building as an entirety (like its most prominent decoration) reads as a cultural mosaic; forced to fit, the parts form a whole but the juxtaposition is flat and without critical interpenetration.

By contrast, Kahn's complex is much less literal in its acceptance of pluralism. Though he does make a mosque a feature of the design, thereby explicitly favoring the Muslim majority, his complex is otherwise remarkably neutral with respect to component cultures. It is a neutrality achieved not by attempting to represent everyone side by side but by trying to integrate many assimilated references taken from two thousand years of Western and Eastern architectural history into some new product. Kahn's pluralism is so vast that it goes beyond the more narrow group divisions of the present, perhaps even to the point of ignoring them. Precisely because the iconography of the Citadel of Assembly does not obviously choose sides in some ongoing group dispute, its symbolic interpretation is more flexible. To allow for this, however, is not to transcend politics completely but, rather, to make a political statement of a different kind. Kahn's political concerns in designing a national capitol have less to do with a present-day cultural pluralism than with a timeless institutional absolutism.

While Hogan's building is a pavilion along the side of a road, sited in a series of buildings so as to appear as one important institution among many, Kahn's parliament, by contrast, is the focal point of a complex inspired by his own dream of idealized government. Kahn's approach, filtered through American eyes and Western notions of government, claims to focus on the institution itself-- the act of "Assembly"-- yet deliberately pays no attention to the ways that the institution functions (or does not function) in its contemporary political context. The building itself is the symbol, rather than any particular iconographical piece of it. As such, however, it is capable of being taken aboard by many different political systems. It is one thing for a single building, over time, to be associated with Bangladesh rather than Pakistan; it is another matter for it to be associated with a military fortress rather than with a haven for near-sacred democratic discourse. This second kind of symbolic flexibility-- in the realm of political institutions as distinct from the realm of cultural groups-- is exactly what Kahn wished to deny. His purity of forms is more politically ambiguous than his rhetoric allows.

As for the other two capitol complexes discussed in Part Two, in terms of its architectural treatment of the legislative institution, Utzon's building is closer to the urbanistic isolation of Hogan's building within the loosely linear Waigani plan, while Bawa's siting of his parliament on an island makes his version of the parliamentary institution rival Kahn's citadel as the central focus of a larger complex. Though Bawa's island parliament commands its site without recourse to principles of Western baroque urban design, it shares with the Dhaka citadel a certain institutional ambiguity. It, too, can easily read as a kind of fortress, in which symbolic associations with participatory democracy are not readily apparent. Utzon's capitol, though located near the heart of its capital, rather than in some peripheral new

district, nonetheless remains an isolated building offering only feigned connections. Like Hogan's parliament house, it is near other civic and governmental institutions but is not visually tied to them through any larger urban design.

In terms of their architectural treatment of cultural pluralism, the complexes in Kuwait and Sri Lanka stand more centrally between the poles of literal representation and universalist abstraction than do those in PNG and Bangladesh, with Utzon's again closer to Hogan's and Bawa's closer to Kahn's. The parliament buildings for Kuwait and Sri Lanka are characterized by clear references to vernacular and historical forms, with many architectural allusions probably recognizable by the general populace in each country, even though these references are significantly abstracted from any specific existing buildings. Of the two, Utzon's Kuwait complex stands closer to the Hogan building, since its most distinguishing iconography is explicitly associated with a particular group-- the Bedouin. Utzon, designing in the romantic expressionist tradition of Saarinen, deliberately tries to make his building resemble a known object. Yet, in Kuwait, his billowed tent is not the ideologically neutral gesture of the Sydney sails or Saarinen's avian terminal for TWA. Whereas in Sydney, the sailing shells of the opera house are surrounded on three sides by the sails of passing boats and New York's TWA bird is flanked on three sides by nesting airplanes, the billowing concrete of the Kuwait National Assembly is surrounded on three sides by a tentless city.

Bawa's island temple, though undeniably associated with Sinhalese nationalism by virtue of its pairing with a revived ancient Sinhalese capital, is nonetheless more architecturally inclusive. The building is less partisan than its site. Bawa's capitol, since it alludes to many influences and phases

in Sri Lanka's long and cosmopolitan past while still managing to evoke an architectural coherence and an empathy for the landscape, contains the germ of an encouraging approach toward addressing Ricoeur's paradox of universal civilization and cultural pluralism. He has observed the residues of past civilizations, absorbed them, and tried to bring forth a new generation of forms that recalls the past without mimicking or trivializing it. In this, his work is but the most recent example of an architectural dialectic that in Sri Lanka has been producing new syntheses for more than a thousand years, as each initially-alien influence becomes incorporated into indigenous traditions. For countries like Papua New Guinea which have a shorter and much more fragmented tradition of architectural synthesis, the architectural generation of a modern parliament building that responds to indigenous civilizations of the past as well as to modern architectural attitudes of the present is even more difficult to achieve.

Whatever the degree of inclusion and synthesis of past and present architectural forms, the thing that is least easily assimilated is the institution of parliament itself. However familiar and integrated the architecture, the institution remains alien. While all four buildings are monuments to national democracy, only the one in PNG has regularly housed a functioning multiparty parliament. At the time of this writing, the Kuwait Assembly remains dissolved by Emirial fiat while, in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the most significant opposition parties continue to boycott the infrequent parliamentary elections. Moreover, as I have emphasized, the mere existence of a functioning parliament does not at all guarantee that the legislature is the supreme decisionmaking power in the country. In new countries, as in most every old one, the executive reigns supreme--with or without military stripes. In short, the parliament building is usually far

more prominently placed in the landscape than the parliament institution is placed within the culture.

While it may be an acceptable position for an architect like Kahn to take the moral high ground by looking only toward some future hermetic ideal, this attitude cannot mask the many ways that parliament buildings are inextricably tied to the shifting political fortunes of the present. For different reasons, Kahn's Platonic citadel is just as jarring as Hogan's concrete spirit house. Both are powerful reminders of the gulf still remaining between fledgling national governments inspired by the tenets of Western parliamentary democracy and the impoverished and factionalized countries this system is asked to manage.

In the design of a capitol complex, there would seem to be two very different objectives at work. On the one hand, it is intended to advance the consolidation of political rule; on the other, it is expected to advance the cause of national unity. In most places, this implies a contradiction: the leaders want the capitol complex to symbolize both the person or group holding power and, simultaneously, the nation-state as a whole. It must symbolize both faction and state, both part and whole. If one rejects the idea of attempting to design a literal microcosm, then one must resort to some form of abstraction. Yet, if a building is too far abstracted from any known reference points, it may be resisted, resented or, worse still, ignored. The challenge is to abstract in a way that contributes to the existing nation-state, that builds upon what already exists. The task is to develop a rich ambiguity, so that the building neither seems to serve one faction nor seems so neutral that it could exist anywhere.

Of all the capitol complexes I have discussed, Bawa's work at Kotte and Kahn's work at Shere Banglanagar best begin to embody a progressive

ambiguity, though each proves disappointing. Bawa's remains a highly conservative work dramatically sited in a supremely reactionary setting. Though few countries have experienced as longstanding and complex a history of architectural miscegenation as Sri Lanka, Bawa's work on the capitol complex is, in the end, more of a summary than a critical synthesis that advances the state of Sri Lankan architecture. While the design interweaves many precedents, it does not stray far from any of them. If it feels "Sri Lankan" as opposed to more narrowly Sinhalese/Buddhist or Tamil/Hindu it does so with caution rather than conviction. There is no innovative jump that is comparable to the great leaps of faith and sponsorship and architectural skill that characterized the first designs of the once-startling, now-timeworn, precedents upon which Bawa draws so lovingly. At base, the most important symbolic aspect of this new capitol is its site, rather than any component of its architectural form. Above all, it is a building on an island in a sea of Sinhalese nationalism. In such a context, Bawa's building offers no protest.

Kahn's complex suffers from just the opposite problem-- it may well be that it protests too much. Right now, it is still possible to envision the Dhaka assembly building as more appropriate for some other country, perhaps one further along the path to functioning representative democracy and one with closer links to the traditions of Roman classicism and the urbanism of the European baroque. To date, this capitol fails to pass a national distinctiveness test: it is not unequivocally a building of Bangladesh and no other place. But this misses a crucial point-- the building is in Bangladesh and in no other place. It is possible for it to become a symbol of Bangladesh even if much of its inspiration was not derived from Bangladesh. At what point, one may ask, did the pyramid become an "Egyptian" form? At first

those sentinels at Giza must have seemed far more alien intrusions than anything Lou Kahn has conjured for Bangladesh. Yet today they remain the unchallenged architectural symbols of Egypt. And, like the Pyramids of Egypt, the Citadel of Assembly may someday be seen as being quintessentially of its country as well.

This distinction is fundamental to the concept of "national identity" and to distinguishing among the various methods with which this elusive goal is pursued. An excess of concern with making a building seem "from" its country can easily lead to a designs that look like a National Tourist Office pastiche. There are other ways of promoting a collective identity that are both more subtle and less retrograde. Only if the traditional architecture of a given country's component cultures (cultures that have always been open to outside influence) is abstracted and combined into new and inventive hybrids can that architecture, often wonderful by itself, also play an active and progressive role in the modern world. It is possible to attract both an international audience and a sincere local empathy for a building without making instantly recognizable architectural allusions, which, once noted, may be quickly dismissed in favor of the "real thing," whether desert tent or village house. Even advertisers now often sell by evoking a mood rather than by explicitly plugging a product.

In recent years, the term "critical regionalism" has come into vogue as a way of categorizing and praising certain buildings that, in Kenneth Frampton's words, attempt to "mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place."¹ Frampton draws a sharp distinction between the "resistant" capacity

¹ Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster, ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port

of "Critical Regionalism" and the "demagogic tendencies" of "Populism," viewed as "simple-minded attempts to revive the hypothetical forms of a lost vernacular." "In contradistinction to Critical Regionalism," he continues, "the primary vehicle of Populism is the communicative or instrumental sign. Such a sign seeks to evoke not a critical perception of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for direct experience through the provision of information."¹ While this distinction between populism and critical regionalism may be of use for understanding the difference between buildings such as Hogan's and Bawa's, the issues of "national identity" raised in the discussion of new capitols also suggest some limitations to "regionalism" as a mode of architectural analysis.

A "region" is at best a hazy notion. One problem is that regions may be subnational or supranational and are rarely coterminous with a nationstate. My own informal survey of the use of this term suggests that the largest regions are those found furthest from the home base of the critic. It is only through ignoring the importance of political conflict that both Switzerland's Ticino and the Indian subcontinent can be equivalently classified as "regions." In a politically-charged environment, all forms are not available equally to the architect and all sites within a region are not ideologically

Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 21. Frampton's argument is presented in a somewhat different form as "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal, v. 20 (1983). Earlier discussions of the importance of a regional approach to architecture may be found in the Patrick Geddes-influenced writings of Lewis Mumford on the Regional Planning Association from the 1920s and his 1940s. Sigfried Giedion's "The State of Contemporary Architecture: The Regional Approach" (Architectural Record, January 1954) and the writings of Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis remain seminal contributions to this line of thinking. See also William J.R. Curtis, "Towards an Authentic Regionalism," MIMAR 19 (January-March 1986) and Peter Buchanan, "With Due Respect: Regionalism," Architectural Review, v. 157 (May 1983) and the November 1986 Architectural Review issue devoted to the "Anatomy of Regionalism."

¹ Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," p. 21.

equal: any "regionalism" that is to be truly "critical" must embrace this realization. If the goal is really "national" identity, any kind of regional influence-- subnational or supranational-- is an enemy, unless it coincides with the group affiliations of the client/ruler. What, for instance, is the significance of the Ticino as a region if one is designing a new capitol for Switzerland?

Frampton's insistence that references from the region must be drawn "indirectly" is another way of insisting on abstraction. In the case of national parliament buildings, this need for abstraction is of special import. In these buildings, it matters not only which references are made; it matters that they are well-integrated. Skillful architects may be able to fuse many layers in a way that is both novel and evocative, but contentious issues are raised by those layers that stick out. An institution that is supposed to be the seat of a representative democracy is not well-served by a building that too obviously symbolizes the preferences of any single elite, be it a regime, a province or a rising class of Western-influenced taste-makers. Such a building, however, reveals an immense amount about the power structure of the "nation" it is asked to symbolize.

"National Identity:" Can it be Designed?

The architecture of new capitols is many things to many people. The designer must confront a series of contradictions, none of which allow for a full resolution. There are contradictions implied by the program and its distribution: the capitol complex must house a large modern series of both functional and ceremonial spaces, and must be able to accommodate a vast

and expanding bureaucracy without letting this less-auspicious latter aspect symbolically overwhelm the legislative chambers whose membership grows much more slowly. There are contradictions of security: the capitol must be defensible yet appear open to the public. There are contradictions of visual communication: the capitol must have a memorable and easily reproducible silhouette yet must not be openly derived from any one particular architectural source, unless it is a source that the sponsoring government wishes unabashedly to represent. The architect's ethical dilemma is itself a contradiction: the capitol commission is an opportunity to design not only a building but an ideal, yet the ideal may be incomprehensibly far from the present political realities or the political desires of the client. The difficulties, and the contradictions within them, go on and on. Somewhere within the barrage of conflicting demands is the persistent question of "national identity."

What things can the architecture and planning of capitol complexes accomplish? Which, among these things, can the architect hope to control? These, it seems, are two very different questions. The problem of "national identity," while it may be addressed by the siting and symbolism of a capitol complex, is not, in the end, something that the architect can firmly mold. Architects must recognize that all symbolism depends upon ascription. Because they often fail to apprehend that the long-term (and even short-term) associations between architectural objects and cultural ideals are fundamentally unpredictable, architects emphasize control over precisely the part of aspect of the built environment where their influence is least assured.

Architects cannot control any symbolism over time, least of all something as amorphous as a "national" one. They can, however, accept their complicity

with the regimes that commission them, and can try to act responsibly. Responsible capitol architecture would work against the hegemony of any one group by careful cross-breeding of architectural parentage. Almost by definition, hybrids are both hardier and more beautiful. Yet, however carefully these they are planted into the landscape, there is no guarantee of a perennial bloom.

Among the many ways that architects are unable to control the propagation of symbols, there is one that looms especially large. Though an architect may be responsible for only a single building or a capitol complex, the symbolism of these places is not bounded by the limits of the architect's commission, nor even by the edges of the planner's plan. What are the boundaries of a capitol symbol? This is an issue of particular importance for discussions of new capitals, where a place is designed not only for the functions of government, but must function as a total city, housing a diverse population. In what sense are the capitol buildings the central symbol, rather than the city-building venture itself? Where does one draw the boundary of a Brasília or an Abuja? Is it at the limits of the monumental axis, the limits of the postcard views? Is it the limits of the "Pilot Plan" and "Master Plan," with housing neatly organized into walking distance communities strung out and curved to converge on the monumental center? Or is the boundary the untold thousands of squatter shacks that remain so illegally and so undeniably present? Though not shown on the Plan, these too are part of the meaning of a new capital and, indeed, a new capitol as well.

In emphasizing the central plaza more than the individual buildings, Corbusier and Costa/Niemeyer provided for a public place at the apex of the composition, framing a vast landscape. For better or worse, this is reversed

in the more recent generation of capitol complexes. The buildings are the focal point, and the public may gather around them, separated by the often-considerable demands of security. In Abuja, despite the decided resemblance of its "Central Area" to the monumental axis of Brasilia, the capitol complex is more in the tradition of Washington, D.C. The Three Arms Zone is not a viewing platform for the countryside but the termination of a Mall axis. The National Assembly building, with Aso Hill as visual reinforcement, is the ultimate focus of an enclosed and inward-directed scheme.

Similarly, the four capitol complexes discussed in Part Two are premised upon the parliament building as an object in defensible space, rather than dominated by a space formed by the careful placement of architectural forms, each subservient to the whole. Kahn's neo-Baroque site plan focuses its diagonals in upon the central structure and sets it off by water, Bawa's building is a shrine isolated on an island, Hogan's Haus Tambaran rises out of park and parking lot and Utzon's complex is completely closed off from the rest of its city, an object to be viewed from the sea. The monument, in each capitol, is a single big building, not a composed public space. Admittedly, the Kahn complex does contain a more complexly carved public space than the others, but this too retains an inward focus, emphasizing capitol over capital, building over city. This capitol complex, even more than the others, is presented as an alternative to its city, an enclave apart.

With the program of the capitol distributed into a silhouette that has a single focus, great symbolic weight is placed upon this most central place. When there is a single form that is charged with becoming a major symbol of the state, one may assume that the choice of that form is a matter of significance. Whether it be a Bedouin billow, a Haus Tambaran or a Haus

Kandyan, the chosen parliamentary icon-- since it is a design ratified by a government client-- must be closely related to the government's vision of, and for, the state. It is only when the central form is abstracted to the point where it may take on multiple meanings, as at Shere Banglanagar, that the limited and time-bound nature of partisan iconography may be partially transcended. Sometimes, as with Kahn, the personal quest strains the bounds of appropriateness to the place. Yet it is surely possible for a building to take part in the search for both a personal identity and an international identity, before finally settling down to be accepted as a national symbol.

Towards a Good Capitol

It is my hope that the mood of future capitol complexes will be less callously monumental. This can occur if architects and their government sponsors resist the temptation to symbol-monger and if, over time, the legitimate power of the parliamentary institutions that are symbolized is increased. In the meantime, however, it is useless to deny the many ways that new capitols and new capitals are manipulated to serve ends that have little connection to democratic government. The monumentality of the buildings-- from Brasilia to Dhaka, from Abuja to Port Moresby-- is a response to a multitude of pressures, pressures which ensure that parliament buildings are far more than exercises in architectural form. These pressures have most often yielded capitol complexes which have denied cultural pluralism by emphasizing the iconography of the sponsoring elite and disfigured the promise of democratic government by giving premature prominence to fledgling institutions.

There is, in all probability, no building or building complex that can be considered "public" in as many different senses as a capitol. They are publicly owned, constructed with public funds, house publicly-funded institutions, are places to gather with the public, are a prime source of origin for public statements and are expected to represent the public interest. They are even, in theory much more than in practice, supposed to be open to the public.¹ It is this last point, this question of access, that requires some further discussion.

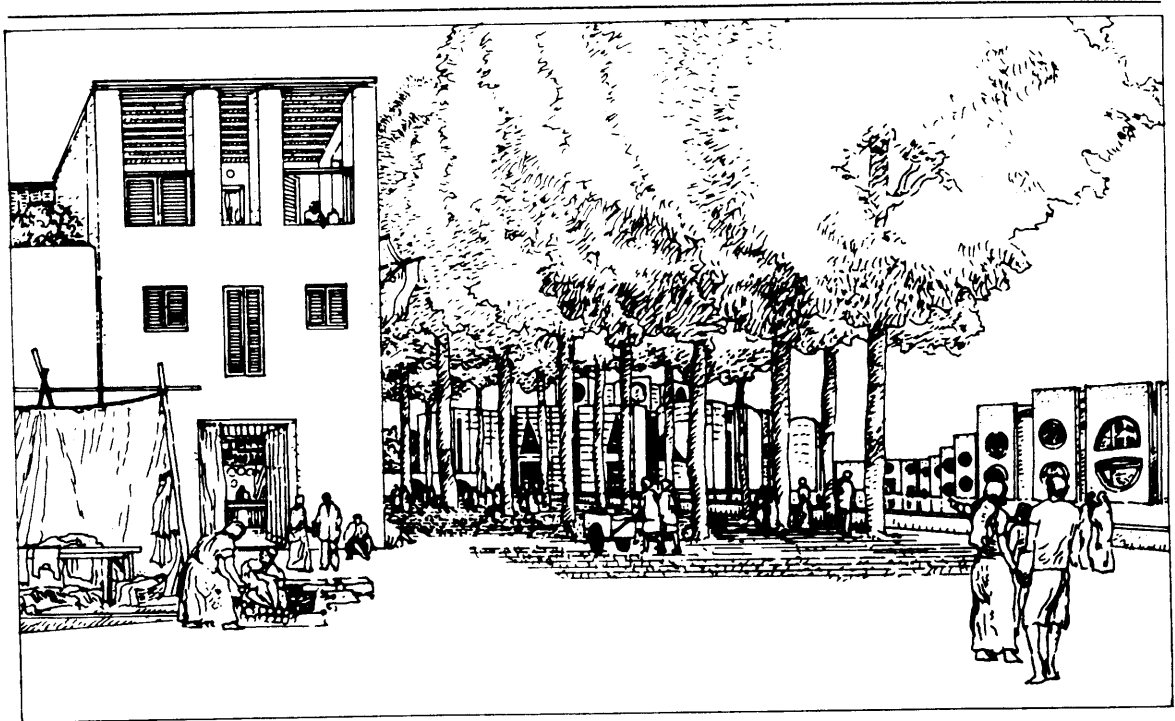
Ironically, it seems likely that many capitols may well fail to be "public" in the most important way of all; most are not places which may be considered as being under public control. This denial of free public access to so-called "public" places is a central fact of political life that most designers of parliament buildings ignore. While Washington's capitol rotunda and the summit of Canberra's capital hill may be places for relatively unsupervised public perambulation, such freedom is not common and does not develop quickly. In most places, especially where democratic government is less established and where political conditions are less stable, so-called democratic institutions are to be looked at but not entered. Capitols are designed with a *cordon sanitaire* around them; there are limits, defined by some combination of landscaping, guardposts, moats and fencing, beyond which special permission is required to proceed. There are, of course, completely legitimate reasons for such security precautions, and these need not be challenged. There are, however, additional design implications that follow from this paradoxical nature of the capitol's "public" character:

¹ See Donlyn Lyndon, "Public Buildings: Symbols Qualified by Experience," in Nathan Glazer and Mark Lilla, eds. The Public Face of Architecture (New York: Free Press, 1987), p 158.

architects must recognize the limitations of public participation and not be deluded into thinking that these buildings are a place of assembly for any more than a select elite.

Two further implications follow from this. First, it may be that the focus of a capitol complex in a democracy should not be a building but, instead, some other realm or realms for public gathering and, second, it may be that the functional center of the capitol complex-- the legislative chambers-- need not also be the ceremonial and symbolic centerpiece. This, at least in part, was the inspiration behind the design of plazas for Chandigarh and Brasília. Yet, as the designs for the capital center of Dodoma suggest, such public participation need not take the form of a monumental plaza. Instead, public participation can be organized as a series of smaller spaces, where government institutions are intermixed with other civic and commercial activities that provide the public with some reason to gather in the capitol complex. And, unlike Dodoma where parliament and Party stake out high ground separate from the rest of the "capital center," the capitol buildings, themselves, should be integrated into this more "normalized" urban environment [Fig. 122].

While this ideal of the hybrid capitol in the integrated city may be taken as a challenge to the practicing designer, there are other challenges for those pursuing architecture as a field for research. I have stressed that the quest to design "national identity" raises many issues that fall outside the scope of the designer's control; these questions also warrant further investigation. The designers and their clients interpret the meaning of a building before it is built. As it gets built, and after it is "finished," it is viewed by a much broader public and is subject to a far greater range of interpretations, assessments which will change and multiply over time. Gestures of



122. Proposal for the "Re-urbanization" of Shere Banglanagar by Perez de Arce



123. Two Capitols

symbolism that seemed significant at the time the building was designed may fade from importance, while new readings-- never even considered by the original architect or client-- may gain greater currency.

How many people know that there is a statue of "Freedom" atop the US Capitol dome, or care what is conveyed by its rotunda frieze? How carefully do most people look at architecture? Does the average urban Papua New Guinean recognize a Sepik Province Haus Tambaran when he or she sees one transmuted into a parliament house, or does he or she just have a vague notion that some "traditional" design was employed? How are these symbol-brimming buildings interpreted by those who do not know very much about the history of architecture, who do not know the social and political circumstances under which the building was commissioned, who do not read the architect's explanation or the architecture student's thesis? How quickly does the originally-intended set of symbols become dated? In this thesis, I have been able to provide only partial and highly speculative answers to such questions. What is needed is some attempt to measure, in a sustained and detailed way, the nature of the public response to public buildings such as capitols, and to trace the ways that different individuals from different backgrounds interpret buildings differently. With a longitudinal study, such shifts of symbolism could be monitored over time. These are the next important steps for research, methodologically difficult but clearly of much potential value.

Figure 123 shows two views of the Washington Capitol from the first half of the 19th century, fifty years before Thomas Ustick Walter's towering central portion of the building was completed. The top view is architect Latrobe's idealized watercolor of a Capitol set off by a gentleman's carriage and by perspectively converging rows of perfect poplars. The bottom view

shows the same building at almost exactly the same moment in time, sketched from nearly the same spot. Here, however, the focus is not on the Capitol but on a procession of slaves in chains passing in front of it, under threat of a brandished whip. The poplars fade into the background, while the gentleman and his parasol-carrying consort stand to one side. In the top case, the building seems a symbol of stability and harmony, even in the absence of its central portion. In the bottom view, the presence of the Capitol sends very different symbolic messages: it stands in ironic counterpoint to the systematic violence and iniquity of its larger social setting. These two views of the Capitol are not, I would argue, views of the same building. So too, it is a different building on the day of Lincoln's inauguration when it symbolizes "a house divided," a different building with its dome complete and the union healed, a different building with its Mall laid out, a different building during the protest marches of the 1960s, and a different building today. As a changing symbol of a changing country, its meanings may well vary significantly not only over time but also among demographic groups. Whose view of the Capitol do we care about?

Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from Washington. This capital and its capitol complex may well have begun to achieve, after almost two centuries of growth and development, the kind of "normalized" relations I have advocated. Centuries from now, perhaps, Washington may even seem as natural and polycentric a capital as London or Paris. Surely, though, there must be some better alternative than to build the isolated monuments before the city. Washington's success is rooted in the ability of the American democratic system to keep its monuments so readily and accessibly a part of the public realm. This is an openness that is politically very difficult to achieve and sustain, and one that has little to do with the

particulars of architectural form. To those designers who are tempted to revive the monumental capitals and capitols of the past without regard for the political circumstances of the present, I say: Let us save our grandest domes for after the slaves are freed.

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