

Housing a Legislature: When Architecture and Politics Meet

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Introduction

By their very nature parliamentary buildings are meant to attract notice; the grander the structure, the stronger the public and national interest and reaction to them. Parliamentary buildings represent tradition, stability and authority; they embody an image, or the commanding presence, of the state. They often evoke ideals of national identity, pride and what Ivor Indyk calls ‘the discourse of power’.¹ In notable cases they may also come to incorporate aspects of national memory. Consequently, the destruction of a parliamentary building has an impact going beyond the destruction of most other public buildings. The burning of the Reichstag building in 1933 is an historical instance, with ominous consequences for the German State.²

Splendour and command, even majesty, are clearly projected in the grandest of parliamentary buildings, especially those of the Nineteenth Century in Europe and South America. Just as the Byzantine emperors aimed to awe and even overwhelm the barbarian embassies visiting their courts by the effects of architectural splendour and

¹ Indyk, I. ‘The Semiotics of the New Parliament House’, in *Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation*, ed. by Haig Beck, pp. 42–47. Sydney, Collins, 1988.

² Contrary to general belief, the Reichstag building was not destroyed in the 1933 fire. The chamber was destroyed, but other parts of the building were left unaffected and the very large library continued to operate as usual. A lot of manipulated publicity by the Nazis surrounded the event. Full details can be found in Gerhard Hahn’s work cited at footnote 27.

magnificent interiors, parliaments, like palaces, can have a psychological objective or at least a psychological impact in their design and setting. Their symbolic effect is almost always cited as one powerful attribute common to them. This symbolic force, most visibly seen in the iconography of the building's decoration, acts as a magnet and focus, but what exactly does that mean? In contemporary times modernity has made us more alert to questions of how our perceptions are created and moulded, and how our understanding is 'mediated' or constructed by a range of factors that may not be consciously or immediately present in our mind. Public buildings are increasingly interpreted as 'statements' as well as representations. As Goodsell noted in an important article on parliamentary architecture, we must take conscious and unconscious factors into account when judging the architecture of legislative buildings. He makes the further claim that '... the impact of parliamentary architecture on political culture is essentially mediated by national elites.'³

We are powerfully aware of the ideological manipulation of architecture in Twentieth Century politics, but architecture has always been an expression of a point of view. Questions of interpretation arise because of the difficulty of agreeing on the nature of the architectural statement. Is there, for example, really a 'Fascist' or a 'Bolshevik' or even a 'democratic' style of architecture?⁴ Opinions vary. Layers of meaning may need to be uncovered in order to pinpoint the fundamental determinants of statements on architectural styles. A work such as *Temples of Democracy* by Hitchcock and Seale, which gives an historical survey of the creation and architecture of the capitols of the various states of the United States, is an excellent introduction to the range of social, political and ideological factors underlying their evolution.⁵ The capitols were clearly seen by their creators as powerful statements of American democratic beliefs, vigorously developing after the War of Independence. They expressed in stone political and national ideals, often stemming from the teachings of the Enlightenment in France. The Capitol in Washington celebrated its bicentenary in 1993, and it too is called a Temple: the Temple of Liberty.⁶ The quasi-religious nature of this designation cannot be overlooked. This historical background and the iconography, which these buildings incorporate, are vital for understanding the rationale of their style and function. But particularities of time, place and personality should never be overlooked when considering the nature of a specific parliamentary building; and, as Taylor and Wefing remind us, generalisations too quickly drawn are dangerous.⁷

³ Goodsell, C.T. 'The Architecture of Parliaments: Legislative Houses and Political Culture', in *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1988, pp. 287–302.

⁴ Taylor, Robert R. *The Word in Stone: the Role of Architecture in the National Socialist Ideology*. Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1974.

⁵ Hitchcock, H.-R. and Seale, W. *Temples of Democracy: the State Capitols of the USA*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

⁶ Scott, Pamela. *Temple of Liberty: Building the Capitol for a New Nation*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁷ Wefing, Heinrich. *Parlamentsarchitektur. Zur Selbstdarstellung der Demokratie in ihren Bauwerken: eine Untersuchung am Beispiel des Bonner Bundeshauses*. (Beiträge zum Parlamentsrecht, Band 31) Berlin, Duncker and Humblot, 1995. (Title translated: *Parliamentary Architecture. On the Way Democracy Presents Itself in Its Buildings. An Investigation Based on the Bonn Bundeshaus*), p. 84.

The Twentieth Century is particularly rich in examples of architecture being harnessed in the service of political, especially totalitarian, ideology. One recalls the Nuremberg rallies, for instance, and Adolf Hitler's vision of the new Berlin, to be renamed Germania, with its massive, neo-classical architecture and grandiose dimensions.⁸ Albert Speer, the architect so dear to Hitler's heart, has much to say about this theme in his memoirs. Robert R. Taylor's *The Word in Stone*, written with some assistance from Albert Speer, provides important documentation on the complex role of architecture under the National Socialist regime.⁹ Soviet architecture, which the Nazis labelled as 'architectural Bolshevism', aimed to create a socialist counterpart to the 'fascist architecture' of Italy and Germany. It too produced its share of ponderous structures projecting an image of the state. This Soviet style was applied throughout the Eastern block. Stalin also took a personal interest in architectural proposals and the characteristics of Soviet architecture were in accordance with his taste and Central Committee directives. In each of these political systems the result in architectural terms was a high degree of 'totalitarian uniformity' where individual human needs were subservient to the representational ideals and the accepted symbols of the state and the dominant regime. Static monumentality, the symbol of political power, triumphed over the sense of movement and any personal freedom of response to light and space. The word 'symbol' is apt for use to cover a multitude of sins.

It is noteworthy that the second half of the Twentieth Century and now the first decade of the Twenty-first Century is a period of unprecedented activity for architects and builders of parliamentary buildings. Many parliamentary premises are being renovated, re-modelled and extended; in some cases brand new buildings have been erected. The time appears more than ripe for a full-scale review of all these developments, but that is a very big task for any one researcher. In Germany alone there are a number of proposals afoot to renovate existing substantial parliamentary buildings and, of course, the position in the former East Germany is particularly instructive. In Canada the native Nunavut people have recently received their own Parliament, and new buildings for the Flemish Parliament and for the parliaments in Stockholm and The Hague have created interest, to cite but a few recent instances. In the Pacific and Asian areas other instances are not far to seek (Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Fiji, India, Northern Territory of Australia).

PART 1: PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS FOR THE GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC

The present paper aims to survey only part of this development, by examining some questions in relation to three recent national parliamentary buildings and one at the state level. Attention is first devoted to German developments, both in regard to the Bundestag in Bonn and the renovation of the Reichstag building in Berlin, a project particularly rich in sensitive historical and political associations. Both these impressive projects raise large, sometimes abstract questions of national symbols, European traditions and, latterly, the democratic aspirations of the newly reunited Germany. The latter part of the paper moves from the elevated German and European

⁸ See details of Germania and Speer's role in designing it in *Faust's Metropolis: a History of Berlin*, by Alexandra Richie, New York, Carroll & Graf, 1998.

⁹ Speer, Albert. *Erinnerungen* [numerous editions] Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein Verlag, 1974. (Ullstein Buch Nr. 3026). Taylor, Robert R., op. cit.

plane to look at related issues in Australia, which arose with the planning of the new Parliament House in Canberra. The question of the relationship between architects, builders and parliaments as clients is dealt with in the case of the Parliament of New South Wales. This Parliament is taken as something of a 'case study', since this author was involved in aspects of the planning of the new building opened in 1980, and can draw on personal experience and observation. Finally, some consideration will be given to parliamentary buildings as part of the process of political communication in modern societies.

(i) *The Bundeshaus in Bonn*

Early Architectural Changes, 1949–1971

Reunification of Germany from 1990 onwards has had such a magnetic effect that it has caused significant events of even a few years earlier to fade from memory or to be uninteresting. This applies, it seems, to the very detailed and lengthy project to rebuild and expand the parliamentary and government complex in Bonn. The inadequacies of the Bonn site, where in 1949 the Bundestag had taken over a former pedagogical college as its seat, had long been recognised and had been the subject of debate and disagreement over a period of years. Architectural changes were undertaken from 1949 by a leading architect of the day, Hans Schwippert, whose erection of a new chamber for the Bundestag had been completed promptly. Glass figured prominently in this project and indeed it was said that glass structures were a trademark of German post-war architectural style ('Bundesrepublican style'), picking up trends that had existed in the 1920s. But nevertheless, piecemeal development of both the parliamentary and the executive buildings in Bonn led to a fragmentary and increasingly inefficient and even messy official infrastructure for a country undergoing major economic and political expansion.¹⁰ An important change came to the parliamentary site when a large multi-storey building to accommodate members and some services was erected in 1969. This building, of some 30 storeys, was colloquially known as the 'tall Eugen' in contrast to the short stature of Eugen Gerstenmaier, the then President (Speaker) of the Bundestag. This building, which soars over the surrounding townscape, is a notable landmark in the Bonn region, especially when seen from the Rhine. Eugen Gerstenmaier, who had succeeded in getting this new building for members' accommodation, favoured a re-designed chamber along the lines of the chamber of the British House of Commons. Others wanted the existing semi-circular seating arrangements retained.

In December 1969 the federal cabinet ordered a stop to the ad hoc building programs of the government in Bonn and set up a planning commission to look at the wider town planning implications of government office and parliamentary accommodation. At the same time, the Bundestag proceeded to draw up plans for additional accommodation and agreed to set up an architectural competition. For the town planning concerns of the federal government a separate commission (Gremium) of experts was set up to make recommendations. As a result, the city of Bonn, the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia and the federal government agreed to a framework for the development of the city of Bonn as well as for its government and parliamentary needs. By 1972 an architectural competition was held for major

¹⁰ Gerstenmaier, Eugen. *Streit und Friede hat seine Zeit: ein Lebensbericht*. Frankfurt am Main, Propyläen Verlag, 1981, pp. 395–6.

restructuring (including new buildings for the Bundestag (Lower House) and the Bundesrat (Upper or States House), office blocks for government departments, child care facilities, an international conference centre, and an hotel with apartments).¹¹ The results of the competition were equivocal and no-one was outright winner. Various complications ensued because of this confused outcome, with different architectural firms being asked to do certain projects, in co-operation with other firms. Disagreements and further confusion followed.

Redesigning the Bonn Parliamentary Building, 1971–1992

It would lead us too far from our chief purpose to trace all these permutations in detail, but as far as the parliamentary needs were concerned, by May 1977 clarity had been reached on how to proceed. These needs were very comprehensive and involved virtually an entirely new parliamentary precinct. Under the Bonn town planning arrangements, consultation with concerned citizens became necessary and criticism on the extent of the proposals was made. Revised plans were announced in December 1978, but opposition to the dimensions of the proposal continued, leading the Bundestag to opt for further reductions. Further architectural competitions, this time for stage 1 of the re-building program, were held.

Yet another complication arose in 1983 when it was found that the fabric of the main chamber (Plenarsaal) was seriously impaired. This meant that it could not be re-built, but should be demolished. Since this chamber was regarded as being of heritage significance, new agitation developed. The whole exercise became both complex and highly public. Of course, changing constellations within the Bundestag could not fail to add political piquancy to the mixture. The Bundestag set up its own building committee of members to watch over progress and plans, but, as the Bundestag member Conradi commented in 1999: 'We built the plenary chamber in Bonn almost without the participation of members, since almost no one had any interest in it. This is the reason that it took 21 years from the commencement of planning in 1971 until completion in 1992.'¹²

Public attention was most caught by the fate of the plenary chamber (Plenarsaal). Intervention by the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia in February 1986 led to a conservation order (Denkmalschutz) being placed on this chamber through the city of Bonn. Further agitation by members within the Bundestag threw doubt on the feasibility of decisions already made. Various experts were called on for advice and in the upshot it emerged that preservation of the existing building in its framework would greatly increase expenditure because of its unsuitable nature. Despite continued opposition to the total demolition of the existing chamber, the decision to build an entirely new chamber was finally made.

The limited power of the state government to intervene in a matter affecting the federal Parliament was given as a decisive factor in allowing the demolition to proceed. Alternative accommodation for meetings of the full Bundestag was made at this time and demolition was announced to begin on October 1, 1987. As may be expected, both costs and timetabling of completion of the projects under way far exceeded original estimates. Dissension still continued among members about the

¹¹ Schindler, Peter. *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages*, 1999, p. 3297.

¹² Wefing, H. (comp.). *Dem Deutschen Volke*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1999, p. 165.

shape of the chamber and the way seating should be arranged. This harks back to what Gerstenmaier, for example, had felt in 1969. The completion date of the chamber had receded still more until in October 1989 a provisional completion date of June 1992 was announced.

The year 1989 became a portentous date in German history, since it was the time when the fall of the East German government and then of the whole state system of the German Democratic Republic began to take concrete shape. This led to calls for the parliamentary building project in Bonn to be discontinued. In February 1990 the Bundestag commissioned the architect of the new chamber (Günter Behnisch) to consider how the extra members from East Germany might be accommodated if reunification became a reality. Already, however, the future of Bonn as capital of a reunified Germany began to be raised. In March 1990, the Upper House, the Bundesrat, decided to stop its project for a new building in Bonn.

Following on the political developments with the fall of the East German State, the Bundestag decided (in June 1992) by a narrow majority to transfer the seat of government administration and of parliamentary functions to Berlin. Nevertheless, the saga with building the new plenary chamber still continued. The original chamber was demolished, and an alternative provisional chamber was provided in a nearby building while the entirely new chamber based on the semi-circular model was built. But even after the decision on the shape of the chamber had been made, members still introduced motions to alter the intention. The effect of any late-minute changes on costs was emphasised and finally agitation for change subsided. Delays nevertheless occurred. In 1989 the cost of the new chamber was reported to the Bundestag to be DM 265 million, with date of completion to be 1992. Calls for a suspension of the building proposals multiplied, especially as political developments in East Germany began to make an impact. It should be noted that the rebuilding of the chamber also included other ancillary facilities adjacent to it, so the project is wider than just the chamber, although public and political attention concentrated on this one element.

Completion of Rebuilding in 1992: Some Mishaps

The projected date of completion was virtually realised when the new semi-circular chamber was inaugurated with much public fanfare at the end of October 1992. It incorporated many new features, but was still influenced by the example Hans Schwippert set in 1949. This applies especially to the use of glass. The emphasis on the idea of democratic openness and the transparency of Parliament's operations were impressively exemplified by this architectural device. Care had also been taken with regard to security of members. Costs rose from an estimated DM 87.6 million (1985) to some DM 256 million (1992). This latter figure is slightly less than the estimate made in 1989. Public reaction to the finished project was positive and the media praised the strong emphasis on the concept of transparency in its design. Wefing's important work on the architectural history of this project describes the 1992 chamber as follows:

The newly constructed plenary area of the German Bundestag, handed over in autumn 1992, crowns the line of tradition in the Bundesrepublik's self-presentation through the use of architecture. It is characterised by a clearly set out internationalism in style which is ascetic and functional, just as it represents a rejection of any kind of striving for effects of

representation by appeals to emotion (Pathetisch-Repräsentatives) which could recall the neo-classic style associated with Speer and which was regarded as historically tainted.¹³

The irony of the situation was that this new chamber was completed and used after the decision to move the seat of government and Parliament to Berlin had already been taken. History had overtaken its painful genesis.

Further troubles still dogged the new chamber: although opened in October 1992, the whole acoustical system of microphones and speakers failed in November, and the Parliament moved back to the temporary chamber until this embarrassing failure of German technology could be rectified. Use of the new chamber began again in September 1993. One other incident which might be said to belong partly to the realm of farce befell the construction of the new chamber. This relates to the very large eagle, the Bundestag and state emblem, which adorns the wall behind the president's rostrum.¹⁴

The Bundestag had voted in June 1987 to have the existing eagle preserved when the chamber was to be demolished. This plaster eagle, colloquially called a plump hen (fette Henne), was taken down, but sawn in 25 pieces. So badly damaged was it that it could not be used again. The architect for the new chamber wanted to install a different (and slimmer) eagle in aluminium. The heirs of Ludwig Gies, the creator of the original eagle, believed their copyright to be infringed. The union representing the interests of artists became involved. This dispute was finally settled with a compromise satisfactory to all parties. No mention is made of the fact that a parliament's wishes were simply ignored.¹⁵ The German press and television seem to have enjoyed this incident which gave rise to various cartoons and humorous reports.¹⁶

The long saga of the renovation and expansion of the parliamentary and government complex in Bonn was finally visited by a natural disaster in December 1993, when the Rhine reached levels unprecedented since 1926, flooding part of the supposedly protected building site. Finally, when Sir Norman Foster handed over the key of the now renovated Reichstag building in Berlin to Wolfgang Thierse, President of the Bundestag, on 19 April 1999, the ownership and control of the Bonn site became the responsibility of the federal government. The total costs of the protracted Bonn project with its numerous facets must have been very considerable, but those were to be dwarfed by the expenditure involved in the move of both Executive and Legislature to Berlin and the re-building of the centre of Berlin to accommodate Parliament, ministries and governmental apparatus. The re-building of the Reichstag building alone is reported in the German press to have cost DM 600 million. Naturally the embassies in Bonn were now in the wrong location and they too had to move.

¹³ Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁴ Full details as well as a number of photographs and models are found in the *Datenhandbuch* pp. 3270–3333.

¹⁵ Schindler, Peter, op. cit., pp. 3326–7.

¹⁶ An example of the press reaction may be found, for example, in the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* of 9.1.97, 'Schlanker Adler lässt 'fette Henne' vergessen', by Reinhard Urschell, p. 3.

The New Chamber and Parliamentary Transparency

The success of Behnisch's redesigned new chamber was generally acknowledged. Before we move to the next stage of the story in Berlin, further reflection on the background to the new design will enable us to understand the intense feelings that often relate to nationally important buildings so intimately linked to both history and politics. Heinrich Wefing has produced a monograph devoted to this specific building and the re-building project.¹⁷ Based on his doctoral thesis, Wefing's monograph traces the historical antecedents of German parliamentary buildings, examines the concepts used by states to present a public face in such buildings, and looks at legal precedents. Questions of symbolism, ritual and iconography are also touched on. Wefing's book is an indispensable and illuminating guide, enriched by some international comparisons (Canberra is mentioned briefly), an extensive bibliography and photographs.

Wefing deals at some length with the concept of 'transparency' that has acquired such a key identity in German parliamentary architecture, both at the federal and the state level. This fact clearly has its roots in a reaction to the National Socialist era and to the even earlier influence of the notion of the strong, generally authoritarian state, where the executive held parliaments in slight regard and met without any thought being given to public accountability. In reading his text one is made amply aware of these facts, but another fact emerges which is worth note. The way in which transparency and accountability are interpreted and finally realised seems largely in the hands of the architects: the input from the politicians; that is, the clients, does not emerge with any clarity or force. There is little sense of the dynamics of planning as a process of inter-action and negotiation between client, architect and builder. This is not to imply that this process did not occur; it is just difficult to get any sense of the machinery of consultation. This may be a reflection of the paucity of German material available to researchers in Australia, but it must be mentioned that the topic itself gets scarcely a mention in the German literature seen by this writer. Indeed, it is not easy to determine how much significant input the clients may have had in matters of detail or overall conceptualisation. Conradi's remarks quoted above seem to confirm this impression.

We may, however, be sure that like parliamentarians everywhere, the Germans were firm in their own opinions. Eugen Gerstenmaier, who was President of the Bundestag from November 1954–January 1969, recounts in his autobiography the electrifying effect that a visit to the new Parliament House in Kuala Lumpur had on the German parliamentary delegation under his leadership. A spark was ignited.¹⁸ This small incident is of symptomatic importance for what we can observe with parliamentarians generally: the degree to which the developments in facilities and premises, conditions and salaries in other parliaments serve to arouse their interest. A certain spirit of competitiveness seems to be sparked. This is not something that can be readily demonstrated, but its importance will be acknowledged by those acquainted with parliamentary culture.

¹⁷ Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit.

¹⁸ Gerstenmaier, Eugen, op. cit., p. 396.

We are also partly at a disadvantage from not having available for study the brief given by the parliamentary client to the architect: this would, we might expect, cast significant light on some important matters and the general parameters within which the architect was directed to operate. It is indeed a striking fact that these briefs are generally not analysed in any detail, nor are they easily accessible, although parts are sometimes cited briefly in works dealing with parliamentary architecture in Germany. One wonders, for example, how the briefs come to be formulated: who does the drafting, whose ideas are really expressed, how much consultation is done with all the stakeholders, including those who are permanent officers, and so on? However, it seems true that the creative conceptions which parliamentary building incorporate stem chiefly from the architect rather than the client. 'Buildings may be seen as a form of non-verbal communication in which messages are encoded by [architects] and then decoded by occupants, with probabilistic but potentially powerful ensuing effects as a result'.¹⁹ These words are worth pondering over, not only in relation to Bonn and Berlin, but to Canberra and Sydney as well.

That parliamentarians can, however, have firm views on architecture is documented in the correspondence that Konrad Adenauer had in 1949 with the prominent architect Hans Schwippert, mentioned earlier. Adenauer expressed his opposition to the use of glass and transparency in the changes to the parliamentary building which Schwippert had in mind. Curiously, the Chancellor's views did not prevail; indeed, in the chamber, later re-designed by Behnisch in 1992, Schwippert's ideas were taken much further. These same ideas also became an element in Sir Norman Foster's re-designing of the Reichstag building in 1999.²⁰

Transparency aims to bring the public into the ambit of the chamber and to avoid any sense of arcane proceedings of no relevance to the citizens. The openness that the extensive use of glass provides, also conveys a sense of accountability in that the public gains direct insight into what is taking place. The outside environment is also brought in closer; this is certainly an aspect to which people are nowadays more sensitive. The aim is also to show how the members work to serve the interests of their constituents and, on a larger plane, of the state's welfare. Of course, with the arrival of direct television transmission of parliamentary proceedings in many national parliaments, transparency has acquired a new two-edged meaning. Too much 'transparency' can lead to unfavourable public comment about empty benches and, particularly in Australia, about unedifying personal behaviour and abusive language. Part of the decline in the reputation of the parliamentary calling may be attributable to the effects of this type of 'transparency'. Naturally, transparency of the political process is very much a subjective judgement. In any case, it is sometimes argued that the real political process occurs outside the chamber, sometimes in parliamentary committees, in constituency work, or in the inaccessible close confines of political parties and other powerbrokers. The recent scandal about the illegal receipt of money for the Christian Democratic political party and the consequent damage to the reputation of former Chancellor Kohl are a blow to the idea of transparency in German politics. Now there is much criticism of the 'Kohl System' of government in Bonn and Berlin. This may have some influence on what 'transparency' adds up to in a modern state.

¹⁹ Goodsell, C.T., op. cit., p. 288.

²⁰ Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit., pp. 115–116.

A factor today which makes design of parliamentary buildings more complex, is the question of security. It is hard to credit that it was possible for a disaffected person to drive a vehicle through the closed glass doors of the new Parliament House in Canberra. In the Senate chamber in Washington a gunman has been apprehended. The environs of the Palace of Westminster has been the scene of a terrorist killing of a member of Parliament. In Germany in the 1970s the Baader-Mainhof terrorist gang succeeded in kidnapping a judge and a leading industrialist. Security of public figures became, and still remains, an urgent matter of high priority. It is quite a challenge to balance the desire to have as much architectural openness and public accessibility as possible with the concern for effective security.²¹

Reviewing the Bonn Experience

In looking back at this account of what happened in Bonn, one is struck by several features. Firstly the tortuous processes which accompanied the building programs there. Political timidity certainly played a role in postponing the decisions that needed to be made. The political powers of the time did not want parliamentary buildings to become an election issue, so on at least two occasions when general elections were due, decisions were left for 'the next parliament'. The second feature is the degree to which the members of the Bundestag changed their minds on matters that seemed settled. But it is surprising that parliamentary motions passed by the Bundestag regarding matters it deemed important were ineffectual in the upshot. Finally, it is also clear that the dynamics of parliamentary and especially party discussion on the nature of the parliamentary buildings and the infrastructure they were to provide does not emerge with much clarity. Conradi maintains that members showed a marked lack of interest in the building proposals for the Bundestag in Bonn.²²

It is also to be regretted that we have so little insight into the wider parliamentary culture in which all these issues were of such central concern. In addition to the parliamentarians there is also a large influential bureaucracy, technical and computer information science personnel and a major library, reference and research department, who have a very shadowy presence in all this discussion about new parliamentary buildings. Examination of the official records (debates, records, party minutes and official reports) needs to be made to elucidate these points. These records have not been accessible to this writer who has had to rely on secondary sources, which seem almost universally to ignore most of this primary material. There is thus still scope to add to the details given here of the history of the parliamentary buildings in Bonn.

Another facet of the situation that is implied, but not strongly delineated, is the sensitivity of German politicians to the legacy of the recent past. Architecture played an unusually emphasised role in the Nazi era. The desire to avoid the impression of any connection with the style and orientation of public architecture of the National Socialist past was a very real consideration. Hence, the avoidance of those architectural features which were prominent at that time. Striving for grandeur and an imposing presence with an accent on ceremonial use of space (large areas for parades, impressive staircases etc.) was clearly the last thing desired. The former pedagogical college in Bonn is indeed a building that could never lend itself to any aspirations of

²¹ Goodsell, C.T., op. cit., p. 297.

²² *Dem Deutschen Volke*, p. 165.

grandeur. It is in fact a bland building from the outside and devoid of any noticeable impact in its architecture or its setting.

(ii) Berlin: the New Capital and Seat of Government

Introduction

The experience gained by the Bundestag from the program to rebuild and expand the parliamentary premises in Bonn might perhaps be seen as an appropriate training school for the much more demanding program to transfer a large national parliament with its extensive, if not indeed bloated, infrastructure to Berlin. The new home of the Bundestag for its meetings and for its office bearers (president and senior members) and for party meetings was now the Reichstag building, which needed a total overhaul. Accommodation for the Upper House, for the Chancellor and Federal President, for government departments, office accommodation for members and party staffers and so on was also needed. The whole area around the Reichstag building, near the Brandenburg Gate, was designated as the official parliamentary quarter; massive rebuilding, restoration and refurbishment were all required, in some cases from the ground up. Central Berlin became one vast building lot for a period of years. Ministries scattered at various locations in Berlin were now to occupy restored existing buildings rather than brand new buildings as originally believed. The political considerations involved in making Berlin the new governmental hub of the largest nation in Europe were of a more crucial nature than those that accompanied the protracted, but also rather piecemeal operations in Bonn. But before we look at the renovation of the Reichstag building and the creation of a very large official precinct in Berlin, it is necessary to look at the whole question of Berlin as capital of the reunited Germany.

Reunification, which came so unexpectedly (officially from October 1990), caught the Federal Republic totally unprepared for a change of this magnitude. Both nationally and internationally, the occasion was of profound importance. The Federal Republic was immediately faced with issues of unparalleled urgency. Berlin had as long ago as 1949 been designated by the Bundestag as the capital of Germany if reunification were ever to occur. Bonn was clearly seen as a provisional capital. But as the decades passed, Bonn acquired the whole apparatus of multi-storey executive office buildings, political party headquarters, diplomatic premises, and so on. Heavy investment had occurred on many fronts in Bonn and, in the eyes of many, Bonn had proved itself a suitable permanent capital, free from the heavy historical and political legacy of Berlin. In addition, Bonn was acceptable to both North and South Germany, whereas the old Bavarian-Prussian dichotomy was strongly identified with Berlin. One argument used in favour of retaining Bonn as the capital of the unified Germany was that it represented an entirely new start in 1949, and one that had proved successful and, of course, free from the negative historical associations of Berlin and its ghosts.

Reunification led many political figures to see the 1990s as the opportunity to start yet another fresh page in German history, where a new image of unity and vigour could be presented in the robust and internationally famous metropolis of Berlin. Bonn was considered to be still somewhat provincial, and lacking in any potential to serve as an image for an innovative, technologically advanced state, able to hold its own on the international and European stage.

The Debate on the Site of the New Capital

The debate on where the capital should be situated was held on June 20, 1991. It created intense interest within Germany because views were divided within parties and a free vote was allowed. Three principal motions were put to the Bundestag concerning the question of the capital and the location of the organs of the state. The motion that succeeded, the one sponsored by Willy Brandt and others, favoured Berlin as the new seat of government and of the legislature. A second motion sponsored by Norbert Blüm and others wanted government and legislative functions to be divided between Bonn and Berlin. A third motion, sponsored by Heiner Geissler and others, wanted Berlin to be the seat of the legislature and Bonn to be the seat of government. Two other motions, one of which was withdrawn, wanted the executive and legislative functions not separated geographically. Helmut Kohl made an excellent speech (not in his capacity as Chancellor), supporting the choice of Berlin.

At issue was the question of the nature of the future reunified German State and its relationship to the difficult historical legacies of both pre-war and post-war history. European sensitivities could not be overlooked. In all, 107 speeches were given, most limited to five minutes in duration. The final vote where members were called on by name (namentliche Abstimmung) was close, 337 to 320, confirming Berlin as both capital and seat of federal government executive and legislative organs. This indicates the degree to which opinions were divided and can hardly be seen as a ringing endorsement for Berlin as the capital of the reunited Germany.

Initially there were grandiose intentions of building a number of completely new buildings for parliamentary and governmental purposes. The sky was the limit with regard to the quality and extent of accommodation desired. Realism set in as soon as the costs became clear. As a result, the re-use of older and often damaged buildings was settled on, but major re-building was still necessary.

The Reichstag building had been restored after the war by the architect Baumgarten, but in a way which was insufficient to make it suitable as the new home for the Bundestag. Major restoration was necessary here too. In fact, a large part of the building was reduced to the shell of the outside walls and an entirely new interior was provided. The newly restored Reichstag building was opened in April 1999 and immediately created great public interest in Berlin and throughout Germany. The influx of visitors wishing to inspect the building with its striking glass dome and its novel spiralling public viewing galleries, led to long queues and lengthy waiting. The Reichstag had declared 'open house' for the citizens of Berlin and some 24 000 persons came on the first day. Visitors still come in considerable numbers, necessitating long queues. The Reichstag website provides views of the imposing dome and details of the building.²³ Before we deal with the nature of the restoration and the discussions on how this was to be achieved, it is first necessary to place the Reichstag in a short historical and cultural context.

The Reichstag: Historical Background

A special house for the German Federal Parliament (created in 1871) was provided, after various preliminaries, in 1894 following a period of construction lasting ten

²³ The Reichstag website is located at <http://www.bundestag.de/berlin/berlin/b_doro.htm>.

years. Its architect was Paul Wallot, who won the second (1882) architectural competition. Wallot's structure, a massive, richly ornamented building with numerous pillars, pilasters, columns crowned with capitals, an impressive dome, and a large array of statuary and allegoric figures, was controversial in its day. The Kaiser had called it 'a monument to lack of taste', but recent writers now see virtues in it that its contemporaries denied.²⁴ The building was partially destroyed by arson in 1933, but the damage to it during the Second World War, and especially during the Soviet advance into Berlin, was very extensive. In the second half of the 1960s, the architect Paul Baumgarten worked on the commission to restore the building, but because of the expansion of Bonn and the shift of political weight to it, the Berlin project wilted and was in fact never officially inaugurated (eingeweiht) although the building was brought into use after a reconstruction period of 12 years. Baumgarten later disclaimed any responsibility for the result: 'As it stands there now, it is a caricature of itself. It is the work of the Federal Construction Authority (Bundesbaudirektion).'²⁵ Contrary to some claims, the Bundestag did actually convene in Berlin after the war, but the only full meetings (Plenarsitzungen) occurred in the period 1949–1965. After the Wall was built in 1961 and the relations between the two Germanies deteriorated, Berlin became a hot point of controversy in international politics between the superpowers of East and West. As a result the Bundestag as a whole no longer held any plenary sessions in Berlin, although committees and party bodies did meet in the Reichstag building as occasion demanded. The detailed data in Schindler's *Datenhandbuch* give a full account.²⁶

During the period of the National Socialist regime, the Reichstag as a legislature ceased to play any role since a totalitarian state made its functions irrelevant, but the Nazi regime kept the fiction alive that there was a Reichstag in existence. The now appointed members (almost entirely Nazi Party members) of the Reichstag met on special occasions in the Kroll Opera House, a building nearby, to acclaim major pronouncements by Hitler. Members of the Nazi Reichstag continued to receive full parliamentary salaries, allowances and privileges until the end of the war.²⁷ The Berliners, noted for their sharp tongues, called the Reichstag the 'most expensive choir in the world', reflecting their awareness of the real situation.²⁸ The building itself still housed for some time the famous Reichstag Library, one of the major libraries of the time in Germany. Hitler's plans for a new Reichstag building and an entirely new grandiose centre for Berlin, the so-called Germania project, are amply documented and need not be gone into here.²⁹

²⁴ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁶ Schindler, Peter, op. cit., p. 1500.

²⁷ Hahn, Gerhard. *Die Reichstagsbibliothek zu Berlin—ein Spiegel deutscher Geschichte: mit einer Darstellung zur Geschichte der Bibliotheken des Frankfurter Nationalversammlung, des Deutschen Bundestages und der Volkskammer: sowie einem Anhang: ausländischen Parlamentsbibliotheken unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft*. Düsseldorf, Droste, 1997, p. 409. (Veröffentlichung der Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien in Bonn). (A detailed review of this work by R.L. Cope was published in *Legislative Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 105–120.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Hahn, Gerhard; Speer, Albert; *Dem Deutschen Volke*; Richie, Alexandra; all op. cit.

During the Second World War, the Russians made the Reichstag the focus of their assault on Berlin, believing that Hitler had his headquarters in it. The fall of the Reichstag is considered by the Russians to be the end of the Great Patriotic War and the famous, still disputed, photograph of a Russian soldier showing (not hoisting as is often said) a flag from the summit of the Reichstag is reproduced across two full pages in the recently published history commemorating the 1999 restoration of the building.³⁰ That flag (or supposedly so) is in a museum in Moscow and brought out on occasions celebrating the Soviet victory in 1945. The complex circumstances surrounding the fate of the Reichstag in May 1945 are dealt with lucidly in Gerhard Hahn's masterly history of the Reichstag Library.³¹

The weight of history and German values associated with the Reichstag building can scarcely be over-estimated.³² The Bundestag debates on the return to Berlin as the capital indicate that the passage of time and the success of the Federal German Republic in its home at Bonn, changed perceptions about the importance of Berlin. The closeness of the parliamentary vote had some influence on how matters were to proceed in the re-building in Berlin. The term 'Berlin Republic' began to gain some currency, distinguishing the 1990s from the 'Bonn Republic' of the preceding decades.³³

Rebuilding the Reichstag in the 1990s: Preliminary Developments

Once the decision had been taken in 1991 to move the seat of government administration and the Parliament to Berlin, focus switched from Bonn to Berlin. There were a number of projects under way simultaneously to put this decision into effect. Architectural competitions were held for suitable designs. In 1993 three first prizes were awarded for designs for the re-building of the Reichstag. The English architect, Sir Norman (now Lord) Foster, was finally chosen to carry out the project. Foster has an international reputation and is associated with a number of major building projects in his native country, and in Europe and Asia. Other competitions selected architects for buildings to be erected next to the Reichstag itself for members' accommodation and parliamentary services. All these buildings are connected by tunnel with the Reichstag and are also within easy walking distance of it. These brand new buildings bear the names of former eminent parliamentarians.³⁴ Different architects were responsible for each of these buildings. The overall aim was to avoid any suggestion of an official uniformity in appearance. This policy gave considerable scope to creativity and a high standard of architectural excellence. In February 1992 and March 1993 there were two official Reichstag colloquia in which members of the public such as architects, artists, political scientists, journalists met with politicians to

³⁰ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., pp. 44–45.

³¹ Hahn, Gerhard, op. cit.

³² Ladd, B. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997.

³³ Habermas, Jürgen. *A Berlin Republic. Writings on Germany*. Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

³⁴ The three buildings are: Paul-Löbe-Haus, Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus, and Jakob-Kaiser-Haus. Details of the competition and the four winning proposals are given in the Bavarian Landtag's magazine *Maximilianeum*, v.12.5, January 2000. Thanks are expressed to engineer Herr Helmut Schnitzler for providing this work and photos of the winning entries with the jury's comments.

discuss proposals for the future.³⁵ The results of these discussions would be interesting to know, but are not readily available. This kind of public consultation seems not common when the planning of parliamentary buildings arises.

It is not clear how much discussion (or if any) was devoted to consideration of the existing infrastructure within Berlin, and whether the Bundestag needed to move in toto from Bonn. This may be a relevant consideration with regard to library and information resources. In Bonn there was a great need to create an adequate library and information service for the national legislature and its numerous committees. Bonn lacked any notable resources of this kind as a city. The Bundestag Library consequently became a major library in its right, with important deposit collections of national, international and inter-governmental agencies' official publications and materials from a number of legislatures throughout Germany and abroad. In Berlin there are already large libraries with the same kinds of materials. The speed with which the decision to move from Bonn and the actual move to Berlin were carried out, must have made searching consideration of issues of policy impractical. It should, however, be noted that not all parliamentary services were moved to Berlin at the same time. Some, including some library and information functions, have not yet transferred from Bonn.

The re-building of the Reichstag was preceded in 1995 by an unusual spirit of anticipation when the artist Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude completely draped the Reichstag building so that only the outline of the building's form was visible. This event created a major public spectacle, attracting large crowds of viewers and even being commemorated with its own large postage stamp. An excellent photo in a double-page spread is featured in Foster's *Rebuilding the Reichstag*.³⁶

Inauguration of the New Reichstag Building

The opening of the restored Reichstag building occurred on April 19, 1999. It was an appropriately celebrated occasion, with speeches given by the President (i.e. Bundestag Speaker), Wolfgang Thierse, Chancellor Schröder, Opposition Leader Schäuble (Christian Democrats), Peter Struck, parliamentary Leader of the Government party, and other major parliamentary figures from all parties, the Lord Mayor of Berlin, and the Prime Minister of the State of Brandenburg, within which Berlin is situated. These speeches, reproduced in full in the April 23, 1999 issue of the weekly journal *Das Parlament*, are interesting for the various viewpoints expressed about what the move to Berlin means.³⁷ Also of interest is the exchange of some sharp remarks about what the new Parliament is now to be called. It had been officially decided to keep calling it the Bundestag, but support for the name Reichstag was voiced. In this disagreement we may see yet another example of the politics of language at work.

Thierse's speech covered the history of the building and set an appropriate tone for succeeding speakers. He drew attention to the blending of the old structure and parts

³⁵ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 170.

³⁶ Foster, Sir Norman. *Rebuilding the Reichstag*, ed. by David Jenkins. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000, pp. 10–11.

³⁷ This issue also contains some excellent photographs of the new building. On page 5 is a photograph of the restaurant on the roof with the dome rising behind it.

of its interior decoration with their strong historical associations and the new political culture and modern outlook of post-war Germany. Peter Struck mentioned for commendation the work of the advisory parliamentary building committee (Baukommission des Ältestenrates). He also spoke the following words:

We, Parliament and Government, are returning to Berlin. But the move is no journey into the past. It marks the entrance into a new century, into, despite all international shadows, a future rich in chances. And: we are not coming with empty hands from the Rhine to the Spree. We bring with us the democratic traditions we have created by our work over fifty years. Those are stable traditions. We are not going from the Bonn Republic into the Berlin Republic: we will remain the Bundesrepublik. (p.6)

The speeches took particular note of the foreign policy issues of European unity and the decision of Germany to participate in the armed NATO actions in Kosovo. The latter issue had arisen at just this juncture and had caused considerable debate within Germany where the whole question of German armed intervention outside its own borders awakened echoes of former times. The seriousness as well as the historical nature of the occasion were done full justice by the speakers, some of whom recognised the added importance given to such international policy matters by the ambience of the Reichstag. The Bonn building seemed to lack this atmosphere of high seriousness.

Assessing the Success of the Foster Project

We are fortunate to have an impressive publication commemorating the rebuilding project. Its title bears the words inscribed at the entrance of the Reichstag building: 'Dem deutschen Volk', that is, 'To the German People'. This publication is edited by Heinrich Wefing, whose name is now well known to us. The book, handsomely illustrated in colour, has an important series of essays by experts in the history of the Reichstag, German architecture, the prize-winning architect Sir Norman Foster, and, most helpfully, a revealing interview with two members of the 11-member Bundestag advisory building commission on the re-building project. These men, Dietmar Kansy and Peter Conradi, give details from the inside of politics about party attitudes, relationships with architects, the dynamics of the non-public negotiations and so on which are not publicly known and yet which bring a project of this complexity to life. They were also members of the panel judging entries in the international architectural competition on the Reichstag, and reveal details about the awarding process and the three winning entries (Foster, Santiago Calatrava, and Pi de Bruijn); they explain why finally Foster was chosen to carry out the project. They speak very candidly and it is obvious that they were no ciphers in their dealings with the architects. As Conradi notes on p. 175, 'We gave the architects a lot of trouble. They had frequently to make changes and the Building Construction Company complained that they had not expected this massive intervention from the Bundestag as client.' They also explain how previous dissatisfaction with the Federal Building authorities caused the Bundestag to vote unanimously to set up its own building body (Building Construction Company) for the Berlin project; this was done jointly by the Bundestag and the Government.³⁸

³⁸ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 166.

Particularly interesting is the members' account of how the spectacular glass dome came to be built against the initial opposition of the architect, Sir Norman Foster, but at the insistence of the government coalition parties (Christian Democrats and Christian Socialists) in the parliamentary Council of Elders. The crucial decision was taken within this forum, not by the full House, but later ratified by it.³⁹ S. Calatrava, one of the three architectural finalists, later claimed that Foster had plagiarised the dome from him. Some public controversy followed.⁴⁰ The dome became architecturally the most impressive feature of the entire project and its greatest public attraction. The dome is accessible to the public and has internal walkways spiralling up it; there is a viewing terrace on the roof beside the dome, where there is also a public restaurant. Foster's recently published work on the project has numerous full-page coloured illustrations of the interior and exterior of the dome, which gives panoramic views of Berlin, as well as of the chamber below it through a glass soffit. Foster did not want a dome at all, and at one point threatened to withdraw from the project when pressed on this point, but finally agreed to the parliamentarians' desire for a dome. Sir Norman later conceded his mistake. One other point that the members insisted on against the architect was the use of blue upholstery for seating in the chamber. Blue was the colour used in Bonn and the use in Berlin was thought to link the two sites of the legislature. The shape of the chamber is not semi-circular, as in Bonn, but rather elliptical. Chancellor Kohl was one of those who did not want to retain the shape Behnisch introduced in Bonn, since it did not sufficiently emphasise the distinction between parliamentary members and the executive.⁴¹

The interview with the two members reveals how effective parliamentarians can be in dealings of this kind. They obviously brought a high degree of intelligent understanding, historical awareness and independent judgement to their task. They had the ability to withstand the commanding attitudes that architects can sometimes exhibit. The political judgment and wide historical perspective of the members may be gleaned from the following remarks made in the interview by Peter Conradi:

In Bonn we have an architecture that does not try to reduce the human dimension through figures incorporating dignity and exaggerated symmetries. We preferred relaxed, open buildings with a view of the Rhine. This picking up of the expressive forms used in modernity represented after the war primarily a conscious turning away from the buildings of National Socialism with their accent on might. This new architectural style was also an indication to those abroad that we had embarked on a fresh political start. Of course, one should not forget that this modesty also sprang from the economic necessity of the time. For me the Behnisch building reflects the best qualities of the old republic on the Rhine. It is not possible to build this in Berlin anew ... (p. 176)

Foster's contribution to this same volume, 'An Optimistic Sign for a Modern Germany', provides extra insights into the planning and the guidelines underlying the project. His chapter (pp. 180-191) sheds further light on a number of matters. It is

³⁹ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 169.

⁴⁰ Foster, Sir Norman, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴¹ *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., pp. 168-9.

interesting to realise the degree to which environmental concerns were in his mind and incorporated into the final design. He deals with these matters even more fully in his own book on the project.⁴² The glass cone which descends like a quasi-chandelier into the chamber from the dome, serves both air-conditioning and lighting concerns. The architect was also anxious to preserve features from the original building (such as decorations which had survived from 1894), and even graffiti by Russian soldiers from the period at the end of the War (Russia has asked that some graffiti not be displayed). Foster has shown a great degree of sensitivity to the historical dimensions of the building and has achieved a result which blends the old and the new with notable, but not undisputed, success.

Norman Foster has just now published his own account of the project. This has appeared, together with five other contributors' offerings, in *Rebuilding the Reichstag*.⁴³ This book is an impressive blending of text and a large range of historical and contemporary coloured photos. Together with the work in German already mentioned (*Dem Deutschen Volk*), the Reichstag project is amply documented and splendidly caught on camera.

Reactions to the re-designed Reichstag are naturally mixed. Judging by the public response, measured by the high numbers of visitors, the success is considerable. The visual impact of the dome and its interior is undoubted. The Reichstag building has once more acquired an outstanding presence in Berlin, which is enhanced by the large park-like space in front of it, its proximity to the Tiergarten, and by the way it integrates with the whole environment of this historic section of Berlin. Falk Jaeger is rather negative in his assessment:

With his (all too German) virtues of solidity and seriousness, he (Foster) has delivered a work whose perfection is simultaneously captivating and boring, a building which ultimately lacks inspiration, courage, and *joie de vivre*.⁴⁴

It may be questioned whether the term '*joie de vivre*' is a legitimate one to use in conjunction with a legislative building. His judgment seems over-severe, and it may be that he was expecting something different from what Sir Norman was asked to provide. Rita Süßmuth, the Speaker under whom the project first started, believes: 'The architecture of power has been replaced with an architecture of openness and freedom appropriate to the vision of Germany as a truly democratic society.'⁴⁵ A different assessment is offered by Heinrich Wefing in an article which deals with both the Reichstag project and the wave of new architecture appearing in Berlin. His perspective is consequently wider and less concerned with the particularities of the Reichstag building as such. He states:

⁴² Forster, Sir Norman, op. cit., pp. 244–5.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Jaeger, Falk. 'The Missing Music: Norman Foster's Reconstruction of Berlin's Reichstag' in *Kulturchronik* no.4, 1999, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Foster, Sir Norman, op. cit., p. 9.

The buildings in Berlin [in the new projects] are not united by some suspect will to power; they simply display a new sense of relaxation vis-à-vis the past. For the first time since 1945 builders and clients have regained confidence not to deny history in stone, to plaster over it or even to demolish it ... The relationship between the present and the rest of time: there we have the core of the changes. Perception of the past and future expectations have been newly codified in a contrary direction. The future is no longer a point into which to flee as in Bonn, and the past is no longer a taboo area.⁴⁶

It is easy to forget that the Parliament in Berlin consists of four separate buildings. The buildings accommodating members and parliamentary services are very large and of interest in their own right. The relationship and integration of these structures and their success as working environments need to be assessed in the light of the experience of a range of users. The striking visual and artistic effects of the Reichstag building are only the most immediate response and should not overshadow or underplay the other considerations that are intrinsic to the whole undertaking of moving the legislature from one city to another.

One aspect of the Reichstag project deserving comment is the degree to which works of art are incorporated into the building. As is usual with such public buildings, a certain percentage of the costs was allotted to works of art. Those chosen for the Reichstag project are very much of the contemporary avant garde 'high art' and 'cerebral' kind which is not out of place in Berlin with its modernist traditions. They reflect a certain contemporary taste, but we may wonder what the taste will be in another two decades. Whose taste they reflect may well be that of the architects rather than the clients. Sir Norman and his colleagues were closely involved in their commissioning. Not all the artists are from Germany and this international selection reflects the desire of the clients to go beyond a purely national image in the architecture and in the building's decoration and outfitting. German crafts in the form of ceramics and textiles, to which ordinary citizens might be expected to relate easily, are not widely used.

The political 'concept artist', Hans Haacke, has been invited by the Bundestag to install a work of art in the Reichstag. His proposal is a work of art to replace the words over the portal (Dem deutschen Volk) with the words 'Der Bevölkerung', translated as 'To the People of Germany'. This new text is said to reflect the multicultural nature of the new Germany and to move beyond the spirit of nationalism seen as implied by the existing inscription. 'After a fierce debate the German Parliament decided by a majority of just one vote to buy the work ...'⁴⁷ This episode might with some justification be said to be 'typically German'!

On a more mundane level, we may close by noting that according to press reports there was some dispute between the client and the architect about the payment of fees

⁴⁶ Wefing, Heinrich. 'Republikanische Lockerungsübungen. Der Umzug nach Berlin und das Ende der Angst vor der Baugeschichte', 1999, pp. 25–30 *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B32–33. (Title translated: 'Limbering up Exercises of the Republic. The Move to Berlin and the End of Anxiety vis-à-vis the History of Building').

⁴⁷ 'The State isn't Only Me', *Kulturchronik*, no. 3, 2000.

and some dissatisfaction with aspects of the workmanship. This is probably not unusual with projects of this scale. It forms a useful counterbalance to the euphoria and rhetoric which have accompanied the Reichstag project, which, when all is said and done, is a striking way for the reunited Germany to enter the Twenty-first Century.

A Further Parliament in Berlin: the Berlin City Members' Assembly

There is another parliament house in Berlin which has not yet been mentioned. It is the successor to the former Prussian State Parliament and is now the Berlin City Members' Assembly (Abgeordnetenhaus). This building is of considerable interest in its own right and is in certain respects more interesting to the historian of parliamentary institutions than the Reichstag. Its complex history, however, will not be dealt with here, where we will give instead a very abbreviated outline of its recent history.

Until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the state of Prussia, the most powerful in Germany, had its own Parliament of two houses. In the 1890s new buildings were provided for each house (Landtag, the lower house, and Herrenhaus, the upper house). These buildings were joined by a connecting wing. The founding conference of the Communist Party of Germany took place (December 1918–January 1919) in the banquet hall (Festsaal) of the Landtag, where Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were present. This portentous event is sometimes overlooked in the history of the building. When the Prussian state was annulled by the Nazis in 1933, one part of the building became the headquarters of the newly created People's Court which acquired a notorious reputation under its head Roland Freisler. Most of the building was, however, taken over by Hermann Göring to form, together with several other buildings, his Air Ministry in which the Aviators' House (Haus der Flieger) was incorporated. These buildings formed the centre of Göring's power base within Berlin. Opposite the Landtag building on the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse was the School for Arts and Crafts (Kunstgewerbeschule) which became the headquarters for the Gestapo which Göring had installed in Prussia. The name of this street became notorious in the Third Reich and synonymous with terror and torture. The Nazi associations of this whole area are significant.

After the War the Landtag building, badly damaged, but not destroyed, was renovated without delay and became the provisional offices of the Soviet administration. Large-scale restoration was still necessary and this began in a rather arbitrary fashion under an architect named Rey, who documented very little and apparently gave orders personally to the building contractors on the site. Initial uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the building ended in October 1949 when the German Democratic Republic was proclaimed in the former banquet hall of the Air Ministry. The Landtag building was to become the seat of the new Government. As events unfolded, restoration dragged on and the intention to use the building as a seat for the East German legislature was never realised. Instead a new building, the Palace of the Republic, became the seat of the People's Chamber. This building was found after reunification to be a health risk because of its heavy use of asbestos. There is now a suggestion that it should be demolished, but other views for preserving it are also heard. The Herrenhaus is also to be renovated for use by the Bundesrat, the Upper House of the German Parliament.

The Landtag building was next designated for the use of the Council of Ministers whilst the Herrenhaus, the former upper house of the Parliament, was designated for the use of key ministerial offices. The Council of Ministers ceased its occupancy in 1955 and the Landtag building was used for subordinate government offices, chiefly the Agricultural Ministry. But some intelligence services used parts of it as well. With the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the building became virtually isolated, since it was right by the Wall. It was apparently used as part of the apparatus of the Stasi to monitor West Berlin and prevent defectors crossing over into the West.

After the fall of the Wall in 1989 and official reunification in 1990, the former Prussian Landtag became designated as the seat of the Berlin Parliament. Berlin is a city-state within the German federation. The restored building was officially opened in 1993 and the first plenary sitting occurred on April 29, 1993. The excellent publication *Der Preussische Landtag: Bau und Geschichte*, issued in 1993 to mark this occasion, contains a wealth of detailed exposition and photos. It has been used for most of the account given here. Without this authoritative volume it would be close to impossible to recount the details given above.⁴⁸

(iii) A Brief Glance at Other German Parliamentary Buildings

Before we leave Germany, it is worth noting that in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, plans to renovate the state parliamentary building, the Maximilianeum, are proceeding after the awarding of prizes in an architectural competition. One proposal was made to remove the chamber to the roof of the existing building and to place a glass roof over it. This proposal by Günter Behnisch's architectural firm in Stuttgart was awarded a special prize and seems to have gained support from members. The example of Foster's Reichstag restoration may have influenced this idea. A final decision is to be made by the state legislature during 2000. Re-building is required because this legislature has decreased the number of its members from 204 to 180. Problems of air-conditioning and heating also require urgent attention.

In 1988 in Düsseldorf, the capital of the large state of North Rhine-Westphalia, a completely new parliamentary building, not just a renovated building, was inaugurated. This is now the new home of the state Parliament. The site chosen for this large building is on the banks of the Rhine, at a former industrial location which has been completely cleared of warehouses and wharves, landscaped and converted into a showpiece for the city. The building itself is of a most striking style, being a series of interconnected semi-circular six-storey structures with inner open spaces between the various segments of the building. The design of the main chamber shows the influence of the idea of glass as an aid to the transparency of the political process. It has been likened to an open flower in its form, which, to judge from photographs, is a good simile. The discussions in Bonn about the shape of the main chamber and about the type of architectural appropriate for modern German parliamentary democracy seem to have played a role in what was done so imaginatively at Düsseldorf. The architect, Fritz Eller, has created a building which would seem to have also influenced the rebuilding of the Reichstag by Sir Norman Foster. There is

⁴⁸ *Der Preussische Landtag: Bau und Geschichte*. Herausgegeben von der Präsidentin des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin. Berlin, Argon Verlag, 1993. (Title translated: *The Prussian Parliament. Building and History*.)

good reason to consider this building to be one of Germany's most significant contributions to public architecture in the Twentieth Century.

Works of art are used very effectively in its decoration, but although they are mostly of the modern abstract style, they seem accessible to general taste and not just that of a cultural elite. They contrast to some extent with the experimental art used strikingly, but with rather less popular appeal, in the Reichstag building. The Düsseldorf building (or more accurately, the complex of buildings), makes a powerful visual impact, but with dimensions which do not dwarf those who use or visit it. The cost of what is clearly a major piece of construction is given as DM 280 million (as at 1988), which more than favourably compares with the cost of renovating the Berlin Reichstag at DM 600 million.

The parallels which can be easily detected with the construction of a new parliament house in Canberra would suggest that a detailed comparison of both projects would be worth undertaking. It is the legislature of the largest German state, with a population of 18 million and 201 members of Parliament, elected by a mixture of direct votes and party list votes. The publications issued by this Parliament to commemorate the new building are of high standard and appear superior in quality of production and information value to similar publications available from other parliaments.⁴⁹

PART 2: PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS FOR AUSTRALIA

(i) The New Parliament House, Canberra

The New Parliament House, Canberra is now, strictly speaking, no longer new. It has been occupied since 1988 and the history of the project has been amply documented in several noteworthy publications.⁵⁰ Controversies have not been absent from this project. These centre around the enormous blow-out in its cost and on the grandeur of the project. Some have questioned whether a moderate economy such as Australia's should convey the impression of being a major power in its legislative building. The initial spate of publications, mostly reacting with enthusiasm to the completion of the project in 1988, has now subsided and comment is less frequent. Certainly a visit to the new building continues to be a tourist attraction in the national capital. The 12 years since its inauguration creates a distance which is helpful for considering aspects of the project. Whether this distance in time also gives objectivity may be a moot point. There is also a body of experience by the clients and occupants of the New Parliament House to allow us to ask questions which could not be appropriately asked of the newly completed building. Some of the themes and issues already encountered

⁴⁹ Three publications, all under the Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia's imprint, are known to the writer. They include one large-format pamphlet of 31 pages with a number of full-page coloured photos, one book with contributions on the technical details of the project (131pp.), and another more elaborate work of 160 pages with many full-page coloured photographs commemorating the project.

⁵⁰ Publications on the New and Permanent Parliament House which might be mentioned are: Fitzgerald, Alan, *Canberra and the New Parliament House*, Sydney, Lansdowne Press, 1983; Beck, Haigh, ed., *Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation*, Sydney, Collins, 1988; and particularly Weirick, James, 'Don't You Believe It: Critical Response to the New Parliament House' in *Transition*, issue 27/28, Summer/Autumn, 1989, pp. 7-66.

in connection with the parliament houses in Bonn and Berlin—with some understandable variations—emerge again. There are striking parallels and some interesting differences.

After a chequered ten-year period of erection the New Parliament House was brought into operation in 1988. It is designed to last for 200 years, but is also expected to have additions in the Twenty-first Century. When Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced, in November 1978, approval for a project to erect a new Parliament House in Canberra, a flood of political and media comment developed on the importance of national symbols, and the pivotal role of the proposed structure as the outward sign of Australian national identity and prestige. The project came to be seen as a demonstration of Australia's political maturity. The unifying and symbolic force of such a major political structure was quickly recognised. The project received a heightened profile by becoming a focal point of the 1988 Bicentenary celebrations: its completion date was set for 1988. It was opened by the Queen in May 1988. The first sittings of Parliament in its new venue began in August 1988. The project may perhaps also be understood as responding at an indefinable level to a desire to overcome some of the tensions and disunity arising from the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in November 1975. We cannot ignore, even if we have difficulty in defining, the idea of this architecture as a 'political statement'. It would seem in fact that the building, so painstakingly designed down to its smallest element, comprises a number of statements.

It was more as a result of backbench dissatisfaction with working conditions and facilities in the old Parliament House, rather than enthusiasm from the Executive for major building undertakings, which finally led to the decision to begin a project which took on dimensions few had anticipated. Initially, the rhetoric which followed this decision was predictable and on the whole enthusiastic. Great public interest was generated by the international architectural competition in 1979–1980 for a design, and the progress of the project received continuing close attention in the Australian media. As the project ran into trouble with what seemed high cost over-runs, industrial disputes and poor public relations skills on the part of the Construction Authority, media attention became less positive and parliamentary comments were at times unsupportive to the project.

None of this is unexpected with a high profile public project of such magnitude, novelty and cost, operating under very demanding time constraints. The project was also subject to colliding interests of political and parliamentary forces. Of course, the fact that the project was almost unprecedented in contemporary Australian history threw up problems of its own; the constructing and architectural authorities had few local precedents to draw on for information or guidance. The 1927 provisional parliamentary building was by its nature of only limited use as a reference point for the new, vastly grander project. The Burley Griffin town planning scheme for Canberra also imposed certain limits. All these factors are documented in varying detail in publications of the Parliament House Construction Authority, in the reports of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House, Senate Estimates committee hearings, parliamentary debates, and in other publications produced in the private sector.

The Parliament House Construction Authority issued in 1990 an invaluable documentary record of its operations entitled *Project Parliament: the Management Experience*.⁵¹ This is a publication of considerable importance to a variety of users, not just builders and architects. Political scientists and students of parliament will find it worth their attention as well, but the material may be of value for what it suggests rather than explicates to these students. Indeed, comments of the Parliament House Construction Authority seem at times cautiously mindful of the sensitivities of the political class. The peculiar nature of the political and parliamentary clients with a range of sometimes conflicting priorities and preconceptions deserves more explicit notice than is generally given. Further important information is contained in the efficiency audit report of the Auditor-General and in the response to it by the Construction Authority and the further comment by the Australian Audit Office. The robust exchange of responses between these two bodies would appear to be without parallel in official reports to the Parliament. The Auditor-General seems to have been the winner.

Reactions to the New Parliament House

In 1995 Peter Walsh, the former Finance Minister in the Hawke and Keating era, published his political memoirs and gave some forthright views on the New Parliament House project. His criticisms reflect many of the criticism generally met with regard to this project.⁵² He explains the political reasons behind the failure of the governments to curb the cost over-runs; the 1978 estimate of cost was 180 million dollars. It was 'optimistic, if not dishonest'; the politicians on the New Parliament House Committee later upgraded the building and further added to its cost.⁵³ Political and industrial circumstances at the time made the project vulnerable to 'union blackmail'.⁵⁴ Walsh refers to other grave factors as follows:

The new building moreover, was maldesigned, the main kitchen was closed within a few years—a typical architect-dominated construction, conceived from the outside in, instead of the inside out. It is also an antiseptic, isolated and impersonal place, compared with its predecessor, and is so vast it takes ten to fifteen minutes walking from one extremity to the other.⁵⁵

These are strong strictures, but not likely to be endorsed by everyone. His criticism would profit from a more analytic differentiation of points. A 1988 paper by the then President of the Senate (Sibraa) gives more detailed comments about costs which offset and balance some of Peter Walsh's charges, without nullifying them.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Parliament House Construction Authority. *Project Parliament: the Management Experience*, Canberra, AGPS, 1990.

⁵² Walsh, Peter. *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*. Sydney, Random House, 1995, pp. 157–161.

⁵³ Warden, James. *A Bunyip Democracy: the Parliament and Australian Political Identity*. Canberra, Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1995, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Walsh, op. cit., pp. 167–158.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵⁶ Sibraa, K. 'Australia's New Parliament House', in *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 69, no. 3, July 1988, pp. 160–167.

Another point made by the former Finance Minister concerning the 1927 Parliament House is, however, likely to gain wider support, or at least sympathy:

... at the risk of being sentimental, I do not believe a nation so young, should dump the limited heritage it has.⁵⁷

His comment about dumping our heritage will be considered again later in this paper when the Parliament of New South Wales is dealt with.

When we review the sizeable body of literature on the new Parliament House, one word jumps out at the reader: *symbol*. So various is the use to which this word is put that one comes in some cases to doubt that it has a definable meaning.⁵⁸ Certainly the strict sense of 'symbol', as used in philosophical discourse, seems inappropriate to much of its use with regard to this building. One of the difficulties that some commentators seem to experience is finding adequate language to express the impact that the building makes. The language chosen is sometimes over-stretched and too elevated to sustain itself in the long run. If, as the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor maintains, the true symbol defies characterisation, then the abundant attempts to characterise the new Parliament House as symbolic appear problematic.⁵⁹ But, of course, there are strong reasons why a building of this kind should seek for ways to express meanings going beyond purely architectural ones.

The competition documents, which set down the guidelines on what the architects should seek to realise in their proposals, indicate that the finished building should represent or convey the image of Australia as a nation. The task of the entrants is described as providing a building that is more than merely functional: 'it must be a symbol of nationhood and commitment to the democratic process of government and it must relate sensitively to its total environment.'⁶⁰ 'The Authority is convinced that, when completed, the building would be an outstanding National Symbol of which all Australians could be justly proud.'⁶¹ The building should 'express the aspirations of the nation and ... symbolise virtuous political principles.'⁶² Symbolism is defined by the Parliament House Construction Authority as the 'image ability of the building, given the significance of the site and the role of the building'.⁶³ In her speech opening the new building, the Queen spoke of its distinctive Australian character, adding:

⁵⁷ Walsh, op. cit.

⁵⁸ Freeland, G. *Canberra Cosmos: the Pilgrim's Guidebook to Sacred Sites and Symbols of Australia's Capital*. Sydney, Primavera Press, 1995.

⁵⁹ Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 479–481.

⁶⁰ Parliament House Construction Authority. *Parliament House Design Competition: Report on Winner's Design*. Canberra, The Authority, 1980. Processed, 25 leaves.

⁶¹ Parliament House Construction Authority. *Australia's Parliament House 1988. The Competition Process*. Canberra, The Authority, 1980, p. 4.

⁶² Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 36.

More than ten thousand men and women can take great pride in the parts they have played in the creation of this symbol of Australian unity and democracy.⁶⁴

Some of the ideals associated with the rebuilding of the Reichstag re-emerge here with a similar understanding of the nature of democracy common to both structures. The great differences between the two projects is that in Berlin the redesigned building already carried a heavy load of associations and significance. In Canberra it was necessary to create a different level of significance and to make a building which in some respects would also be an 'educational picture book in stone' for all Australians. But we should also be mindful of the prerequisites of the site that spring from the Burley Griffin town-planning scheme for Canberra. There were some important design and aesthetic parameters established before the Parliament had left Melbourne. The importance of an orientation to the landscape of Canberra was one of the most significant of these. But within those parameters the architects have created what is akin to a 'total work of art' with an integration of all elements and details to their overall vision.

The emphasis on the public's free access to each building (Bonn, Berlin, and Canberra), and the openness of proceedings in the chambers is not conveyed 'symbolically', but in specifics of design and materials chosen (glass, for instance). But the question might be asked whether those features and the implication that the building is somehow the 'people's house' have an underlying reality or are simply a pleasing intellectual construct.⁶⁵ One should not forget that 'the people' have limited or indeed no access to large parts of the building. The flagpole at Canberra is seen by most commentators to be of symbolic importance. Some writers see it as being of negative symbolic import, but perhaps it is stretching credulity too far to claim that 'for many citizens [the placement of] the current flag [on Capital Hill] is also [a statement of conquest]'.⁶⁶ With such a range of rich associations possible in the nature and placement of a flag, we might expect many additional perceptions to be held by citizens as well. Ivor Indyk puts the matter well when he states:

The colonnade is the sign of an entrance, the walls define the limits of the place, the flag mast declares this place to be of national significance—it is as if the basic sense of possession had been performed, and marked out, so that the process of building might now begin.⁶⁷

Argument about the nature of symbols, icons, allegory and metaphor, and about the most appropriate means (linguistic, pictorial, statuary, decorative, representational, abstract, etc.) to convey or embody values, political principles, national myths and so on, can easily consume much energy and passion. Language can be made to do strange things in such cases, especially if the disputes are surrogates for arguments about power, control and prestige. The writings on the new Parliament House do

⁶⁴ Speech by the Queen at the Opening of the New Parliament House, Canberra, on Monday 9 May. [Typescript, 1988.]

⁶⁵ Indyk, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁶⁶ Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶⁷ Indyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43.

indeed offer their authors ample opportunity to show all these rhetorical possibilities and the pitfalls of language. We may perhaps take Horatio's advice to Hamlet against becoming absorbed in abstruse or fruitless speculation, where the danger becomes 'to consider too curiously'. The nature of the project, however, makes this admonition unlikely to have much effect and symbols are perceived in what seem to be unlikely places. Indyk sees, for example, the placement of the Prime Minister's suite as conferring on him the role of *concierge*, the caretaker of the democratic process, rather than its ruler.⁶⁸ This notion is more likely to cause humour than assent.

One article reflecting sophisticated personal impressions from a visit to Canberra in 1988 to inspect the recently opened building is John Carroll's 'The New Parliament House: the Monument to 1988'. Carroll's account reflects some interesting attitudes, such as an earlier scepticism about the role of Canberra as the capital, firm views on Australian parliamentary culture and about the nature of a parliamentary building to incorporate it. He discusses the political forces which led the Fraser Government to undertake the project. The building is, he avers, 'in part oriented to tourism: tourism empties out everything it touches, even under an educational gloss.'⁶⁹ This may be an extreme, even heretical sentiment, but it is worth pondering as well. Perhaps it is more justified than many would like to acknowledge. Parliamentary education is a new growth industry which has support on all sides.

Carroll believes that the dimensions and design of the building impact unfortunately on parliamentary culture, where 'the human element' becomes reduced or lost. He is also of one mind with former Senator Peter Walsh about the jettisoning of heritage. He strongly defends the virtues of the old Parliament House and would like the legislature to return to it. 'The old Parliament was right for Australia. It symbolised the nation and its style of democracy at their best.' But at the same time he praises as well. He sees much good in various aspects which he singles out, and his overall impression of the building as a monument is positive: 'The new Parliament House is a building of singular architectural merit, and it fits into the grand town plan of Burley Griffin, bringing it to a brilliant completion.' His strong quarrel is with specific elements in the design and with the way traditional parliamentary culture is subverted. In particular, the two chambers are called the 'explicit catastrophe' of the new building: the one is like a 'bull-ring', whilst the other is like an 'expensive pink bordello'. Selective quoting from this article does not do it justice: it is both thoughtful, based on appreciation of parliamentary history and candid in its likes and dislikes. Even though Carroll expresses unfashionable views, he obliges the reader to re-assess the merits of the argument. Some of his criticism, seen in the light of 12 years after, do not seem to have been vindicated, but the principles he points to or implies are still open to discussion. As an expression of strong immediate impressions from the new project, the article is an admirable effort and it would merit a place in an anthology of political writing in Australia.

Burley Griffin and Landscape

The Walter Burley Griffin legacy and its relationship to the natural setting in Canberra have already been mentioned. Landscape in the vision of this American town planner

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁹ Carroll, J. 'The New Parliament House: the Monument to 1988.' *Quadrant*, vol. 34, March 1989, pp. 30–35.

and architect is the one major factor in the siting and design of the new Parliament House. It poses challenges to architects and planners and represents values which are intrinsic to the idea of Canberra. Those values, 'the language of landscape and natural forms'⁷⁰ may be open to interpretation and dispute, but they cannot be escaped. The prize-winning American-Italian architect, Romaldo Giurgola, has written intriguingly about landscape and its influence on the design of the new building. The intertwining of the two themes of landscape and symbol is also a recurring motif in the writings on the New and Permanent Parliament House.

In his important prize-winning article on the challenges and implications of the new Parliament House project, Terry Fewtrell refers to the influence of Burley Griffin's American ideas of democratic government on the siting of the parliamentary building on Capital Hill and the nature of the capitol building he had in mind.⁷¹ He does not explicitly deal with this architect's views on symbolism and landscape. These two topics have received close attention in the writings of Peter Proudfoot, an academic with architectural expertise. Proudfoot has variously analysed how Burley Griffin's writings have impacted on Giurgola, and has made some surprising claims about esoteric ideas concerning chthonic and cosmic forces being employed by Burley Griffin and his wife in architectural terms. He states:

Giurgola draws a veil over the true nature of the Parliament House design in his writing, denying the ancient paradigms which underlie the geomantic matrix established by Walter and Marion Griffin: the geometry to which his work in fact responds.⁷²

Just how seriously these claims are to be taken may be left to the test of time and the analysis of those experts best placed to offer sound assessments. It must be reiterated that writings about the New Parliament House by Giurgola himself contain ideas which indicate an imaginative and poetical strain in the architect. There is also at times a quasi-mystical note discernible in his two important papers of 1986 and 1988. These are the Ian McLennan Oration of 1986 and the A.S. Hook Address of 1988, two documents of basic importance to students of the New Parliament House. In the 1988 Address, Giurgola talks about the 'spiritual dimension' of a building. He states, for example:

Buildings based on these kinds of principles [i.e. those he advocates] are not intended as impositions but rather are generated by the natural state of things; they are buildings which can reach out to make connections without being in submission and which have the possibility of formulating a symmetry between the cycles of the natural environment and products of the rational mind.⁷³

In the 1986 Oration he expresses the hope that the finished project will:

⁷⁰ Indyk, op. cit.

⁷¹ Fewtrell, T. 'A New Parliament House—A New Parliamentary Order?', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 64, no. 4, December 1985, pp. 323–332.

⁷² Proudfoot, Peter. *The Secret Plan of Canberra*, Kensington, NSW, University of New South Wales Press, 1994, p. 109.

⁷³ Giurgola, Romaldo. The A.S. Hook Address, *Architecture Australia*, vol. 77, 1988, pp. 73–75.

... achieve the kind of unity one senses as being part of a great community, where the contributions of it are not measured according to self-interest, but rather by their meaning for others and for the human community at large.⁷⁴

These sentiments do not seem to exist in the same universe as the realities of party politics in Australia. This is not to say that some of the idealism of Giurgola's position is out of place; his writing does indeed oblige us to look at the building from unexpected perspectives and even suggests overlooked (and even unrealisable) possibilities. With regard specifically to the landscape and setting of the new house, he explains in his A.S. Hook Address that the impact of Canberra's natural environment, which he relates to the plans of Burley Griffin, made the architects determined:

That the building configuration must not impose its presence on the top of the hill, but should rather be comprehended visually with the help of the natural elements and the surrounding sites.

This forms some of the motivation for placing the building within Capital Hill, rather than on it. Part of the building is actually underground and the grassy mounds over the building give public access up to the crowning flag pole. This feature is said to be a symbolic representation of the supremacy or dominance of the public will in the democratic system. How many of the public would think this idea other than a poetic fancy? Proudfoot comments in several places about the literary source of some of the architect's inspiration.⁷⁵ That does indeed seem to be case. But Proudfoot makes a further point which has a force that cannot be ignored: 'Despite Giurgola's rhetoric, there remains the distinct dissatisfaction with the perceivable gap between the aerial plan view and the experience on the ground.' Symbols have to be perceived to be able to exert any effect, however we might want to interpret that effect. Giurgola's views are, however, far more convincing when he talks about the place of the arts and crafts in the project. These will be considered later.

Guy Freeland's account of the way a visitor to Canberra would perceive the new building provides a different orientation from that of other authors already mentioned. Like Proudfoot, he believes that the reality of the building is at odds with the architect's ideas and he analyses Giurgola's intentions with both sympathy and scepticism. Freeland's text, which has not appear to have yet received the attention it merits, contains an abundance of useful observations and common sense.⁷⁶

In Canberra, but not of Canberra?

In Franz Kafka's novel *The Castle*, the castle looms over the village at its foot as a controlling, ominous presence. A similar picture could easily have been the result of a monumental new official building on Capital Hill. Without wanting to strain the

⁷⁴ Giurgola, Romaldo. 'Architecture More Than a Building.' (Fourth Ian MacLennan Oration), *Architecture Australia*, vol. 76, 1987, pp. 43–46.

⁷⁵ Proudfoot, Peter. 'Canberra, Landscape and Symbolism in the Parliamentary Triangle', *Populous Places: Australia's Cities and Towns*, ed. by A. Rutherford. Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1992, p. 84.

⁷⁶ Freeland, G., op. cit.

analogy beyond what it can stand, it seems that Giurgola was anxious not to have the New Parliament House seen in this light. It was not to be divorced from the environment and community in which it is situated. The desire to avoid an impression of dominance and remoteness is seen in the way the building was placed in, rather than on, Capital Hill. The architect's sensitivity to landscape and the integration of the elements of his building to the environment has already been explained. The success achieved is generally recognised. But there are still points about the building and its site which deserve comment.

The first point to be made is that the site is one exposed to all the influences of Canberra's sometimes harsh climate. There is no shelter from wind, rain or snow as one approaches the building. In addition, the location at the summit of a steep rise means that none but the fit and young would be anxious to walk to it. It may be questioned whether much thought went into ways of approaching the building other than by vehicle.

The monumental scale of the interior of the building is another aspect which may have, over time, a psychological effect of dwarfing the occupants in ways which could evoke a range of diverse individual responses. Loss of a sense of intimacy, which was present in the old building, may be unsettling to those who come from it to the new building. There is no information readily available on such matters, but the recent suicide of a federal member of the Lower House has been attributed in part to the way in which the parliamentary building isolates those working within it and thus prevents the kind of close personal contact helpful to persons undergoing emotional crises. They can become isolated from one another within the building and at the same time they are isolated from the community outside its walls. It would be interesting to ascertain if levels of sickness, resignation and morale among permanent staff can be correlated to cast light on these points. There is some belief that the fully air-conditioned environment of the new parliamentary building in Sydney has led to problems such as these, but the matter of occupational health in parliamentary buildings needs research.

The nature of the location of Parliament House and its relative remoteness from the homes of the inhabitants make it different from the other parliaments mentioned in this paper. Berlin, Bonn and Sydney, not to mention Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth all have parliamentary buildings which are within easy reach of pedestrians and the main thoroughfares of their respective cities. There are other kinds of problems for some of these buildings, but of course most of them do not have the advantages of the landscape setting enjoyed in Canberra. Someone has jokingly referred to the new building as the 'forbidden city'. The self-enclosed nature of the structure does indeed suggest such an image of a place where one is cut off from the world outside whose destiny it nevertheless controls. Such a view makes claims about the 'people's house' and national unity questionable.⁷⁷ The phenomenon of popular political alienation which is mentioned frequently in Australia has not been assuaged by the New Parliament House.

There are obviously advantages and disadvantages in any setting and it is a matter of weighing up competing factors. With regard to the gathering of specific information

⁷⁷ Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 112.

on questions of 'user satisfaction' about the New Parliament House in Canberra, there is the important research carried out by Terry Fewtrell as a follow-up to his 1985 paper discussed above. In his second paper of 1991, Fewtrell asked federal parliamentarians their views on a number of questions relating to the new house, contrasting them with their expectations and their experiences in the old house. His data form a valuable barometer of views soon after the move to the new house and will be useful if further surveys are carried out.⁷⁸ What is surprising and a weakness in his survey is that only members of Parliament are interviewed and not officers of the Parliament and ordinary staff. Members' views are certainly important, but since most of them work only part of the year in the building, it is obviously insufficient to disregard the experience of the others who spend their entire working life in it. Sometimes the most revealing sources of information on the questions of how a building works come from those who are not in glamorous or high profile positions, but are instead those who carry out lesser tasks. The remarks by Peter Walsh about the kitchens of the new building prompt questions which could perhaps be best answered by kitchen staff. Have the officers of the Parliamentary Library, for example, found their expectations about their new quarters realised or not, and so on?

One recurring complaint about the New Parliament House, and one that comes also from parliamentarians in other parliaments where large-scale building changes have taken place, is the loss of the previous good informal relations and camaraderie that existed between members across party lines. Malcolm Fraser has mentioned this as an undesirable effect of the new building. Such subjective judgments should be taken seriously, but they do also need to be accompanied by some evidence for their validity. Parliamentary culture and parliamentary sociology are not generally as closely understood by architects as they need to be if architectural changes are to preserve some of the psychological aspects important to members of Parliament. The same could be said about the choice of works of art and craft, and of furniture styles; not all members and staff are comfortable with pieces with which they now have to work and live, even if they are selected by panels which include members of Parliament.

The economist would ask a different set of questions about the costs of running the new building, comparing them with comparable costs elsewhere. The Clerk of the Senate published in 1998 a paper dealing with the cost of the Commonwealth Parliament.⁷⁹ This paper, unfortunately, does not cast any light on the costs of running the new building, but it is valuable for other uses relating to public expenditure on parliamentary government in Australia. The question of interest to us is one that requires clear parameters and detailed research. This paper is not the place for that. Perhaps the topic might recommend itself, difficult as it may prove to be, to one of the future Political Science Fellows sponsored by the Federal Parliament.

Artworks and Craftworks in the New House

Most commentators seem agreed that the works of art and the craftworks in the New Parliament House are one of its great successes. The large number of artists and groups commissioned to produce items is considerable and the quality and range of

⁷⁸ Fewtrell, T. 'A New Parliamentary Order? A Preliminary Report', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 50, no. 1, March, 1991, pp. 84–93.

⁷⁹ Evans, H. 'The Cost of the Commonwealth Parliament: Amalgamations, Values and Comparisons.' [Typescript, 20 August 1998.]

items produced are outstanding.⁸⁰ They represent an excellent cross-section of Australian artistic achievement of the 1980s. Ivor Indyk's sophisticated essay 'The Semiotics of the New Parliament House' analyses the role allotted to the crafts and to materials such as timber in the overall conception of the building. He relates the arts and crafts to Giurgola's vision of the integration of architecture, landscape and human dimensions. He states:

It may be a heavy burden to place upon the arts and crafts, but the architects would have us see them as the products of a community rooted in the soil, a language formed from the elements of nature accessible and intelligible to all. In these ways then, the new Parliament House bears out Giurgola's definition of the relationship between architecture and nature, 'to perform art within nature, by nature, and of nature.'⁸¹

The presence of artworks with some Aboriginal association is another noteworthy feature of the project. Michael Tjakamarra Nelson's striking forecourt mosaic is principal among these and is often reproduced in publications on the building. It has found a mixed reception and is, according to John Carroll, 'a pseudo-Aboriginal mosaic which looks like a flattened vegetable omelette.' Carroll is not impressed by the art works. For him 'The building is littered with modern art—sculpture, painting and tapestry, in content either infantile or meaninglessly abstract. Even were the art of value, what is it doing here? This is a Parliament, not an Art Gallery.'⁸² These are personal sentiments which will raise strong reaction in many other visitors, yet the point Carroll makes about parliaments being art galleries is worth considering further.

As representative buildings, visited by distinguished overseas personalities and of course by many ordinary tourists and citizens, their decoration and outward appearance are important elements in their overall impact. The message they convey is not irrelevant to the politics and prestige of the country. The type of decoration appropriate for them is determined by various considerations. Certainly one might have misgivings if it is primarily the taste of the architects that is reflected in them. There has been little note made in Australia of the discussions which surrounded the type of decoration used in the Nebraska State Capitol where the sculptures and other works of art are a celebration of the industry, agriculture and other aspects of the State of Nebraska. These are largely allegorical depictions and are not of the modern abstract school of art. This seems an entirely reasonable attitude to take, provided that the works are done by skilled artists. Quality is important as well as message. The results in Lincoln, Nebraska appear very suitable and while to some eyes they may be old-fashioned, they are readily understood, convey their message clearly, and are not likely to become dated in the way that happens with taste in modern painting, for example.⁸³ There is justly said to be a 'multi-cultural' aspect to the works of art in the

⁸⁰ Parliament House Construction Authority. *Australia's New Parliament House*. Canberra, the Authority, 1986; Smith, D. *Interpreting the Art and Design of Parliament House. a Guide for Senior Secondary Schools*. Canberra, Parliamentary Education Office [in conjunction with] Built Environment Education Working Party of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1989.

⁸¹ Indyk, op. cit., p. 46.

⁸² Carroll, J., op. cit., p. 31.

⁸³ Luebke, Frederick C., ed. *A Harmony of the Arts: the Nebraska State Capitol*. Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Canberra building.⁸⁴ It might be said that this aspect is not inclusive enough of all cultures and peoples now represented in the Commonwealth of Australia. The Chinese presence seems, for example, to be largely lacking, which is regrettable when we consider the Nineteenth Century role of the Chinese in Australia. No doubt the same could be said for other cultural groupings. There is always the risk that the pressure groups and those most vocal get more attention than those who are quiet and content to stay in the background. Politics rather than other factors generally seem to dictate the outcome.

Carroll's strictures are not likely to be widely shared, but in the matter of works of art there is no hope of achieving unanimity of response. The passing of time has a winnowing effect and it may well be that in representative buildings such as parliaments a periodical replacement of some items is desirable. Indeed, parliaments are built to last generations, so it would be surprising if redecoration were not necessary periodically. What is a real danger is that the fads of taste of certain key players might run amok and destroy or damage what are national assets. To guard against these dangers, parliaments need to establish (and adhere to) guidelines ensuring that where changes are decided, what is no longer in favour is still preserved in some other location. Works of art no longer fashionable have a habit of coming back into vogue. Parliaments have not had a good record on preserving the items they have collected over the decades. This is particularly true of furnishings and movable items. Their libraries are now in the firing line and valuable state and national assets are being lost (by sale, sometimes) for the very temporary gain of some money for the annual budget. From some points of view, parliaments should not be organisations that undertake other than minimal levels of collecting. They are not really organised in a way to guarantee that the funds in this area are spent for real advantage. The changing rule (and policy orientation) and variable taste of political masters do not create the continuity and certainty that are essential for organisations that collect. The perspectives are different in each case and the parliaments should focus on the central issues which are relevant to their principal role in society.

Perhaps public confidence would be reassured in parliaments as collectors and custodians if they were better at publicising their activities and in giving periodical accounts of the way they manage the state assets entrusted to them. It is almost impossible to know how the collections of the parliaments, that is, their works of art and of craft, their china, silver, paintings and prints, furniture and furnishings, their historical archives and library collections of books, records, files and audio-visual materials are being cared for, preserved and recorded. It is not easy to ascertain, for instance, whether they have policies about receiving and retaining gifts of items and bequests. We seldom hear of stock-takes, but theft and wear and tear must be factors affecting them as they affect other institutions. What is the value of these national assets, are they insured, are they inventoried as they should be? How active are auditors-general in this respect? One expects that the answer in the Federal Parliament is affirmative, but it would be useful for the Presiding Officers to present a report on their stewardship to the nation once every five or so years. Collections involve a burden of continuing responsibility for their care and study; Carroll may be right to ask the question we have highlighted, but the answer is not readily found. More is said on this topic when we discuss the Parliament of New South Wales.

⁸⁴ Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 77.

The building and the question of political identity

The New Parliament House has given rise to a range of writings of a high standard, even if the temptation to hyperbole is occasionally evident. Authors' impressions cover many aspects and this variety of points of view is instructive. The majority of the writings mentioned so far have been essays or contributions to books dealing with specific questions, such as the influence of landscape on the architectural style, the place of works of art in the design, and so on. James Warden has, however, produced a monograph which differs in important respects from the publications so far mentioned. His monograph, a veritable *tour de force*, uses the new building as a basis for discussing a whole bundle of political and parliamentary concepts, which he relates to the completion of the project and the occupancy of the new building. His work, entitled *A Bunyip Democracy* (1995), published as one of the series of monographs produced by Political Studies Fellows of the Federal Parliamentary Library, is a searching discussion of ideas in relation to the parliamentary institution and the ideology of politics. The book's sub-title, *The Parliament and Australian Political Identity* indicates a wide scope, and it is the author's ability to bring together a surprising number of strands, touching on a host of questions and phenomena in the process, which commands respect. The monograph broaches many of the political and parliamentary themes of the 1980s and earlier, and could well be studied as an expression of the attitudes of that era. Warden's monograph is mirrored by an address he gave in 1995 in the Senate Occasional Lecture series. The address is to some extent a brief version of his monograph and is also an impressive piece of work.⁸⁵

The Bunyip Democracy is founded on a broad base of historical discussion and a wide knowledge of the literature of political science and of parliamentary government. It has a comprehensive bibliography which has a few surprising omissions. The introduction by Tom Uren MP deserves explicit mention. Uren justly praises the work for tackling contentious questions, and for 'stirring the possum'. He opines that the book 'will make an important contribution in the democratic process of our parliament and our nation.' He also makes one perceptive criticism that pinpoints a certain uncertainty in the author's handling of his own role. This may explain the varying tone of the monograph, which is sometimes didactic, sometimes ironic or explicit, and sometimes witty. It is partly scholarly and partly polemical, with brilliant passages, especially in the earlier sections of the work. It is a tightly compacted work, containing much more than can be easily absorbed in one reading. Above all, it is full of perceptive remarks and insights that illuminate a difficult topic. For example, one might refer to his remarks on 'gendered architecture' (p. 84) which is one of the few occasions on which this idea appears in any of the literature reviewed in this paper.

The argument of Warden's monograph is complex and needs a depth of analysis which cannot be given here. One might, for example, follow up his remarks on p. 42 about the new building reflecting the concept of the citizen and how this causes us to 'reunderstand' existing institutions:

Parliament House is no longer just an expression of democracy and nation, but of citizenship, democracy and nation. So, while the original 1980s ideas inherently to be expressed in the building were democracy,

⁸⁵ Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., and 'Parliament, Democracy and Political Identity in Australia', *Papers on Parliament*, no. 25, 1995, pp. 47-64.

openness and identity, additional concepts must be added in the form of republicanism, participation and citizenship.

His remarks on the use of language are often penetrating and clinch his line of argument. In mentioning that 'the people who come to Parliament House are called *visitors*', Warden defines the theme of the 'people's house' (sometimes called the People's Palace) in convincing terms:

While the parliamentary security people comment anecdotally [sic] that visitors are impressed and have a clearer sense of value for money, there is no suggestion that the people have a sense of ownership of the Parliament or of Parliament House. They just visit it occasionally and pay taxes to foot the bill ...

One wonders how James Warden's formulation of matters of political identity and of parliamentary democracy might now be affected by the unequivocal results of the referendum on the republic. Political identity and political behaviour are two sides of a coin; it would be good to have more on the 'behaviour' side than we are offered. His work reflects some of his own political beliefs, but without any sense of ideological commitment as such. His understanding of 'political identity' is indebted to many sources and is rich in its implications. For the purposes of this paper, the great benefit of his work lies in the manifold way he links the New Parliament House, its style of architecture, its decoration and its setting, to broad political and social phenomena and to issues of political theory. It is a stimulating work to read and deserves a wide audience.

If a revised edition is produced it would be useful to have the author tell us how he personally experienced the New Parliament House. He presumably spent his Fellowship year in it, but reveals no personal impressions at all. Buildings influence patterns of behaviour, and these in turn may have political relevance. This is an intriguing topic which James Warden is well qualified to discuss.

To conclude this selective review of publications on the New and Permanent Parliament House, mention must be made of James Weirick's lengthy, informative article which is both a detailed literature review and a distillation of most of the lines of argument made about (and against) the project up to 1989.⁸⁶ It also introduces important additional arguments and observations. This article, published in the architectural and planning journal *Transition* is a far-ranging study of the project, based on a more elaborate context than is generally the case, but suffused with a polemical spirit. Weirick, head of the Landscape Unit at the Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction of the then Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, draws on both published and unpublished material to provide a rich analysis of the competition's parameters (the Canberra setting, the Griffin legacy), the elements of the winning design, the influence of modernist architectural tendencies, the nature of the American architectural profession and the career of Aldo Giurgola, and the characteristics of Australian parliamentary and political life. It is remarkable how much the author has covered in his article and how well he is able to illuminate the

⁸⁶ Weirick, James. 'Don't you believe it: critical responses to the New Parliament House', *Transition*, issue 27/28, Summer/Autumn 1989, pp. 7-66.

undercurrents as well as the all too obvious main features of the project. His scope is as much cultural as architectural and the result is both stimulating and provocative. Weirick's attitude to Giurgola is at times puzzling because the tone seems resentful. It suggests that there may be some unstated reason for his negative remarks, although he quotes other writers who praise the architect. Weirick is strongly of the school of thought that believes that Australian values were unfulfilled by having an overseas architect determine the design of our national legislature. Remarks about the 'Canberra power elite' and its self-interested role in the competition's outcome need more convincing argumentation and documentation to support his case.

The author makes the following claim:

The inescapable reality of the New Parliament is that the curved walls, the entry portico, the long facades of the House and Senate offices, the block house mass of the Executive Wing and countless other elements suggest nothing so much as the suborned rationalism of Mussolini's Italy (p. 61).

This description implicitly raises questions rather than states facts. It is another example of the power of the project to arouse a 'poetic' strain where words convey attitudes rather than simple unambiguous meaning. But this is not to deny that there is ample reason to take Weirick's overall analysis seriously and to be grateful for its direct confrontation of interwoven cultural, historical, political and architectural themes. 'Don't You Believe It' is a major contribution to the debate on the merits of the Canberra project, reflecting attitudes of its time and possibly of Melbourne architectural circles. It will be interesting to see how it stands the test of time and maturing perceptions, and the evidence of actual experience.

Conclusion

It is a truism that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The same might be said about the merits of architecture. No one view is likely to command total agreement. While some views may be of greater authority than others, it is possibly the judgment of time that must be the final arbiter. In complex structures such as the New and Permanent Parliament House, we would need also to assess the experience of those for whom it is their working environment over a period of time. Some of these persons are members of Parliament who periodically spend concentrated periods of time in the building; others are permanent officers and staff who may spend most of their working lives in it. Empirical evidence would be useful to have in an area where so many opinions vie for attention.

One aspect of the building which has not been dealt with in this paper is the incorporation of ministerial offices in the new house. This policy decision is mentioned by Weirick, Indyk and Fewtrell in particular. The coupling of the legislative and the executive functions in one structure highlights the 'forbidden city' impression that was alluded to earlier. It may well be asked whether ordinary citizens are aware of the fact. If they are, they do not seem troubled by it. Perhaps developments in the parliamentary and political process may one day make the issue more important than it seems at present.

The time is now approaching when a fresh monograph, or better, a symposium, on the New and Permanent Parliament House might seem worth undertaking. The period of

euphoria as well as animosity and even resentment is past: but is it yet too soon for sober assessments to be attempted about the justification of the project, the design deficiencies which may have surfaced, and the influence of the building on the nation's political class and on parliamentary government? The question of cost-benefit to the nation needs some research as does the real rather than supposed effect of the sophisticated information and research facilities on the processes of scrutiny and policy assessment in the national legislature. The range of writings reviewed here suggest how complex such an assessment might be and how necessary it is to have a variety of viewpoints from more than a narrow group of participants. Consensus is hardly to be expected, but a clearer idea of what are legitimate arguments (rather than just personal impressions) might emerge. An acquaintance with even a few of the publications reviewed above will convince doubters that issues of genuine importance are at stake. We should likewise recognise how our perception of the role of public architecture has been greatly enhanced by the numerous writers on the New Parliament House. Their passion and strong attitudes cannot leave us unmoved, even if they do not necessarily invite agreement.

(ii) Proposals for Extra Parliamentary Accommodation in Sydney

Introduction

The focus of this paper now changes by introducing a personal element. What follows is based on the author's personal experience and recollection of the planning procedures in the 1970s at the New South Wales Parliament, when major extensions to the existing Macquarie Street building were undertaken. While no claim for any special insights or privileged knowledge can be made, the reason for recording these matters is that there seem to be few writings by parliamentary officers of Australian state parliaments on the internal parliamentary planning and bureaucratic mechanisms in such major parliamentary projects. This is especially the case if we wish to know about procedures that are not related to the accommodation and facilities for the elected members and for ministerial needs. These receive a fair amount of notice and analysis, and are often the chief focus of select committee inquiries. Infrastructure for services and subordinate parliamentary activities tends to be relegated to back of stage. The one great exception seems to be information technology, now playing so great a role in parliamentary and electorate work. A good example is the article by T. Wharton⁸⁷ that gives a detailed insight into the procedures followed in the Federal Parliament in planning for the information technology and data processing requirements of the New Parliament House. These needs take in an ever-widening range of services and hardware. There is, on the other hand, little available on the negotiations or other means whereby requirements are determined for meeting the varied and sometimes diffuse needs of parliamentary services such as catering, cleaning, storage and archiving, public relations, educational facilities and infrastructure, library and parliamentary reporting needs, to mention a few.

The State Parliamentary Buildings: the Victorian Example

Australia has nine parliament houses, most of which have been renovated or expanded in the last 25 years, yet strangely enough there is no overall survey of them. It is a curious, little remarked fact that the parliaments give very little ongoing information

⁸⁷ Wharton, T.H.G. 'The Development of Computerized Information Systems for the New Parliament House in Canberra', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 69, no. 2, April 1988, pp. 90–94.

on the important buildings in which they meet. Information is scattered in small pamphlets issued for visitors, but anyone seeking information in depth is likely to be faced with a difficult search. The state parliament houses deserve a scholarly monograph of their own because they are historically, politically and architecturally of intrinsic interest and importance. Dating for the most part from colonial times, these buildings form an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage. Their history is sometimes difficult to unravel; it is different in each case. They have also experienced controversy and vacillations on their future over the years. With the considerable changes in parliamentary needs (e.g. information technology, parliamentary education), and the altered ambit of government in the Twentieth Century, these buildings, erected for the quieter tempo of colonial legislatures, have become increasingly unsuitable for the modern functions they have to serve. Dissatisfaction has been expressed by members of most of them over decades, about the inadequacies under which they have to perform their parliamentary duties, but for the most part executives, long reluctant about upgrading, renovating or even re-building existing premises, have in recent decades taken the hard decisions. Major expenditure has occurred, for example, in Brisbane, Sydney, Perth, Hobart, and Darwin. In some of these cases, political courage was necessary for the state government to spend money on their parliamentary building. Such decisions are almost invariably unpopular with the media, who seem partisan rather than objective in their assessments. While public perception of parliamentary self-indulgence may be based largely on ignorance, it may be also argued that the parliaments are woefully deficient in making the public aware of the conditions under which members and parliamentary staff work and the way the parliamentary process is hampered by poor accommodation, and deficient facilities. The media rarely provide information on these matters, but they readily report items that cast a poor light on personal behaviour or party intrigues.

The case of the Parliament of Victoria is a topical example that shows some of the predictable and unpredictable occurrences associated with carrying out major work on a parliamentary building. The Victorian Parliament, with its impressive façade and its ideal central location in Melbourne, but its unfinished state, is acknowledged to be inadequate for the primary legislative and political tasks that it now carries out. These deficiencies have been recognised for many decades, but unlike almost all the other Australian states, the state of Victoria has been reluctant to grapple with a problem that is admittedly thorny. The completion of the building has never had a place on the priorities of the Executive until the election of the Kennett government.

Premier Jeff Kennett had expressed the view soon after taking office that the Victorian Parliament's heritage building, begun in 1856, but never completed and in particular still lacking a dome, should be finished. The dome seemed to receive more comment than it might intrinsically warrant; the example of what happened in Berlin might be considered in this respect. The parliamentary building suffers from a number of problems, chief among which is lack of adequate accommodation for members working in the new information age. It is an expensive building to maintain adequately, especially as regards the elaborate and ornate interior and the exterior. Provisional quarters for some members are available in a structure (nicknamed the 'chook house') in the parliamentary garden. At first all parties agreed on the need to complete the structure, and an estimate of 80 million dollars to carry out the project seemed settled. This 'gentleman's agreement' did not last, however, when disputes about the quarrying of stone to finish the building led to some industrial and political

agitation. In 1996 the Premier said that the withdrawal of Labor Party support had scuttled the project. Legislation to abolish the Parliament House Completion Authority was enacted in 1997. During the discussions about the building project, estimates of costs rose from 80 to 230 million dollars. This naturally caused considerable public and parliamentary disquiet.

New ingredients were added to the debate on the project by Premier Kennett suggesting that the site of the Parliament might be moved to the western suburbs at Jolimont. Another site at Melbourne's Federation Square had also been mentioned at one stage. Finally, with the defeat in 1999 of the Kennett government, the idea of completing the building seems to have been dropped completely, although the inadequacies of the existing premises remain. It should be noted that the Victorian Parliamentary Library, possibly the finest and most valuable of all the state parliamentary libraries, has long suffered from lack of proper accommodation for its irreplaceable collections. Outside storage has been one palliative that has been tried, but the break-up of the collection has started and is an inevitable outcome of the failure of the political masters to resolve an issue that can scarcely ever be publicly popular.⁸⁸ The idea of moving the legislature to a new location, one of the few new ideas advanced in Australia about the problems of existing parliament houses, is a reasonable option if one considers economic, demographic and geographic factors. Also the way people and government work is now radically changed by the use of information technology. One day 'e-lancing' (freelance working by computer from locations not necessarily in a central office) might have a counterpart in a form of 'pe-lancing' (parliamentary e-lancing), but this is an idea ahead of its time. Other options might be explored as well, but first the objectives being sought have to be determined. This is generally the aspect that is least satisfactory in discussions about parliament houses.

The Parliament of Queensland is now carrying out extensive renovation to its old Parliament House, built in 1868. A ten-year project to replace the building's outer perimeter with fresh sandstone began in 1993. In the 24-storey annexe, built in 1977, refurbishment has been proceeding for some time. The annexe building is having trouble with the lifts, the air conditioning and with power costs. It too is reported to be short of accommodation for parliamentary committees and other needs not envisaged in the original brief. In 1992 Speaker Fouras advocated 'a three-floor extension' to the annexe building (*Courier Mail*, May 22, 1992). Another problem has been discovered in part of the historical original building where termites are active. The parliamentary annexe is unlike most other Australian parliamentary buildings in that it also provides overnight accommodation for members, including the Premier's penthouse suite. The 1977 building was notable for setting the standard for its time among state parliamentary buildings. Its design was much studied by visiting members from other parliaments in Australia, including members of the New South Wales Parliament. In another respect Queensland has set a standard: this is in the care it has devoted to the preservation of the heritage aspects of the old Parliament House. The interior, with its fine colonial furniture and craftsmanship, and the famous O'Donovan library collection, are all maintained as a showpiece for the state and for the nation.

⁸⁸ I am grateful to officers of the Victorian Parliamentary Library for a number of newspaper clippings and references on the completion project.

The New South Wales Parliamentary Building: Developments in 1999

In July 1999 the New South Wales Public Works Department held a special workshop of members of Parliament, parliamentary officers and staff from the Department to discuss planning strategies for proposed new accommodation for the New South Wales Parliament. For the purposes of a historical background a paper was presented by R.L. Cope, entitled 'Parliamentary Accommodation. A Personal Record of Experience and Views'.⁸⁹ It attempted to outline the main planning procedures followed in the 1970s when the new building was built; it also reviewed both the successes and failures of the planning results. The paper concluded with suggestions of how a successful planning process might be achieved in the complex context of the political and institutional culture of parliaments in Australia. It seems generally the case that this culture is too little understood by those outsiders who come to have dealings with the parliamentary institution. This in turns leads to frustrations and misunderstandings for consultants, architects and technologists. The account in this section draws heavily on this earlier paper.

No official announcement has yet been made concerning the Executive's decisions about what is to be done with regard to parliamentary needs in Sydney. Indications point to larger decisions being considered, embracing a far-reaching re-development of the Macquarie Street area. An integrated program taking in legislative, executive and judicial needs seems the option most favoured at present. Of course, public criticism of a project just for parliamentary purposes, especially after the 1980 building project was supposed to solve needs for decades to come, will be dampened if the scheme adopted goes far beyond parliamentary needs. Plans have arisen earlier for re-developing the Macquarie Street area, and we may also be reminded of the town-planning concerns that arose in Bonn when parliamentary accommodation was under review.

The historical context of the New South Wales parliamentary buildings must be briefly outlined in order to provide an adequate understanding of some deep-seated attitudes about the buildings that continue to have influence, even in the present day.

Historical Aspects of the New South Wales Parliamentary Buildings

The New South Wales Parliament occupies part of what was, in colonial times, the Rum Hospital, dating from 1811–1819. It is consequently a building of considerable heritage, historical and cultural importance in Australia. It is one of the very few buildings from that era which has been in continuous use since its erection. Its inadequacy for parliamentary purposes, particularly after bicameral representative government was inaugurated in the late 1850s, soon became apparent, and led to an architectural competition being called in 1861 for an entirely new structure. An award for the prize-winning entry went to an architect in Dublin (Henry Lynn), whose neo-gothic extravaganza was fortunately never built. Succeeding decades gave rise to sporadic calls for a new building, while the existing building underwent innumerable ad hoc additions and renovations. Parliamentary debates are full of humorous and caustic comments by members on the conditions of their accommodation and working facilities. Little sensitivity can be detected in the way the Parliament used a building of such intrinsic heritage significance until very recent times. It is probably true that

⁸⁹ Cope, R. 'Parliamentary Accommodation. A Personal Record of Experience and Views'. [Typescript, 1999.] Copies available from rcope@ozemail.com.au.

even now parliamentary recognition is still deficient of the burden of responsibility that occupancy of this building and its historical site imposes. As former Senator Walsh noted in his autobiography, we are not rich enough in cultural heritage to be able to ignore or undervalue what we have.

Because of the vacillations of successive parliaments and governments, the flexibility for re-development of the parliamentary site grew steadily circumscribed. When the Mitchell Library wing was opened in 1910, and the Public (later State) Library of New South Wales was built in the 1930s hard by the parliamentary site, the Parliament was hemmed in by the State Library with its ever-growing collections and needs, and on the other side by Sydney Hospital with its needs to expand. It also transpired that part of the land the Parliament occupied belonged in fact to the State Library. It was ultimately returned to the Library's control when the major multi-storey new State Library building was erected in 1988 on Macquarie Street. The proposed height of the new State Library had to be amended so that it would not be higher than the adjacent Parliament House: symbolism was of concern here.

Over the years various departmental and select committee reports were made, but yielded no tangible results. In 1955, Douglas Darby MP, member for Manly, suggested that the Parliament be removed to Bathurst. This suggestion, at the time thought rather fanciful, is to-day, with government departments being decentralised to locations outside Sydney, not as extreme as it formerly was. The pioneering research publication of the New South Wales Parliamentary Library entitled *New Parliament Buildings, Sydney: Proposal from 1856 to 1969* (second ed, 1970) is still the best source for locating an account of views and proposals on parliamentary accommodation. Reference should also be made to the illustrated book *Australia's First Parliament* (1987), issued to commemorate completion of the new parliamentary building and the refurbishment of the historical Rum Hospital section of the old building.

Memories of New South Wales State Parliamentary Planning Processes in the 1970s

When the decision was finally made to proceed with a new building for parliamentary accommodation, the Parliament set up a Joint Committee of members to deliberate on the needs and details of the program. This Committee called on submissions from interested parties, and as Parliamentary Librarian of the time the present writer contributed views. Individual departmental heads and their staffs were called on to prepare their own specifications and to discuss these with the project architect, Andrew Andersons. The Parliamentary Committee maintained overall control, but in practice left much decision-making about matters of detail to Andrew Andersons, to whom much credit for the building must be given, and who had the expertise and taste to guide the Parliamentary Committee on the overall concept of the project and on matters of decoration, furnishing and presentation.

There was from the parliamentary side little co-ordination between parliamentary departments and services. Each department did its own planning without consulting other departments or having any insight into what others had in mind. The co-ordination lay in the hands of the project architect who had to show a strong degree of negotiating and diplomatic skill since there were undercurrents of competitiveness and suspicion among some of the key parliamentary officers. The chief motivation

behind much of the in-house planning of the time seems to have been to do away with the existing and long-suffered deficiencies of the building. This reactive character characterised all the planning of members and staffs. In other words, it was the responsibility of the project architect to provide any vision of the future or consideration of long-term developments. The lack of expertise or any attempt at training of parliamentary staff to equip them to carry out the elaborate and time-consuming tasks necessary for planning a major new building reveals how unsophisticated and even naive Parliament's own efforts were at the time. This reinforces the remarks above about the key role of the planning architect. Without his creativity and professionalism the project could have turned out to be yet another 'official building' lacking any distinction.

The chief focus of planning was to provide parliamentarians with better personal accommodation and facilities than they had ever enjoyed in New South Wales. In the light of what has happened since 1980, it is evident that the understanding of the time about what constitutes essential working facilities was too narrow. Too much was dictated by what was wrong in the past, rather than by any thought of what might be needed in the future. Perhaps the desire for more 'glamour' and prestige in the new building, fuelled by the splendid example of the new parliamentary annexe in Brisbane, was at the cost of what the building should provide for basic services, storage and upkeep costs.

The New Parliamentary Building's Features

The site's grave limitations, with two 'immovable objects' on either side of it (Sydney Hospital, and the State Library) and the heritage nature of the old building with its Rum Hospital origins, were major constraints. Premier Kennett's suggestion that the Victorian Parliament should move to an entirely new location never found any echo in Sydney, where this option seemed then unthinkable. The site continues to have serious limitations, but the lack of political vision over decades has reduced options to very few; earlier bad decisions are now all too obvious and increasingly expensive to the state.

The new building was obviously superior in every respect to what had existed before. It provided individual office accommodation, dining facilities, an indoor swimming pool, and underground parking which might be described as relatively luxurious in comparison with earlier times. Special features such as indoor gardens, the ample and architecturally striking fountain vestibule and the judicious display of artworks made the building something of a 'museum-showpiece' for Sydney. The building received a great measure of public and professional acclaim and was seen as being of international standard for a legislative building. Indeed, the architectural authorities had stated that the building, designed as an organic unit, should not be altered without their sanction and approval. This was gradually disregarded or circumvented within the Parliament, which gradually started altering here and there until some real damage was done to the initial concept of the project. Here we see the unequal relationship that exists between architects and Parliament.

One aspect of the project architect's overall planning that caused misgivings at the time was the decision that the new building should contain uniform furnishing and outfitting and that little of the Nineteenth Century cedar furnishings should be used.

There were some concessions made to this decision in specific instances, but a great quantity of material was simply removed from the site when demolition of some parts was carried out. This does not reflect well on Parliament's responsibility as the custodian of the state's heritage consciousness.

The standards set by the new building have proved impossible to sustain. Visitors would not be aware of this fact, but those who have or who still continue to work in it would have experienced the decline. Much of this is the result of political developments, such as more committees and hence more staff to service them, the growing presence of executive staff and control within Parliament House, and severe budgetary constraints affecting the maintenance of services at the former level.

The new building provided good quarters for the New South Wales Parliamentary Press Gallery. Originally this accommodation was cost free, but it is understood that rentals may now be charged. The location of these quarters within the building has been a difficulty since press personnel, at best a group whose job makes them liable to 'cut corners' and set their own standards of behaviour, could gain access to almost the entire building. The manner of their use of the refreshment room facilities led on occasions to comment because of the behaviour of a few media representatives. The power of the media influenced aspects of the planning of the new building because of their strong pressure group presence. Some parliamentarians as individuals have mixed feelings about the privileges and access enjoyed in Parliament House by media representatives, but the attitude of political parties tends to be more cautious. Obviously both groups have an interdependent relationship and each lives off the other.

The parliamentary dining rooms—there are three as well as a staff cafeteria—were an instant success, but they have not been economically viable. As long as Treasury subsidies continued to maintain them (and the rather special prices charged for meals), there were no worries, but those times are passed. The dining facilities are now often used by organisations and groups for private functions for which the Parliament receives payment. The parliamentary dining rooms in Canberra and Melbourne are experiencing financial difficulties and this causes us to ask whether something is fundamentally wrong or unrealistic in the planning of these services. It is a subject on which it is not easy to find much information or objective discussion.

The theatrette in the new building was an excellent addition and has made meetings with public attendance possible. But the location of the theatrette is now proving unsuitable in times where security issues and control of the movement of people in the building require monitoring in a way not so vital when the feature was planned in the 1970s. A similar situation exists with the location of the Parliamentary Post Office; the public reach it by crossing the entire ground floor entrance lobby.

Parking has been mentioned above. It has proved a continuing worry and a matter on which the rules and guidelines are subject to continuing trouble. Members have been hard to discipline on their entitlements, and cases where family members wish to park at Parliament House are well known to staff. Since members now must pay for this entitlement, it seems some of them believe that they now 'own' a continuing parking spot and this in turn leads to dispute and policing difficulties. Originally parking in the 1980s was available to members and staff. The pressure from the executive for

parking has proved irresistible and staff parking is now considerably reduced. The parking issue highlights the inadequacies of the site where there is the poorest possible public vehicular access. It is possibly worse than in any other Australian parliament.

Finally, the planning of the building shows deficiencies with regard to the public's presence. The space available for public exhibitions is poor and there is a lack of adequate cloakroom and toilet facilities. This is especially evident when groups of young schoolchildren visit the legislature.

In a fully air-conditioned building, the quality of the control of the atmosphere is vital. A member of Parliament has publicly stated (July 2000) that her intention to resign from Parliament has as one cause health problems stemming from smoking by members penetrating the air-conditioning system. Although the parliamentary workplace is said to be a 'smoke-free zone', there is reason to believe that some members disregard this regulation. Although this is not a design fault of the building itself, it is worth noting that fully air-conditioned premises cause unexpected problems since they are dependent on technology functioning according to specified norms. If there are power failures, lifts and other systems are affected, and fail-safe mechanisms may not be as reliable as they are supposed to be. There is plenty of evidence of this happening in Sydney, to look no further.

Previous sections of this paper have mentioned that the nature of parliamentary culture is not widely understood by outsiders. Members of parliament represent a cross-section of the population and their patterns of behaviour are correspondingly varied and alter with the influx of new members. There is a common core of interests and attitudes to members as a class, but the variables of behaviour and individual needs cannot be easily generalised. Architectural solutions which are on too elevated a plane are not likely to be widely successful in meeting the diverse range of needs of the parliamentary clients. There must always be tensions between the ideals of architects and the pragmatic concerns of members of parliament. To resolve those tensions becomes one of the challenges for those designing parliamentary accommodation. Of course, provision must be made in architectural terms to adapt to changing needs. Too much 'set in concrete' will prove a mistake in the long (or even short) term.

Works of Art and Other Collections in the Parliament of New South Wales

Like the other parliaments described in this paper, the Parliament of New South Wales had works by artists and craftsmen provided in its new building. A great many were specially commissioned, while others were purchased. The result added a sense of prestige and culture to the building. The choice of items acquired seems to have been largely in the hands of the project architect. Works included oil paintings, prints, the specially commissioned courtyard fountain designed by Robert Woodward, ceramics and weavings, and items of appliqué embroidery. While the quality of the prints which were acquired for members' and officers' rooms was high, those actually placed on walls in individuals' rooms were not always acceptable and were exchanged for others. In some cases, members or their staffs simply privately swapped with others the prints they did not like; this led to problems with the inventory. In the case of one prominent oil painting—the portrait of Patrick White by Brett Whiteley—it was not regarded kindly by some influential politicians and for a

period it simply 'disappeared'. The Judy Cassab portrait of Robert Askin, which was the property of the Parliament before the new building was built, continues to suffer the same fate even to-day. An interesting side-light on parliamentary collections is given in an article in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* (2 June 2000) concerning the purchase by a no longer serving President of the Legislative Council of exceptionally expensive silver tableware for his private dining room. The newspaper reports the items cost more than 60 000 dollars. Presiding officers do not publish annual accounts of their administration and are in some respects shielded from accountability. The present example is perhaps extreme, but how are we to know?

These few instances underline the difficulties that can arise in selecting and acquiring works of art acceptable to the tastes of such a disparate (and changing) group of persons such as members of Parliament. Since they rightly regard the parliamentary building as their home, they feel justified in suiting their own taste with regard to decoration and furniture. The aspirations of architects to create a stylistic, uniform and harmonious decor has little chance of success if the members do not feel comfortable with the result. Parliamentarians are not likely to be easily bound by rules in this and other matters.

One great oversight of the new building in Sydney was a reflection of the spirit of the time; the failure to include more than a token piece or two of Aboriginal art. The writer of these lines had pushed hard to have in the Parliamentary Library a ceramic mural by the Aboriginal artist Thancoupie, but this never came to pass. This is still a matter of regret. The New Parliament House in Canberra has fortunately been more enterprising in this regard and acted accordingly. What is also troubling is that the ceramic pieces (by Janet Mansfield, for example) bought for the new building in Sydney have been given scant regard and are no longer on display. Some seem to have been broken. In retrospect, it seems ill-advised to have placed them on tables in open areas. The Parliament is a working environment with heavy movement of persons during session. It is not as controlled or disciplined an environment as one finds in museums and galleries, and can consequently not offer the same level of care or respect for works of art and decorations.

The new building was erected originally in response to long cries from the Parliamentary Library for adequate accommodation for its extensive culturally and politically important collections. In the upshot, the planning of the new library was at a late stage gravely impaired by a personal decision of the Premier of the time to move the location of the parliamentary theatre. This affected ceiling heights in the library stack underneath; consequently the stack did not have the space originally requested, that is, space enough to house 250,000 volumes. This change is not mentioned in the commemorative book on the completion of the project, but on p. 77 project architect, Andrew Andersons, states:

Work on the sketch plans proceeded satisfactorily in 1974, but in 1975 was subject to extensive change by Premier Lewis who required the inclusion of a television studio and associated facilities in the building. At

the same time, [the Clerks of both Houses] obtained more generous facilities to accommodate the growth in Parliamentary staff numbers.⁹⁰

The Library started life in its new location with a potential deficit of space that became increasingly problematical. This is not the place to go further into the fate of the Parliamentary Library and its collections of heritage value.⁹¹ The question should be raised, however, whether parliaments should properly become collectors of works of art, specimens of craftsmanship and collections of books, other than what is needed for pragmatic reasons and for day to day information and research requirements. What is now increasingly clearer is that the costs and responsibilities (not to mention the expertise, and levels of appreciation and historical knowledge) for parliaments to be collectors on other than a limited scale are no longer as easily met as was formerly the case. The nature of the parliamentary institution has also changed and may change even further, further affecting the rationale and fate of such collections and the investment of public money in them. Such collections are in essence a reflection of Nineteenth Century ideals and mentality. Their validity in parliaments in the Twenty-first Century is surely ripe for re-assessment.

Conclusion

Parliamentary buildings are generally built to last more or less indefinitely. The same used to be true of other major public structures. However, the sale and demolition of the multi-storey State Office Block in Sydney, built by the government to house most of its public service departments only some three decades ago, shows that this need not remain the case. It seems, in retrospect, folly to build a parliamentary building designed to last for 200 years, as is the case in Canberra. The level of continuing public investment required, the impossibility of foreseeing changes in politics, in technology and in social needs, are all at variance with building on this basis. This is a debatable matter, but one that would benefit from closer analysis of basic attitudes that are becoming irrelevant to present-day realities.

The fact that the New South Wales Parliament is no longer adequately housed and resourced in a building of such recent vintage (planned in the 1970s and occupied in stages from 1980 onwards) should give us pause. But based on the author's memories of the planning procedures of the Parliament at that time, it must be conceded that there is much to suggest that short-term perspectives, political rather than parliamentary priorities, and some self-interest will determine how planning is to be undertaken. Perhaps this is to adopt too pessimistic an outlook? Certainly the range of options available to architects and planners at the existing Macquarie Street site is very limited. They were limited in the 1970s, as Andrew Andersons' text already quoted makes abundantly clear. In the year 2000 they are even further limited.

To overcome these limitations calls for creative thinking able to envisage new and different roles for parliamentary representation in coming decades. If, as we hear

⁹⁰ *Australia's First Parliament: Parliament House New South Wales*. Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 1987. Illustrations of Henry Lynn's 1861 prize-winning design for a new Parliament House are reproduced, pp. 42–43.

⁹¹ R.L. Cope. 'If special libraries are disappearing, why are parliamentary libraries surviving?' *Australian Library Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4, November 2000, pp. 307–326.

nowadays, the American Congress needs ‘reinventing’, so does the New South Wales Parliament.

Changes in the Australian polity are occurring at a rapid rate, with political parties feeling the pinch. More women are being elected to parliament, but parliamentary traditions and arrangements are not noticeably geared to this fact. The question of ‘gendered architecture’ becomes an issue. More Independents are being elected. Their accommodation and service needs throw up challenges, especially if there is a need to keep the Independents housed apart from other members. But beyond these obvious developments, there is the slowly growing momentum for public involvement and participation in the processes of consultation. Talk of participatory democracy has not yet led to many concrete results, but as Carmen Lawrence advocated in a recent speech:

It is possible to do much better [with parliamentary government], to open up decision making, to involve more MPs and engage the wider community, to actually thrash out the issues in real debates [and not just the existing empty rituals]. Australia was once considered the ‘democratic laboratory’ of the world. It’s time to conduct a few new experiments to revive our body politic and embrace principles openness, accessibility and accountability.⁹²

These are interesting ideas, even if they sound utopian and lack concrete detail. They deserve public discussion and input not only from the politically aware but also from a spectrum of social interests, including architects. Perhaps it is time for Australian parliaments, especially those of the states and territories, to look in fresh directions away from the strong models in Washington and Westminster. Have these models served their purpose? Should we look for new Australian-grown models or, at least, formulate new aspirations, which may well require some re-thinking on the score of parliamentary architecture. This idea is developed a little more fully in the last section of this paper.

(iii) Political Communication and Parliamentary Buildings in Australia

The reviews of the various parliamentary buildings touched on in this paper make it clear that architects and parliamentarians share a belief that the buildings play a role in the process of political communication. The role is often formulated in rather elevated or abstract terms, using vague words such as ‘symbol’. These buildings can indeed be seen to serve symbolic and representational purposes with which the citizens of the country can identify. But other possibilities of political communication can be discovered as potentially available in and through parliamentary buildings. One relates to the educational and information resources of the parliamentary research and information services.

In the paper referred to above, this author has argued that parliamentarians are ‘over-resourced’ as regards access to information in comparison to the rest of society. The

⁹² Lawrence, Carmen. ‘Renewing Democracy: Can Women Make a Difference?’ Address to the Sydney Institute, 17 August 2000. Available at <http://www.carmenlawrence.com/says/papers/sydneyinstiti.htm>.

resources at their disposal are abundant and heavily used by them during the limited sessional periods when parliaments meet. Should not those resources, not duplicated elsewhere, be made accessible to the community the parliamentarians serve? Such an idea is not new, although it is novel in Australia. The German Bundestag Library planned a special reading room with separate entrance for the public in the design for its new quarters in Bonn. Because of the creation of Berlin as the new seat of the government and the legislature, this proposal did not proceed as planned in Bonn, and this writer is not certain of what is to happen in Berlin. The case for the Australian parliaments enlarging the access of the public—under appropriate conditions and safeguards—to resources built up at public expense is not as revolutionary as it might appear. The benefits are easily explained and the improvements that could flow from the idea to the image and role of parliament in a time of ‘participatory democracy’ are not hard to grasp. Implications for parliamentary architecture spring to mind. It will be interesting to follow the course of consultation and decision-making to be adopted in New South Wales if the proposal to increase parliamentary accommodation, or more likely, to redevelop the official enclave in Macquarie Street, Sydney. Architects will, whatever the outcome, be assuredly heavily involved.

(iv) Concluding Remarks

Consideration of parliamentary buildings throws open a range of questions about important political, social, cultural and architectural issues. A few of them have been touched on in this paper, and reference to many other writings and views on the topic have been given on the way. Political scientists and public commentators in Australia have been aware of the rich implications of this topic, but there is still much more work to do to define the topic more closely. In particular, the state parliaments are worthy of far closer attention than they have hitherto received.

One of the conclusions that may be drawn from the account of the Australian parliaments is that their occupiers, sometimes called the ‘temporary kings’, are, as a class, remiss in keeping the public adequately informed about the quality of their ‘housekeeping’. The amounts of public money spent on these buildings and the services and staff they house are not inconsiderable, but to obtain current information on the cost of upkeep of the buildings and a range of other related questions is difficult. Despite the provision of annual reports (of varying degrees of value and accountability) by parliamentary authorities and departments, there is no report published devoted to the actual parliamentary building and its preservation and use. It is almost impossible to obtain an informative and current picture of the present position of these buildings. This is not to suggest any impropriety on the part of the parliamentary authorities, but rather a lack of awareness of the degree of public interest their houses, the ‘people’s house’, arouse.

In 2000 this does not seem an unreasonable request, nor is it one difficult or expensive to satisfy. Australian parliament houses deserve their own periodic reports published for public benefit and general interest of all. The presiding officers of the Australian parliaments will perform a valuable service to the community if they produce reports of this kind.