

GRAND DESIGNS: PARLIAMENTARY ARCHITECTURE, ART, AND ACCESSIBILITY

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Abstract: *The phrase ‘grand designs’ is used in political science and international relations, as well as in architecture. The buildings that house parliaments and legislatures are often appropriately grand, for they represent the highest aspirations of their states. While many legislatures use updated versions of ancient Greek and Roman architectural styles, there are instances of striking new parliamentary buildings, such as Oscar Niemeyer's Congress buildings in Brasilia, Louis Kahn's Parliament buildings in Dacca, and the refurbished Reichstag in Berlin. There are also pertinent examples of indigenous architecture in the legislatures of countries such as Fiji and Samoa. Some states attempt to incorporate the principles of democracy – including transparency and accessibility – in their public buildings, but others do not. In this regard, it is significant that American, Australian, Canadian, and Scandinavian legislatures are far more accessible and open than the New Zealand Parliament.*

Keywords: *Parliaments, legislatures, architecture, art, accessibility, transparency*

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INTRODUCTION

It is hugely humbling to stand here before you as a professor in the oldest political science programme in New Zealand.¹

The School of Political Science and Public Administration was established at the Victoria University of Wellington in 1939. When I moved from the University of Canterbury to Victoria University in 1981 there were two professors in the School – the late John Roberts, and Margaret Clark, who I am delighted to say is still a highly valued colleague.

Margaret Clark and John Roberts were preceded as professors of political science at Victoria University by only five people, none of whom held the post for very long. Leslie Lipson, Robert Parker, and Stephen Milne all left New Zealand to continue their academic careers overseas, while sadly Ken Scott and Ralph Brookes both died tragically young. I should add, however, that I am

¹ This article is a revised version of an inaugural professorial lecture delivered at Victoria University of Wellington on 5 August 2008. My son Evan once asked me whether I was embarrassed by the fact that several of my former students were full Professors while I – their former lecturer – was at that stage ‘only’ an Associate Professor. I replied, in all honesty, that I would rather have been an Associate Professor who had climbed Mt McKinley / Denali than a full Professor who had not. The presentation of this inaugural lecture allowed me to acknowledge, with some satisfaction, the pleasure I felt in having reached *both* heights.

especially honoured by the presence at tonight's lecture of Ken Scott's wife and daughter, Constance Scott Kirkcaldie and Caroline McGhie.

Major texts in New Zealand political science (books that are still frequently consulted today) were published by three of these first five professors after they had left Victoria University – Leslie Lipson's *The Politics of Equality*, Ken Scott's *The New Zealand Constitution*, and Stephen Milne's *Political Parties in New Zealand*.

The first footprints on the beach-head of the systematic study of New Zealand politics were made by people with very large shoes that still, roughly half a century later, are difficult to fill. As a Maori proverb states: *Ma mua ka kite a muri* – those who lead give sight to those who follow.

NON-PUBLICATIONS

A long time ago, in a simpler era, there was a body called the University Grants Committee, the UGC, which funded New Zealand's universities. When I first arrived in New Zealand, the chairman of the University Grants Committee was Sir Alan Danks, a former professor of economics at the University of Canterbury. He was an 'old school' professor – a teacher, a scholar, and an administrator, but with very few publications. Indeed, if you look up Alan Danks in this university's library catalogue, there are just two works by him, one of which is the Danks Report on Official Information, for Sir Alan was the person who chaired the committee that recommended the structure of the Official Information Act in place in this country today.

Sir Alan once gave a wonderful lecture on his *non*-publications – on the long list of articles, books, and chapters that he had meant to write but for a variety of reasons had never got round to doing so. In the same spirit, here is my list of *non*-inaugural lectures.

The first professor of political science with whom I taught, Professor Keith Jackson of the University of Canterbury, was a major influence on my academic career. He mentored me long before universities in this country began using the word 'mentoring'. A chapter in one of Keith Jackson's earlier books was about New Zealand's constitutional development and was entitled 'Look No Hands'.² As a result, in memory of Keith (who died in 2007) I seriously considered giving an inaugural lecture entitled 'Look No Teeth: New Zealand's Constitution in Comparative Perspective'. However, I decided not to, at least in part because I wanted to avoid analysing Mike Moore's recent ruminations on the topic.³

Another person I greatly admired died in January 2008. In 1991 I was privileged to visit the hospital Sir Edmund Hillary established in Kunde, Nepal. Sir Ed's vision for the betterment of the lives of Nepal's Sherpa peoples, his practical implementation of his plans in this regard (including chairing the Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) organisation in New Zealand), and his participation in the ill-fated 1975 Citizens for Rowling campaign all lead me to believe that there is ample scope for a lecture entitled 'Summit Diplomacy: The Political Philosophy of Sir Edmund Hillary'. More time is needed to develop the topic, but I hope to turn my ideas on his outlook and work into an article in due course.

Instead, I have combined 46 years of studying comparative politics *with* more than half-a-century's active photography on all seven of the world's continents *and* a long-standing personal and professional interest in architecture to give a lecture entitled 'Grand Designs: Parliamentary Architecture, Art, and Accessibility'.⁴ Having analysed the 2005 election for Television New Zealand in a 'virtual parliament' – which was, in reality, a featureless green room – I am now

² Keith Jackson, *New Zealand: Politics of Change* (Wellington: Reed Education, 1973), pp. 17-32.

³ See, for example, Mike Moore, 'Banana republic risk, without the bananas', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 January 2008; and Mike Moore, 'Constitutional arrangements – what's next?', *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 2008.

⁴ Specific references in this article to parliamentary or legislative buildings are generally to ones visited and photographed by the author [eds.].

going to look at some real buildings.

THE PHRASE *GRAND DESIGNS*

The title for this lecture has been chosen deliberately. The use of the phrase ‘grand designs’ often refers to the dreams and aspirations of political leaders.

For example, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity* is the title of Jeffrey Glen Giauque’s book about American and European leaders’ plans for reshaping Western Europe after World War II.⁵ Likewise, in his book *American Foreign Policy Since the Vietnam War*, Richard Melanson asks, ‘What were the grand designs, strategic objectives, and tactics of the Nixon (Ford), Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush foreign policies?’⁶

In a speech towards the end of her reign as Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher once claimed that the British ‘tend to approach things in a rather different way from some of our partners in the European Community ... we are cautious about grand designs and blue-prints’;⁷ while Adolf Hitler, on the other hand, had grand designs not just for the fate of Europe but also, per medium of his favourite architect, Albert Speer, for the buildings in Germany’s expanded Reich.

It is noteworthy, however, that nowadays the phrase ‘grand designs’ is possibly used more in conjunction with architecture than with the expansion of empires or foreign policy. A very popular British Channel 4 television programme about ‘unusual architectural house-building projects’ is called *Grand Designs*, while one of the very small number of academic articles about parliamentary architecture, Russell Cope’s ‘Housing a Legislature: When Architecture and Politics Meet’, used the words ‘grander’ and ‘grandest’ in its first ten opening lines.⁸

I am pleased to say that my colleagues Margaret Clark and Jon Johansson still begin their first-year ‘Introduction to Government and Politics’ course by teaching New Zealand students about Plato and Aristotle. This is because, as Kenneth Minogue has pointed out, ‘very few possibilities that we discuss were not recognised in one form or another by the Greeks’.⁹ Johansson even shows his first-year class a picture of Plato and Aristotle, taken from Raphael’s *School of Athens*. Plato – ever platonic – points upward to the heavens, while the ever practical Aristotle gestures down towards the ground.

However, if we stand back and look at more of Raphael’s painting rather than just a detail from it, we see that the philosophers are standing in the middle of a large building that is very un-Greek and far more Roman. This is clearly because Raphael was a 16th century Italian artist, but it is appropriate, because, as Kenneth Minogue has argued, ‘we inherit our ideas from the Greeks, but our practices from the Romans’.¹⁰ A short while later in his brief book simply entitled *Politics*, Minogue also says: ‘both the architecture and the terminology of American politics are notably Roman’,¹¹ so I will turn now – ever so briefly – to a quick look at Greek and Roman architecture.

⁵ Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁶ Richard Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2005), p. x.

⁷ Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet’, 12 November 1990, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=108241>.

⁸ Russell L. Cope, ‘Housing a Legislature: When Architecture and Politics Meet’, *For Peace, Order and Good Government: The Centenary of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Canberra, ACT: Parliament of Australia – Senate, Papers on Parliament, number 37, November 2001). See <http://www.aph.gov.au/SENATE/pubs/pops/index.htm>.

⁹ Kenneth Minogue, *Politics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 18.

¹⁰ Minogue, *Politics*, p. 20.

¹¹ Minogue, *Politics*, p. 20.

GREEK AND ROMAN ARCHITECTURE

The Parthenon atop the Acropolis in Athens is, of course, the supreme example of classical Greek architecture, which, in turn, has been called ‘truly the cradle of Western architecture’.¹² The Parthenon was built in the 5th century BCE and is the oldest building considered in this lecture. Its Doric columns and the simple, stylish symmetry of the entire building have become a mainstay for parliaments and legislatures around the world. However, the Romans annexed Greece in 146 BCE and mixed Greek ideas with their own about architecture. Greek columns were supplemented by arches (such as in the Colosseum, in bridges, and in aqueducts) and – significantly – domes. In this respect, the Pantheon is a classic example of Roman architecture. While its front entrance is reminiscent of a Greek temple, its domed interior reminds us of St Peter’s even though it predated Michelangelo’s masterpiece by 1,400 years.

Because this an inaugural lecture, and not a series of lectures such as the Reith lectures, I am now going to have to fast-forward from the second century AD to the eighteenth century, to the time in Western history when ideas about the rights of man, suffrage, and representation were taking hold. This brings us to a time around 1776 and the American Declaration of Independence, to around 1787 and the framing of the United States constitution in Philadelphia, and to around 1789, the year of the French revolution.

Talk of democracy and representation was in the air, and so too was a renewed interest in Greek and Roman architecture. As Jonathan Glancey has argued, ‘With the emergence of the new science of archaeology and the excavation of sites such as Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748), western Europe renewed its interest in Classicism. Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo design gave way to a more archaeologically correct but updated style of ancient Greek and Roman architecture.’¹³ Not only was this appropriate for parliamentary architecture, given the significance of Greek and Roman ideas in western political thought, but we should also be thankful for it, sparing us what might otherwise have been a series of baroque, rococo parliamentary monstrosities.

Two years ago, on my last period of research and study leave, I was fortunate to be able to visit what is now the Bank of Ireland building in Dublin. Begun in 1728, it was originally the Irish Parliament, ‘the first building in the world specifically designed for a two-chamber legislature.’¹⁴ It is a handsome building with distinctly Greek features. The former chamber of the Irish House of Commons is now a banking hall, because after the Act of Union with England, ‘the building was made redundant’¹⁵ as a parliament; however, its architectural features were not so easy to discard.

PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS ARE MEANT TO ATTRACT ATTENTION

In many ways, of course, legislatures and parliaments represent the pinnacle of the democratic process. It is noteworthy that the constitutions of both the United States of America and of Australia outline provisions for their legislatures before dealing with the executive branches of their governments. Article 1, Section 1 of the US constitution, for example, says simply: ‘All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.’

It is not surprising, therefore, that the buildings that house legislative assemblies are often imposing as well as beautiful. This is because they have usually been built to reflect some of the highest aspirations of their states. The buildings stand for lofty goals as well as idealistic views of

¹² Jonathan Glancey, *Architecture* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2006), p. 90.

¹³ Glancey, *Architecture*, p. 342.

¹⁴ Deyan Sudjic with Helen Jones, *Architecture and Democracy* (London: Laurence King, 2001), p. 22.

¹⁵ Sudjic with Jones, *Architecture and Democracy*, p. 22.

the role of representative democracy.

As Russell Cope has noted, ‘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 commanding presence, of the state.’¹⁶

Indeed, in several states, the buildings housing either parliaments or legislatures are widely recognised as national symbols. A simple statistical test proves that London’s Palace of Westminster, the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa, and the Althingi in Reykjavik are regarded as physical symbols of Britain, the United States, Canada, and Iceland respectively. On the other hand, a google-image search on the phrase ‘symbol of New Zealand’ does not produce pictures of the New Zealand parliament; instead, there are images of ferns and kiwis.

Despite what has been called the ‘splendour and command, even majesty ... projected in the grandest of parliamentary buildings’,¹⁷ politics is often grubby and politicians sometimes (indeed, perhaps frequently) exhibit tawdry behaviour. As a result, it is all the more important that the assemblies in which politicians work should be imposing, if not necessarily grandiose. It is appropriate that the settings in which politicians go about their daily — and sometimes less than edifying — business should remind them of the ideals to which they should aspire.

IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, Thomas Jefferson was an architect, appropriately, both of democracy (it was Jefferson, after all, who penned the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence) and of major buildings (his own home, Monticello, and the University of Virginia are among the most famous physical structures in North America). Jefferson also designed the Virginia state capitol building in Richmond, built in 1785-89 and modelled on a classic Roman temple – namely, the Maison Carrée built for Augustus Caesar at Nimes. The setting and style of the Virginia state house have contributed to its being called ‘the temple on the hill’.

Ten years later, Charles Bulfinch – probably the greatest American architect of the early 19th century – designed the Massachusetts State House in Boston. Above the legislature’s imposing portico, with its colonnade of Corinthian columns, Bulfinch placed a 35-foot high hemispheric dome, which has been covered with gold-leaf since 1874.

Thomas Jefferson and Charles Bulfinch were among the architects who designed the United States Capitol Building, in Washington, D.C., so it is not surprising that neo-classical ideas were predominant during its long and chequered period of construction. Jefferson himself proclaimed that the Capitol Building, ‘embellished with Athenian taste’ would become ‘the first temple dedicated to the sovereignty of the people.’¹⁸ The large dome that crowns the building as we know it today was eventually completed in 1863, and was modelled, in part, on the dome of St Peter’s in Rome.

Bulfinch’s dome on the Massachusetts State House and the dome on the federal Capitol Building set the standard for capitol buildings throughout the United States. Of the 50 US state capitol buildings, three-quarters are topped by domes. The capitol buildings in Sacramento (California), Des Moines (Iowa), Helena (Montana), and St Paul (Minnesota) are four examples. The Minnesota capitol building also shows the extent of the influence that just one architect was

¹⁶ Cope, ‘Housing a Legislature’.

¹⁷ Cope, ‘Housing a Legislature’.

¹⁸ Henry J. Cowan *et al.*, *A Guide to the World’s Greatest Buildings: Masterpieces of Architecture & Engineering* (San Francisco: Fog City Press, 2002), p. 100.

able to have in the United States a hundred years ago. After designing the Minnesota state capitol, Cass Gilbert went on to design the Arkansas and West Virginia capitol buildings, as well as the Woolworth building in New York City (which, after 1912, was the world's tallest building for a period of 20 years) and the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. – another building clearly modelled on Greek and Roman temples.

In the United States, neo-classicism is so predominant that the exceptions to the standard columns-and-domes style of the country's capitol buildings are especially worthy of study, because they tell us a great deal about their states' intrinsic values. Two exceptions to the Jefferson-Bulfinch model are the state houses in Lincoln (Nebraska) and Santa Fe (New Mexico).

Designed by Bertram Goodhue, the Nebraska state capitol was constructed over ten years from 1922-32. 'Like his contemporary, Frank Lloyd Wright, Goodhue believed that architecture must be organically united with the landscape'.¹⁹ Goodhue's 'design reflects the geography of Nebraska. The broad, low base reflects the flat landscape of the plains, and the tall tower ... imitates grain elevators jutting up from the prairie horizon.'²⁰ Although it is not, as some critics have claimed, one of the world's greatest buildings,²¹ the Nebraska state capitol is, nevertheless, as Dale Gibbs has noted, an excellent embodiment of 'the union of art, architecture, and humanism'.²²

A second example of a non-traditional state house is the Roundhouse in Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. Built to reflect the adobe style that defines many of the private and public buildings in Santa Fe, the New Mexico capitol building is low rise (indeed, the Senate and House of Representative chambers have been dug down into the ground), and the building is entirely in harmony with its environment.

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Across the Atlantic, parliamentary architecture went off in a wholly different direction to the United States. In London, the Houses of Parliament were dramatically destroyed by fire in 1834. There is a series of wonderful paintings by J. M. W. Turner of the event. Watching the fire were Sir Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin. The latter remarked, 'There is nothing much to regret and a great deal to rejoice in.'²³ For Barry and Pugin, there was indeed. Two years later, they won the competition for the design of the new British parliament. The competition rules had stipulated that the building must be either a Gothic or Tudor design,²⁴ and the new Palace of Westminster is, as a result, the world's best example of Gothic Revival architecture. As Cowan *et al.* note, 'built between the Parliamentary Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867, the [Palace of Westminster] represents an attempt to recreate Britain's past stability in a time of political turmoil. ... The building both looks back to an idealised medieval past and reflects contemporary agitation for parliamentary reform.'²⁵

Although the Palace of Westminster is frequently referred to as 'the mother of Parliaments', this is a political rather than an architectural observation. There is really only one other parliament quite like it – the Hungarian parliament on the Danube. Indeed, the parliament in Budapest, it is

¹⁹ H. Keith Sawyers, 'The Architectural Vision of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue', in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *A Harmony of the Arts: The Nebraska State Capitol* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 22.

²⁰ Susan W. Thrane and Tom Patterson, *State Houses: America's 50 State Capitol Buildings* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2005), p. 248.

²¹ See, for example, Elinor L. Brown, *Architectural Wonder of the World: Nebraska's State Capitol Building* (Ceresco, Nebraska: Midwest Publishing Company, 1965); and nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/bluebook/56-59.pdf, p. 5.

²² Dale L. Gibbs, 'Art, Architecture, and Humanism: The Sculpture of Lee Lawrie', in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *A Harmony of the Arts: The Nebraska State Capitol* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 50.

²³ Sudjic with Jones, *Architecture and Democracy*, p. 68.

²⁴ Cowan *et al.*, *A Guide to the World's Greatest Buildings*, p. 102.

²⁵ Cowan *et al.*, *A Guide to the World's Greatest Buildings*, p. 103.

said ‘surpasses Westminster in scale and grandeur’²⁶. Built over a period of 20 years from 1882, the Hungarian parliament, was seen as a ‘reflection of the status of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian empire.’²⁷

‘WESTMINSTER IN THE WILDERNESS’

Queen Victoria is reputed to have referred to the Canadian parliament as ‘Westminster in the wilderness’. Although it is often regarded as another instance of the Gothic tradition in architecture, elements of both renaissance French and nineteenth century French architecture are also clearly present in the central position of the tower and the elegant pitched roofing on the two smaller towers on each side of the main clock tower. In light of Canada's mixed English and French origins, it is – of course – not altogether surprising that the Canadian parliament bears considerable resemblance to the architecture of many a *hotel de ville* (or city hall) that can be seen in France (in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, for example) or in sites where the French flag has flown – as in what was originally the *hotel de ville* in Saigon, now somewhat more prosaically known as the People’s Committee building in Ho Chi Minh City.

In a short story by Joe Dupuis, we read that ‘Alicia and Stefan stepped outside in the bright autumn sun. The Parliament buildings looked medieval with their brownish sandstone cornices, dusted niches and grand, sky-punching pinnacles.

“All Parliamentary architecture looks the same.” Stefan sighed ... “It’s the British influence. You Canadians are so British.”

‘Alicia laughed softly. “It’s what makes us different from the Americans.”’²⁸

Sadly, Stefan hadn’t looked very far. Although the Ontario provincial legislature has elements of Canadian gothic architecture, it also has more than a whiff of Scottish baronial architecture. Not surprisingly, however, Quebec’s national assembly is classically French, while the Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan legislatures are all pure mid-west. Stefan could equally have sighed, ‘You Canadians are so American!’

NEW ZEALAND’S PARLIAMENT

Just as fire razed the former British parliament, so too did fire destroy the former New Zealand parliament. On 11 December 1907 – just three months after New Zealand’s Dominion status was proudly proclaimed from the steps of the General Assembly Library – the William Clayton-designed mock-Gothic wooden building burned down. A competition to design a new parliament for New Zealand was held, and it was won by the chief government architect, John Campbell. Is it a metaphor for New Zealand (and its perhaps unfinished constitutional façade) that the cupolas, the central dome, and the eastern half of Campbell’s design were never built?

Nevertheless, the edifice that was built and which still serves as the parliament today is an impressive (if not altogether grand) building sometimes described as ‘Edwardian neo-classical’. With its row of Ionic columns and an impressive set of steps leading up to its main doors, the New Zealand parliament is a solid rather than stolid building that speaks of power. At the same time, however, the building is far from unique. Its front steps are very like those that Herbert Baker placed in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa, while the building as a whole

²⁶ Sudjic with Jones, *Architecture and Democracy*, p. 52.

²⁷ Sudjic with Jones, *Architecture and Democracy*, p. 52.

²⁸ Joe Dupuis, *When It's Over ...* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2004), p. 54.

bears a distinct resemblance to the former Ceylonese House of Representatives,²⁹ as well as to the Finnish parliament, the *Eduskunta*, which in turn looks quite a lot like Wellington's former Dominion Museum building.

As a result, enticing one of the world's better-known architects, Sir Basil Spence (probably still best known for his design of the new Coventry cathedral, which linked the bombed ruins of the old cathedral to a sweeping modern redbrick structure), to design extensions to the New Zealand parliament was a bold and striking gesture. As Robin Skinner – Victoria University of Wellington's Associate Dean of Architecture – has argued in a chapter on the Beehive, '[Basil] Spence remains the best-known architect to have worked in New Zealand'³⁰; and although the Beehive and the parliament buildings are, architecturally at least, odd bed-fellows, the Beehive proclaims that New Zealand is not an Edwardian backwater. This country is, rather, part of a brave, new world.

NEW AND TRADITIONAL PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS

Basil Spence's Beehive is just one instance of several striking new parliamentary buildings. The book *Icons of Architecture: The 20th Century* features only two parliaments: Oscar Niemeyer's Congress Buildings in Brasilia and Louis Kahn's Parliament Buildings in Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh.³¹ Similarly, Niemeyer's building is also one of just two legislatures in another book, *Masterpieces of Modern Architecture*. The other is the refurbished Reichstag, re-opened in Berlin in 1999 and topped by Norman Foster's striking glass dome.³²

To these three stunning buildings, one could add another three new parliaments that are architecturally striking and visually exciting:

- the new Sri Lankan parliament (designed by Geoffrey Bawa, 'one of the most important Asian architects of the twentieth century'³³ and completed in 1982);
- the new parliament in Australia – designed by the Italian-born American-Australian architect, Aldo Giurgola (who was, incidentally, a friend and admirer of Louis Kahn's) and opened during Australia's bicentennial celebrations in 1988; and
- the new Scottish assembly building, designed by the Spanish – or Catalan – architect, Enric Miralles, and opened in Edinburgh in 2004.

The architecture of legislatures and parliaments, as well as the art-work on and in the buildings, often reflect important aspects of the nation, state or province in which they are situated. For instance, the imposing façade of the Indian parliament — designed by Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens and constructed during the period 1921-27 — is a permanent reminder of the country's colonial past. Likewise, the Legislative Council building in Hong Kong recalls the fact that an area that is now a part of China was a British colony for 99 years.

The architecture of at least several of the parliaments in the South Pacific is also especially appropriate. The assembly buildings in American Samoa, Fiji, Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), and Vanuatu are all based on customary architectural styles: the *fono* in both American Samoa and Samoa are shaped like a traditional *fale* or house; the Fijian parliament has a high, steeply-pitched

²⁹ See, for example, Sudjic with Jones, *Architecture and Democracy*, p. 91.

³⁰ Robin Skinner, 'The Beehive: A Difficult Collaboration', in Mark Swenarton, Igea Troiani, and Helen Webster, eds., *The Politics of Making* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 145.

³¹ Sabine Thiel-Siling, ed., *Icons of Architecture: The 20th Century* (Munich: Prestel, 1998), pp. 98-99 and 106-107.

³² Matteo Agnoletto, Francesco Boccia, Silvio Cassara, Alessandra Di Marco, Guya Elisabetta Rosso, and Marco Tagliatori, *Masterpieces of Modern Architecture* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), pp. 94-101 and 288-293.

³³ David Robson, *Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 12.

roof reminiscent of the houses of Fijian chiefs; while the Vanuatu parliament in Port Vila resembles traditional meeting houses such as those found on the island of Pentecost. Sadly, the architecture of the Tongan parliament is also appropriate. It is a small, unprepossessing wooden building that looks like a school house and serves as a courtroom when not being used as the country's legislature. It is appropriate because democracy is a very frail flower in Tonga: the general public is permitted to elect only nine of the state's 30 MPs. In stark contrast to Tonga's pathetic little parliament, the palace of the Tongan King — who appoints all twelve members of the Cabinet, each of whom also has a seat in the parliament — is an imposing Victorian mansion. Let us hope that the new king's recently announced plans come to fruition, and that Tonga soon sees both a better democracy and a better parliament.³⁴

PARLIAMENTARY ART

A former President of the German Bundestag has said that the artworks in the German parliament are 'an integral component of its ... living and working environment' and 'a creative force in the formation of identity.'³⁵ It is a statement that can apply to many other parliaments as well.

For instance, the Magna Carta in the Members' Hall in the Australian federal parliament building is one of only four original copies of the 1297 version of the document still in existence. Its presence offers a vivid illustration of the fact that the Australian system of government is, to a considerable degree, based on ideas and concepts developed in Britain over a period of nearly 700 years.

By contrast, the painting in the Danish parliament, the Folketing, of the Danish Cabinet presenting the country's new constitution to King Frederik IX in 1953 underscores the transience of political institutions (in that the 1953 constitution was Denmark's third constitution in a period of only just over one hundred years). At the same time, the painting is also evidence of the stability of the structures of the government and politics of Denmark, because the country's newest constitution is now more than half a century old.

Charles Russell's massive painting, *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross's Hole*, dominating the area behind the Speaker's podium in the Montana House of Representatives, speaks volumes about Montanans' love of wide open spaces (it is not by chance that the state has its 'Big Sky' nickname). At the same time it draws on a key aspect of the state's history, namely the Corps of Discovery expedition, authorised by Thomas Jefferson following the Louisiana Purchase, that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led up the Missouri river system, through what is now Montana, and over the Rocky mountains in 1804-06.

The large John Drawbridge mural in the banquet hall of New Zealand's Beehive has helped make the country's Parliament buildings partly a showcase for New Zealand art, something that many legislatures and parliaments try to do for their own countries and territories. The supreme example of this is possibly the New Mexico legislature, the Roundhouse, which — thanks to the Capitol Art Foundation — has probably the biggest and best collection of New Mexican art anywhere in the world. It is a large and vibrant exhibition reflecting the many different strands —

³⁴ Recommendations made in 2009 by the Constitutional and Electoral Commission established in Tonga to review the country's system of government, including its electoral system and the composition of its parliament, suggest that significant change in the country's electoral rules and political institutions may not be far away. There seem to be no plans, yet, for a new parliamentary building, but on the evidence elsewhere an upgrade in the institution's independence and status may well lead to a new one being designed and constructed in due course.

³⁵ Wolfgang Thierse, 'Introduction', in Andreas Kaernbach, ed., *Jens Liebchen: Politics & Art – Art & Politics* (Berlin: J. J. Heckenhauer, 2005), p. 116.

Native American (or Indian), Hispanic, Anglo, and others — that have been woven together to form modern New Mexican society.

‘OUR BUILDINGS SHAPE US’

In a November 1950 article entitled ‘Architecture and Politics’ in a New Zealand journal, *Design Review*, R. S. Parker – then professor of political science at this university – claimed that ‘industrial capitalist society has tended to produce political elites of Philistines.’³⁶ Parker nevertheless regarded ‘Winston Churchill [as] an exception proving the rule’. Indeed, Winston Churchill – who was, of course, both a parliamentarian and an amateur builder – noted in a speech he gave in the House of Commons more than 60 years ago, ‘We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us’³⁷, and legislatures and parliaments frequently tell us a great deal about the structure of the political systems of which they are a part. It is a truism that seating arrangements in the United Kingdom’s House of Commons, where government and opposition politicians confront each other — face-to-face — directly across the chamber, reflect (and contribute to) the adversarial nature of Britain’s predominantly two-party political system, as does the House of Representatives in Australia’s federal parliament. Looking at the New South Wales state legislative assembly chamber makes it easy for an observer to see why it’s often called the ‘bear pit’: this beautiful room is so small that politicians from opposing parties are almost literally eyeball-to-eyeball.

As Churchill pointed out, ‘the [two-party] system is much favoured by the oblong form of chamber. ... [T]he act of crossing the Floor is one which requires serious consideration.’³⁸ By way of contrast, the fact that the debating chambers in the Swedish, Finnish, and Danish parliaments are semi-circular both reflects and encourages the greater degree of consensus that those parliamentary systems exhibit. What is more, the layout of the Norwegian legislature, the *Storting*, underlines an important aspect of the structure of that country’s democracy. There is a special set of seats in the Norwegian parliament that are reserved for members of the Norwegian cabinet, who may take part in parliamentary debates and answer questions, but who cannot vote. Simply seeing the debating chamber of the *Storting* serves as a reminder of the fact that members of the legislature in Norway who are appointed to the executive must vacate their seats in the legislature for the duration of their membership of the cabinet. On the other hand, the situation in the New Zealand House of Representatives is the very opposite of Norway’s: in New Zealand, members of the executive must also be Members of Parliament.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN OUR PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Earlier I mentioned the renovated Reichstag. In 1960 in Berlin, Adolf Arndt, a member of the Bundestag from 1949-69, posed the following rhetorical question in a talk entitled ‘Building for Democracy’: ‘Shouldn’t there be a connection between the public principles of democracy, and inner and outer transparency and accessibility in our public buildings?’³⁹

There is, in fact, to quote Deborah Barnstone, an ‘ideology of transparency ... in German

³⁶ R. S. Parker, ‘Architecture and Politics’, *Design Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, November-December 1950, p. 64.

³⁷ Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 28 October 1943. See, for example, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/quotations/famous-quotations-and-stories>.

³⁸ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War – Volume Five: Closing the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 150.

³⁹ Quoted in Deborah Ascher Barnstone, *The Transparent State: Architecture and Politics in Postwar Germany* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.

parliamentary architecture⁴⁰, which tells us a lot about why there is now a striking *glass* dome on top of the Reichstag building. As *The New York Times* noted in April 1999, ‘The new Germany, exquisitely sensitive to its past, informally welcomed back its Parliament to a refurbished Reichstag in Berlin. [It is] topped with glass to symbolize the political transparency on which the country has based its postwar revival’.⁴¹

With Adolf Arndt’s question as a cue, a few closing words about parliamentary accessibility seem appropriate.

Visiting legislatures and parliaments can be easy, difficult, or even impossible. At one end of the spectrum, the Scandinavian parliaments are exceptionally open. Visitors in the public galleries in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are permitted to take photographs *ikke blitz* — without a flash — while the legislatures are in session.⁴² Even after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, visiting US state legislatures is also remarkably easy. Some state capitols (such as California’s) have airport-style security systems at their public entrances and some (such as Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire and New Mexico) do not, but all regard access to legislators and elected officials as a public right. Visitors to US legislatures are generally free to wander round the corridors and lobbies, and of course to attend committee hearings and House and Senate debates. Some states even go so far as to permit visitors to take photographs (again, invariably without the aid of a flash) from the public galleries while the chamber is in session and every one of the state capitol buildings I have ever visited permits people to photograph the legislature’s debating chambers when they are not in session.

In Australia, the federal parliament and the state parliaments permit visitors to wander round the buildings and they allow people to photograph their debating chambers when they are not in session. This is also the case in the provincial legislatures I have visited in Canada.

A PLEA FOR TRANSPARENCY

Richard Prebble, a long-term New Zealand Member of Parliament, once claimed on a promotional video encouraging people to visit Wellington that the New Zealand parliament was one of the most open parliaments in the world. The claim was, and regrettably still is, frankly, rubbish. While visitors are welcome to visit the New Zealand legislature and the parliament runs good tours, individuals may not look round the building by themselves.

Examining the works of art and the historic photographs that adorn the walls of the corridors of the New Zealand parliament, and visiting the former Legislative Council chamber, are not activities that visitors to Wellington can do on their own in the same way that visitors to St Paul, Sacramento or Santa Fe are permitted to do.

One may well ask why I am able to wander round the halls of the Australian federal parliament (and to take photographs of New Zealand art in the Australian parliament, such as the painting of Milford Sound given to the Australian federal parliament by the New Zealand parliament as a gift in 2001 to mark the centenary of Federation) while being prohibited from doing the very same thing in New Zealand.

Try and take a photograph in the New Zealand parliament — not only of an empty debating chamber, but even of the first floor bust of suffragette Kate Sheppard or of a tapestry on the wall

⁴⁰ Barnstone, *The Transparent State*, p. 25.

⁴¹ ‘Reichstag Reopens’, *New York Times*, 25 April 1999.

⁴² When I asked whether I could take photographs while Iceland’s parliament, the *Althingi*, was meeting, the attendant’s sole concern was that my camera strap was firmly round my neck to ensure that my camera was not inadvertently dropped from the galleries down into the debating chamber.

— and you are likely to be rapidly apprehended by security guards. As a New Zealand citizen I regret the fact that as an individual – after going through a wholly understandable security screening – I cannot walk around parliament on my own and that I cannot take photographs in the parliament of the country I live in, while I can do so not only in the Australian federal parliament, but also in each of the 24 state and provincial legislatures that I have visited in Australia, Canada, and the United States.

To return to Charles Bulfinch's state house in Massachusetts, when I went there I was given a pamphlet so that I could conduct my own self-guided tour of Bulfinch's historic building. Similarly, visitors to Cass Gilbert's archetypical capitol building are given a leaflet so that they can make their own way round Minnesota's state house. I challenge New Zealand's parliamentarians – in the cause of *transparency* in this country – at last to give us at least the degree of accessibility to New Zealand's parliament that is accorded to visitors to the legislatures in Massachusetts and Minnesota.