Chapter 7

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The previous two chapters explored the site in detail integrating the theoretical position and the programmatic possibilities to arrive at an inclusive site reading and a number of recommendations in the form of the design methodology. The next two chapters will take these and use them as guidelines in order to arrive at urban and architectural design proposals.

This chapter however will digress from this linearity and present a few earlier design concepts for the site. These form rudimentary design explorations, in them lie the search for an idea, and as such they form important lessons for the chapters to follow.

These design concepts, presented here are named after the generating thought behind them:
- Concept 1: Something old to begin something new
- Concept 2: The void within view
- Concept 3: Urban grading

Concept 1: Something old to begin something new

The generating idea behind this concept was the preservation of the existing structures on site, regarding these as sacred and projecting spaces from these that would form the most important open or public spaces.

In this case the dilapidated warehouse structure on the southeast was clad with two strong parallel walls [a]. A main ‘celebratory’ path [b] is projected northeastward and lined with the 53 flagpoles for the nations forming the AU. To the west of this axis is the podium [c] which serves as a plane of gathering extending the ‘public square’ of the taxi rank. This is to be used for events and protests. Under this ‘plane of gathering is the complex’s parking basement. On the western side of the ‘celebratory path’ is the main parliamentary building [d], housing the PAP chamber, media briefing, exhibition halls and related functions. This building is conceptualized as a lifted contour as opposed to a building block. North of this parliamentary building, the existing railway electrical substation [e] is clad with two full height walls, and a space is projected westward from this forming a long linear courtyard [f.] that separates the parliamentary building from the office wing [g]. It is envisaged that the linear courtyard would be bridged over by walkways at different heights linking the parliamentary to the office wings.

Above: The three concepts
Above and side: photos of concept model
Criticism

- This concept conceptualizes the entire intervention as a single large building as opposed to an extension to the urban fabric. This results in large monumental structures that dominate over the surrounding urban context.
- The concept seems to perpetuate the status quo of producing monumental, highly visible icons, essentially contradict the theoretical position of the thesis.
- The strategy of retaining the memory of existing structures and using these as the basis of generating urban form, might be a novel way of approaching design, it however does not effectively deal with the ‘valley-cove’ site from an urban level. The northern edges of the site continue to be isolated despite being ‘filled’ with program.

Positive Attributes

- The retaining of the taxi rank and grading of space from bustling public space to quieter civic space is regarded as a merit. This is seen in the context of the alternative practice of creating fenced-off pseudo public space.
- In this concept we see the office function located on the northern portion of the site, which lends itself more to such function that do not necessarily require active street frontages.

Concept 2: The Void within View

The generating idea behind this concept was to conceptualize the parliament as an in-between space and void as opposed to an iconic monument.

Here we see the existing dilapidated warehouse structure being replaces a commercial building [a] that responds to the curve of the site gaining retail exposure on both street facing as well as taxi rank facing facade. The ‘celebratory path’ [b] and podium [c] are retained as per the previous concept. To the west of this path is the most public building [d] housing the consulate offices of the 53 African nations, and other public related spaces including an African library. This is the highest and most prominent building. This building is fronted by the public plinth [e] which makes the building accessible from both the western street edge as well as the celebratory path.

North of this building is the main parliamentary chamber [f]. This is formed by two large curvilinear walls that encase the parliamentary chamber and the parliamentary gardens [g]. These walls open up facing westward towards the M1 Motorway. The northernmost buildings [h] house the parliamentary offices.
Criticism

- As with the earlier concept, we see this design envisaging the intervention as a single large building of different parts. It also perpetuates the status quo of creating highly visible iconic monuments, and does not address the valley-cove site at an urban level.

Positive Attributes

- Although it perpetuates the existing approach to political architecture by producing a highly visible iconic monument, it does so in a tactful manner. This is achieved by giving dominance to the most public orientated spaces as seen up close from the perspective of a passing pedestrian or motorist. The chamber building is conceived as an iconic void orientated to the M1 motorway, as such from a distance it is perceived as the main iconic element.

Concept 3: Urban Grading

This concept takes the idea of spatial grading and the podium from the first two design explorations and proposes the main parliamentary chamber as an extension of this.

The existing dilapidated warehouse structure [a] is retained and refurbished to become a gallery. The celebratory path [b] is retained from the earlier concept and projected to the northeast. This path focuses onto the main office and exhibition hall wing [c] housing all other functions with the exception of the main chamber. The main chamber building [d] rises out of the earth forming a dune-like building. It extends the gradient of public to civic plinth, dragging this gradient into the building to public foyer and into the semi parliamentary chamber. The sloping ‘roof facade’ is envisaged as a large louver protected sloping glass facade, that expose the inner workings of the PAP to the pedestrian at close range as well as the motorist on the M1 motorway from afar. The building is also envisaged to have stripped windows on the northern sloped façade, facing onto the railway reminding the parliamentarian within of the reality of the harsh reality of the daily commute, on the outside. The crescent shaped building [e] is envisaged to house the African library, and other auxiliary functions.

Above: Design sketches
This building and the office and exhibition hall wing partly enclose a large civic ‘courtyard’ [f]. The parliamentary gardens [g] are located on the north western corner of the site. The northern edge is allocated to accommodate the complex’s parking requirements. In later development of this scheme the crescent shaped building and office and exhibition hall wing are joined and a 12 story hotel building is located at the meeting point of these two buildings.

**Criticism**

- This concept seems to create a grander monument then the previous two concepts, and is thus contrary to the theoretical position of the thesis.
- The parliamentary gardens seem to be awkwardly located and seem to be site filler and after thought.
- As with the previous two concepts it does not address the valley-cove site at an urban level.

**Positive Attributes**

- The location of the parliamentary chamber building along the spatial gradient, while creating a large monument, seems as a logical terminus to the gradient.

**Overall Conclusions**

While this chapter digressed from the linear progress of thought, it served as a valuable exercise in ‘testing the waters’. A few valuable lessons can be taken forward in this regard:

- As opposed to creating gated pseudo public space, the spatial grading from bustling public space (southern taxi rank) to quieter civic space has been identified as an important strategy.

- All three explorations did not look at addressing the valley-cove site at an urban level, essentially contributing to the isolated nature of the central and northern extents of the site. As such it is recommended that the urban design should look to form further connections into the urban fabric.