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When power stepped off its pedestal ... the design of the Pan-African Parliament

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when power stepped off its pedestal.....

the design of the pan-african parliament

mohammed adam 2007

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This document is submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree:
Master of Architecture [Professional]
at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa,
in the year 2007

Declaration

I, Mohammed Adam 0200560E, am a student registered for the course Master of Architecture [Professional] in the year 2007. I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism [the use of someone else's work without permission and/or without acknowledging the original sources] is wrong. I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have stated explicitly otherwise.
For this purpose I have referred to the Graduate School of Engineering and the Built Environment style guide.
I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my unaided work or I have failed to acknowledge the source of ideas or words in my own work



Mohammed Adam 0200560E

12 October 2007

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Introduction

This thesis looks to design the permanent home of the Pan African Parliament, an important institution of the African Union and envisaged legislative authority for the continent.

The Pan African Parliament has been hosted at its temporary home of Gallagher Estate, Midrand for the previous five years, functioning in an advisory capacity to the African Union. In early 2007 the South African Department of Foreign Affairs launched a continental design competition for the P.A.P's permanent home.

On a recent episode of the political talk show Interface, Aisha Kajee, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs noted: "The problem with institutions such as the African Union and the Pan African Parliament is that they are conceived as top-down institutions, as such they are inaccessible, people need to be able to access them if they are to live up to their continental potential" (Interface: 2007)

This thesis attempts to contest the design competition on two important grounds in an attempt to address the inherent top-down paradigm, through the means of an urban and architectural intervention. Firstly it will argue against the proposed competition site which in the opinion of this thesis perpetuates the inherent colonial and post colonial spatial thinking trap. This seeks to separate the institution of power from the everyday life of ordinary people. Secondly, It will highlight current and historical thinking regarding politically monumental architecture and argue against its perpetuation. This will be done through a study of various civic, provincial, national and international political buildings, building up on the work of authors in this field such as Lawrence Vale, Charles Goodsell, Nnamdi Elleh and others.

As such this thesis grounds itself within the socio-political disparity which is characteristic of the continent and other developing nations. By exploring the relationship between the politically powerful and the marginalized and critically evaluating the status quo, the thesis seeks to find a place where they can harmonize and exist in symbiosis.

Essentially this thesis asks two questions: What happens when the monument meets the mundane?
What happens when power steps off its pedestal?

QUICK GUIDE

The argument is structured under the following 8 main topics. The text is cross referenced to these at the bottom of each page for ease of navigation through the document.

1. Understanding the African Union from an organizational and opinion driven perspective.
2. Exploring how the AU is conceived and perceived as an elitist organization
3. Exploring the continental potential of the PAP to make the AU accessible to all Africans.
4. Analysis of the PAP design competition brief highlighting its inconsistencies and inability to live up to the potential and mandate of the PAP
5. Integration of the theoretical position and the program to arrive at a relevant design methodology
6. Exploration of various site options, arrival at a design site and undertaking spatial mappings of the site and surrounding context
7. Integration of the design methodology, design intent and site mappings in order to produce an urban design framework for the site
8. Integration of the urban design and design methodology, tracing the design from conceptual through to final design, and technical resolution stages

1

AU?



2

ELITIST



3

PAP



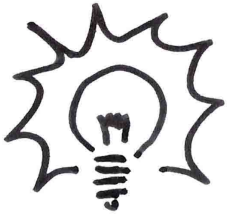
4

BRIEF



5

DESIGN METHODOLOGY



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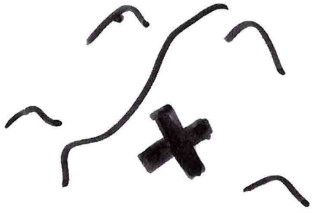
SITE



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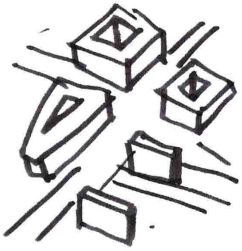
URBAN DESIGN



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DESIGN

