

LUKE TIPENE

INTERSTICES 22

# Diagrams in the field: Three conceptual approaches in the entries for the 1979 Australian Parliament House design competition

The 1979 Australian Parliament House design competition is a significant episode in the history of the relationship between architecture, urbanism, and Australian democracy. Competition entrants were tasked to exemplify principles of Australian democracy in parliamentary architecture, with little guidance from the competition brief about what those principles were supposed to be. This vacuum of values was accompanied by a physical vacuum of urban and civic spaces surrounding the site for Parliament House, on Capital Hill in Canberra. Together, they established a design challenge of isolation that foregrounded issues concerning the objectification of architecture and a fixation on interior planning in the compositional arrangement of each entrant's design scheme.

Each entrant's scheme was unique. Yet, on reviewing the remaining competition material for 324 of the stage-one competition entries from the National Archives of Australia, three shared conceptual approaches to this design challenge are identified.<sup>1</sup> These approaches are described as Autonomous, Symbolic, and Representational, and are introduced by examining their appearance in common compositional relationships between architecture and urban planning in many of the entrants' schemes. The presence of these approaches is significant as they reveal risks and potential benefits in attempting to exemplify democratic principles in the compositional arrangement of entrants' architecture and urban designs.

## The Griffin Plan for Canberra

The 1912 Griffin Plan for Canberra, by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, is commonly understood as a major influence on the relationship between Canberra's urban plan and the designs developed for the 1979 Australian Parliament House design competition. The idea of the Griffin Plan's influence on competition entrants' design schemes has been examined most extensively in two essays by Andrew Hutson.<sup>2</sup> In both essays, Hutson considers the influence of the historical Griffin Plan on three aspects of the Parliament House design competition: on the political sensitivities regarding the contested site selection, preceding the competition;<sup>3</sup> on entrants' designs that appear to embrace or oppose the Griffin Plan;<sup>4</sup> and on the Committee of Assessors' selection of finalists and winning design schemes.<sup>5</sup>

Hutson's examinations are deeply insightful. Yet, both essays imply an equivalent sense of significance for the Griffin Plan between those who developed the competition brief—the Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House (JSCNPPH) with the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC)—the competition entrants, and the Committee of Assessors. This equivalence suggests, for instance, that the historical significance of the Griffin Plan and political sensitivities concerning the contested site selection for the new Parliament building—prior to the competition—translated into an equivalent sensitivity in entrants' proposed design responses, and equivalent sensitivity during the Assessors' deliberations.

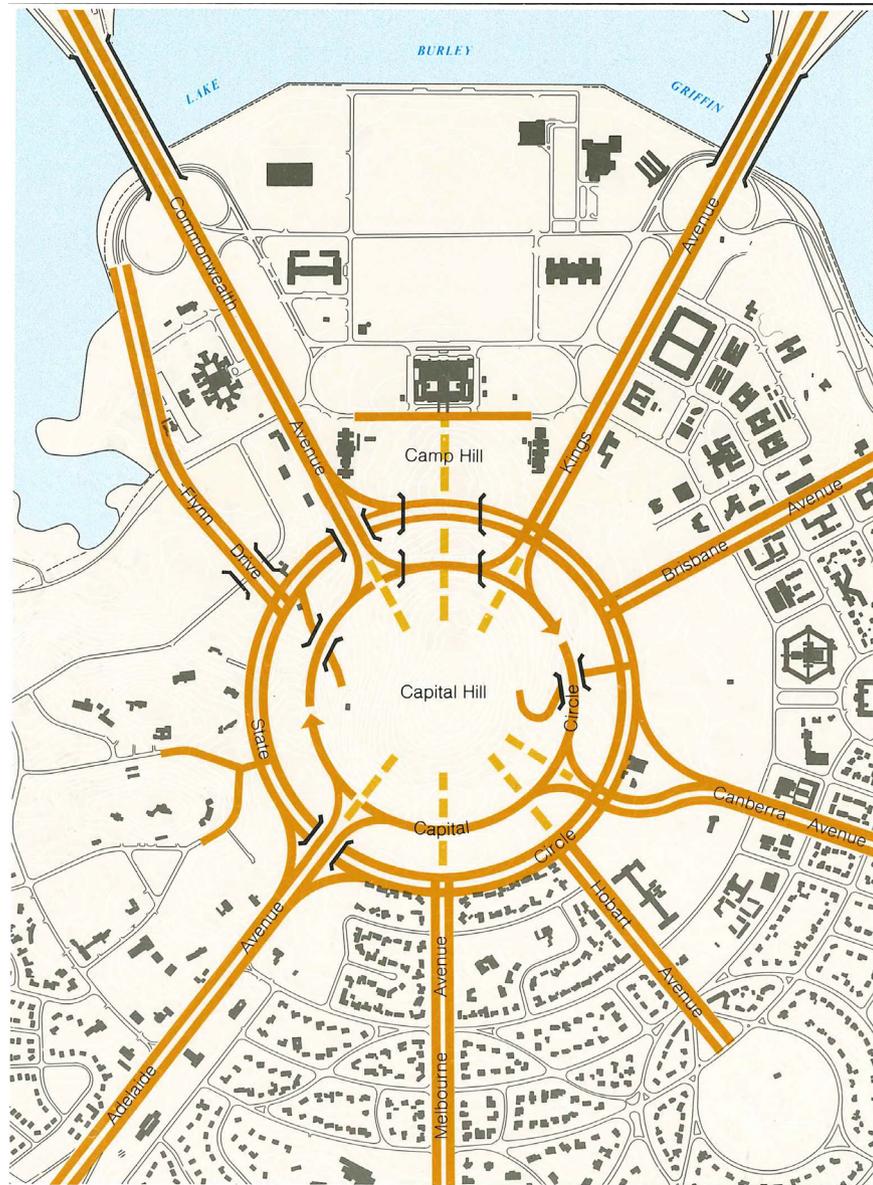
Such equivalence requires careful consideration. For, on reviewing the remaining 324 competition entrants' design reports in the National Archives of Australia, 96 make no reference to the Griffin Plan.<sup>6</sup> An additional 77 reports make only single passing references to the Griffin Plan, generally as introductory remarks. Together, both groups make up just over half (173) of all competition entries.

Recognising this, it is important to acknowledge that the idea of equivalence omits the examination of potential discordances between the significance ascribed to the Griffin Plan by those who wrote the brief, developed designs, and assessed the competition. Addressing this possibility of discordance, rather than equivalence, presents an opportunity to examine what other impacts Canberra's 1979 urban composition—beyond the legacy of the Griffin Plan—had on 324 competition entrants' designs schemes.

Turning to the competition brief, there are several points to support the possibility of discordance for the significance of the Griffin Plan between those who wrote, responded to, and assessed the competition. In the 170 pages of the brief, for example, there are no references to the contested site selection that preceded the competition, its political sensitivity, or departure from the 1912 Griffin Plan—a point Hutson acknowledges.<sup>7</sup> Further—and conspicuously for a document of such political importance—the brief makes no reference to qualitative principles of Australian democracy to undergird competition entrants' design responses. This absence extends to a lack of qualitative information about the significance of the Griffin Plan beyond its geometric arrangement of urban precincts and landmarks.<sup>8</sup> Only one quotation at the introduction of volume two of the brief links a reference to Australian democracy with the Griffin Plan.<sup>9</sup> Yet, this quotation is prefatory, and occluded by 34 pages outlining pragmatic attributes of the Griffin Plan's 1979 incarnation, such as site information, infrastructure, geometric urban features, geography, views, and climate information (Fig. 1).<sup>10</sup>

The absence of qualitative principles regarding Australian democracy and the Griffin Plan enables discordances in the brief between conflicting recommendations for a Parliament design, specifically regarding site sensitivity and the monumentality of architectural form in relation to the Griffin Plan. For instance, Volume 1 Section C of the brief, entitled "Views to the Site," recommends a "sufficiently powerful" building, "to firmly establish and mark the critical apex of Griffin's triangle."<sup>11</sup> Yet, Volume 2 Section E, entitled "Symbolism," uses rhetorical questions to foreground considerations of a parliament building's scale on the site: "What would be the connotations—in the mind of the visitor—of a building with a monumental scale, sited on a hill? Does significance necessarily mean bigness?"<sup>12</sup>

Fig. 1 Transport opportunities from the 1979 incarnation of the Griffin Plan, outlined in the Parliament House design competition brief. [National Archives of Australia, NAA: A8107, 1]



Other discordances exist between the “emphasis” of the “assessment process” outlined in the competition brief and the “Criteria for Assessment” used during the Committee of Assessors’ selection process.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, regarding sensitivities towards the Griffin Plan and the inclusion of symbolic democratic references. The Committee of Assessors’ final report from 1980, for example, describes the criteria to “reinforce Capital Hill as the focus of Griffin’s plan for Canberra and his concept of siting the most significant national building at the apex of the Parliamentary Triangle,” and to “express in a symbolic way the unique national qualities, attributes, attitudes, aspirations and achievements of Australia.”<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the competition brief makes no equivalent reference to the significance of the Griffin Plan or Australia’s unique democratic qualities in the “assessment process.”<sup>15</sup> Instead, it describes the “major determinant of the symbolic quality of the building will be its massing.”<sup>16</sup> This discordance is further exacerbated by the surprising revelation that the Committee of Assessors only developed the criteria of assessment *during* their assessment of the stage-one entries.<sup>17</sup>

These examples of discordances are important because they suggest limits to the implied equivalence ascribed to the Griffin Plan by those who wrote the brief and assessed the competition. Further, these examples raise important questions about what information was available to whom and when—particularly regarding the competition entrants, who were not privy to the criteria of assessment prior to the date of submission, and who used the competition brief as their chief source of information for the design project. The site sensitivity and historical significance of the Griffin Plan, described by the Committee of Assessors, was largely absent in the brief itself. As a result, discourse concerning the Griffin Plan likely had little impact on many of the entrants' design responses. Hutson similarly notes this possibility when referring to efforts by the Committee of Assessors to cement the "Griffin legacy," despite its use in many entrants' schemes as little more than "a rhetorical device."<sup>18</sup>

### Other architectural approaches to Canberra's urban plan

If the Griffin Plan was used as little more than a rhetorical device, what material impact did Canberra's 1979 urban plan have on competition entrants' design schemes? And, in the absence of any guiding principles on Australian democracy from the competition brief, how might the compositional arrangements of entrants' architectural/urban planning responses reflect considerations of Australian democracy?

These questions are examined by considering what information about Canberra's urban plan was actually available in the brief for competition entrants. Despite the inclusion of a comparison between the Griffin Plan's 1912 and 1979 incarnations in the brief, it is inaccurate to suggest the 1979 urban plan for Canberra reflected its 1912 conception. One significant difference between its 1912 and 1979 incarnations is the proposed placement of Parliament House on the most prominent topographical point in the Canberra basin, Capital Hill. Despite Capital Hill's location outside the zone the Griffins' intended for government buildings, Hutson outlines the political machinations that finally led to its selection in 1974.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, James Weirick's 1989 criticism of the competition, its winning scheme, and its political context, describes this historical episode of site selection as the "blood and guts of politics" in Canberra's urban planning.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of how it came to be chosen, it is important to consider the impact this site had on the architectural and urban planning strategies of the competition entrants' schemes.

One major impact of the Capital Hill site is its physical distance from existing civic settings of Canberra. Weirick suggests the parliamentary decision to use Capital Hill significantly impacted any Parliament House design by establishing irreconcilable issues of urban isolation:

[Capital Hill had] no program of future land use, no indication of future urban form, no principles for future growth and change, no acknowledgement of anything like the flux of city life intruded upon the enormous emptiness of the site ... The official culture of Canberra, by 1979, had produced a situation in which the *New Parliament House* was to be built to an exceedingly lavish brief on the most isolated, most prominent site in the city; in a total urban design vacuum; and as quickly as possible.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the rhetoric of the Griffin Plan, Weirick's comments illustrate the significant material impact this site had on competition entrants' design responses. The physical distance of Capital Hill from Canberra's civic precincts presented a critical design challenge that would require all entrants to confront the building's isolation from its urban context. And, perhaps more critically, to confront the public and political perceptions of physically isolating the building intended to exemplify Australia's seat of parliamentary democracy at a distance from its people.

The impact of this isolation on the architectural/urban planning arrangements of entrants' design responses is clearly illustrated when comparing Weirick's criticism to more general criticisms of urban planning from the period. Weirick's comments, for instance, resonate with Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's broader criticism of modern and contemporary urban planning in their 1978 essay, "Crisis of the Object: Predicament of Texture."<sup>22</sup> In this essay—published one year prior to the Parliament House competition—Rowe and Koetter suggest the social failings of 1970s urbanism originated in changing approaches to compositional relationships between architectural and urban spaces over the twentieth century. The critical inference of their compositional analysis is that "[t]he matrix of the city has become transformed from continuous solid to continuous void."<sup>23</sup> Effectively, the proliferation of empty space between buildings in modern and contemporary cities propagated a social disillusionment of civic spaces, what they describe as the "disintegration of the street and of all highly organized public space."<sup>24</sup> One cause they identify for this isolating phenomena is an inward reorientation of architectural design processes towards more sophisticated approaches to interior space planning, supported by maturing twentieth-century rhetoric on the functional efficiency of interior space.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of the Parliament House site, Rowe and Koetter's analysis suggests two key and problematic characteristics for competition entrants attempting to address the challenge of urban isolation. The first is the objectification of architecture due to the site's separation from civic relationships. Objectification in this instance refers to the reduction of architecture's complex civic contribution to little more than its visual appearance. By selecting Capital Hill, urban or civic pressures from adjacent structures and landmarks were replaced with an urban vacuum. As Rowe and Koetter imply, any architecture conceived in such a vacuum would need to contend with its own preconception as a "free standing object in the round."<sup>26</sup> The impact places "immensely high premia upon the building as 'interesting' and detached object," which would reduce the building's contribution to civic discourse to little more than the signs and meanings attributed to its appearance at a distance.<sup>27</sup> Or, as Weirick put it: "[m]issing was anything but token commitment to the democratic experience."<sup>28</sup>

The second problematic characteristic challenging any entrant's design response is a type of interior fixation. Fixation in this instance refers to an inflated emphasis on the functional efficiency of interior space planning above all other design considerations. Capital Hill's isolation limited the capacity of external factors to impact the design of a Parliament, enabling an *interior turn* to validate design decisions by foregrounding emphasis on effective interior space planning. Rowe and Koetter similarly introduce the idea of an interior turn in response to urban isolation. Applying ideas from housing to civic contexts, they describe how "external public space had become so functionally chaotic as to be without effective

significance, then—in any case—there were no valid pressures which it could any longer exert.”<sup>29</sup> The result was that the “configuration of housing now evolved from the inside out, from the logical needs of the individual residential unit ... [that would] no longer be subservient to external pressures.”<sup>30</sup> This interior turn is evident in the brief, with the entire second volume—74 pages of Sections E and F—devoted to systems diagrams, matrices, and bar charts illustrating the specified “functional links” between all interior spaces for the Parliament design.<sup>31</sup> Combined, these two sections of the brief constitute the majority of design considerations.

Weirick alludes to this interior fixation when recounting how the “exceedingly complex brief was issued, to which entrants were given just over four months to respond”; implying the highly diagrammatic emphasis on interior pre-planning and limited time reduced entrants’ capacity to significantly depart from the pragmatic interior planning conditions.<sup>32</sup> He similarly recognises the impact of both problematic characteristics—the objectification of architecture and interior fixation—for all competition entrants’ design responses, describing how:

The lack of urban context for the Capital Hill site suggested a built form derived from the road pattern, the form of the hill itself, the surrounding empty paddocks and memories of the Griffin Plan. The need to “fast track” design and construction left detailed resolution of the interior and its itinerary to some later moment.<sup>33</sup>

### **Three conceptual approaches to Canberra’s parliamentary architecture and urban plan**

Addressing how these two key and problematic characteristics were mitigated by competition entrants reveals three common conceptual approaches to the challenge of isolation. Described here as Autonomous, Symbolic, and Representational, the three approaches demonstrate different considerations of Australian democracy in compositional relationships between architectural and urban planning, and can be introduced by closely examining the remaining 324 competition entrants’ design reports and drawings.

The “Printed Report” for each entrant’s submission was an A4-size booklet that accompanied the “Display Material” (up to ten sheets of architectural drawings of various orthogonal and perspectival views, and up to eight photographs of a site model).<sup>34</sup> The report was required to be up to 30 pages in length—yet many exceed this specification—and separated into eleven sections: Form, Structure, Finish, Planning, Circulation, Flexibility, Chambers and Circulation Spaces, Site, Roads, Services, and Cost. As outlined in the brief, the purpose of the report was to provide a “concise account of the design approach,” and “concentrate on illustrating the essential concepts in the most direct way.”<sup>35</sup> Overwhelmingly, these instructions are fulfilled by the first section of each report, entitled “Form,” and any introductory remarks, together providing a concise summary of each entrant’s conceptual approach to the competition brief.

Reading the introduction and Form sections of 324 reports reveals the common conceptual approaches that undergird the detailed and nuanced characteristics of each entrant’s submission. Autonomous approaches refer to concepts that make little or no reference to democratic values and instead focus on explaining

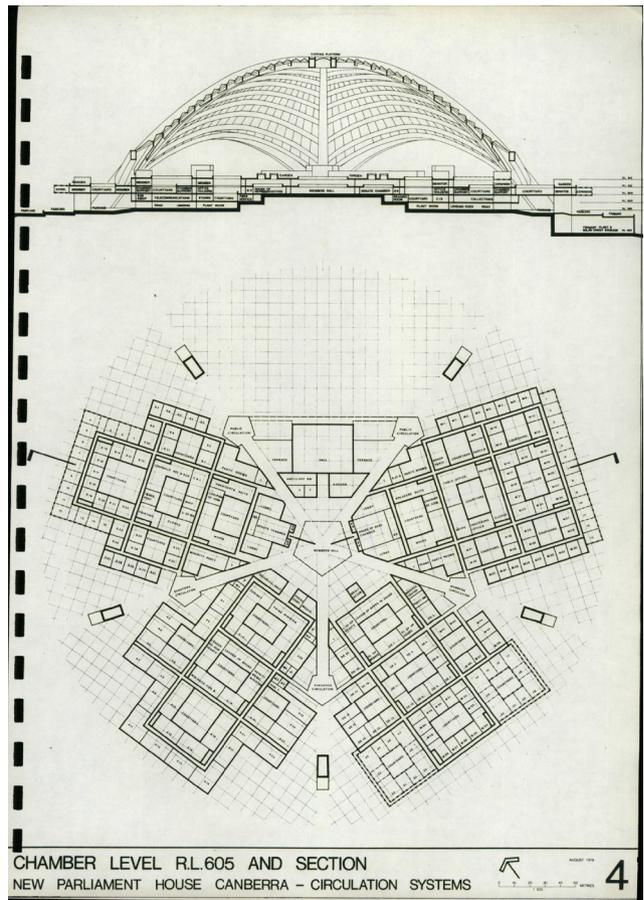
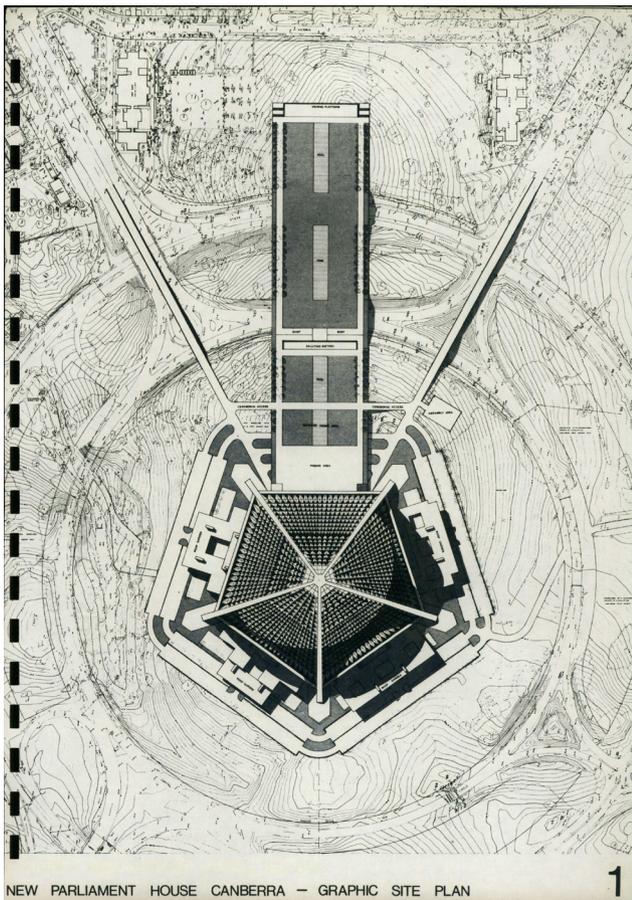
the internal logics of their own architectural/urban planning compositions. Symbolic approaches refer to concepts that use symbolic and metaphoric references to embed abstract notions of democratic values in their compositions. And Representational approaches refer to concepts that foreground democratic ideals not emphasised in the competition brief to establish the foundation for their compositions. Of the 324 reports, 116 primarily emphasise Autonomous approaches, 142 primarily emphasise Symbolic approaches, and only 41 primarily emphasise Representational approaches. Most schemes refer in some way to notions of the other approaches they do not primarily emphasise, yet surprisingly only 22 competition submissions are too nuanced to recognise their primary emphasis. And only three reports were not categorised because they do not include a Form section.

The architectural/urban planning arrangement of each scheme is apparent in their Display Material drawings. In these drawings, how each entrant addresses the two key and problematic characteristics of Capital Hill’s isolation—the objectification of architecture and an interior fixation—closely reflects the conceptual approach they primarily emphasise in their reports. A useful way to demonstrate this is by reviewing examples of entrants’ work as exemplars of each of the three conceptual approaches.

The Display Material for Scheme 305, by competition team Goyette, Cole, and Lynch, for instance, exhibits properties that emphasise an Autonomous conceptual approach (Fig. 2). The design is conceived as a pentagonal-based parabolic dome, or “pentadome” of “skylights and solar panels,” beneath which a

Fig. 2 Goyette, Cole, and Lynch (1979). Scheme 305. Rendered site plan for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 305*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of Goyette, Cole, Lynch, and Rupp]

Fig. 3 Goyette, Cole, and Lynch (1979). Scheme 305. Interior plan and section for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 305*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of Goyette, Cole, Lynch, and Rupp]



parliament building emulates the same pentagonal arrangement in plan.<sup>36</sup> The Form section of the printed report makes passing references to symbolism and local landmarks, yet the text primarily emphasises the “permanent, unchanging building form” of the “pentadome.”<sup>37</sup> No references are made to democratic principles, yet the dramatic presence of the pentadome’s formal appearance is notionally associated with national pride, described as embodying “Australia’s present and future strength as a leader among the nations of the world.”<sup>38</sup>

In terms of addressing the two problematic characteristics of the isolated site, this Autonomous conceptual approach appears to exacerbate the objectification of architecture and interior fixation. Effectively conceived as an architectural object in the round, the planning arrangements of both dome and building are largely rotationally symmetrical. They exhibit little compositional consideration of external environmental factors, nor civic or urban consideration other than an alignment of the building’s entry to the land axis of Canberra’s urban plan. The building’s resultant formal appearance is highly self-contained, giving the sense it could be designed for any location.

The interior space planning for Scheme 305 is emblematic of a fixation on functional efficiency above other design considerations (Fig. 3). The building’s four wings are almost identical in their interior arrangement and follow a repeated grid layout. The commitment to a single interior planning arrangement enables each enclosed space (offices, meeting rooms) to maintain identical access to an arterial corridor on one side and a cloistered courtyard or external view on the other. The result is an efficiency of interior space planning that prescribes the placement of activities and users, based on the formal pentagonal arrangement of the plan. Similar responses to the objectification of architecture and interior fixation are apparent in many schemes that emphasise Autonomous approaches, including Scheme 169 by P. Riddle, Gillman, Gary, Clapp, and Sayers, or Scheme 235 by C. Wojtulewicz.

A scheme that strongly emphasises a Symbolic conceptual approach is Scheme 8 by Synman, Justin, and Bialek (Fig. 4). The design was conceived from the assemblage of separate component parts that reference and interpret local urban features and landmarks of Canberra. The scheme itself consists of a radial plan centred on the intersection of the land axis and two arms of the parliamentary triangle axes on Capital Hill. In elevation, a prominent dome feature of the scheme mimics a “similar element atop of the War Memorial” to “reinforce the land axis by repetition” of the nearby landmark.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of addressing the two problematic characteristics of the site’s isolation, this Symbolic approach contests—rather than exacerbates—the objectification of architecture and interior fixation. The scheme achieves this by adopting and internalising surrounding civic and urban features into the composition of its architectural form. The axial geometry of the Griffin Plan’s 1979 incarnation is heavily emulated in the compositional alignment of the building’s centre, orientation, and wings, enabling its plan to act as a spatial metaphor for the historical significance ascribed to these urban features. This internalisation of the urban plan’s abstract geometry is a design strategy repeated extensively across many entries emphasising Symbolic approaches, including Scheme 58 by G. Breen, Hawke Breen, and Associates Pty Ltd, or Scheme 298 by Kenneth P. Finn.

Internally, fixation on the plan’s functional efficiency gives way to the symbolic

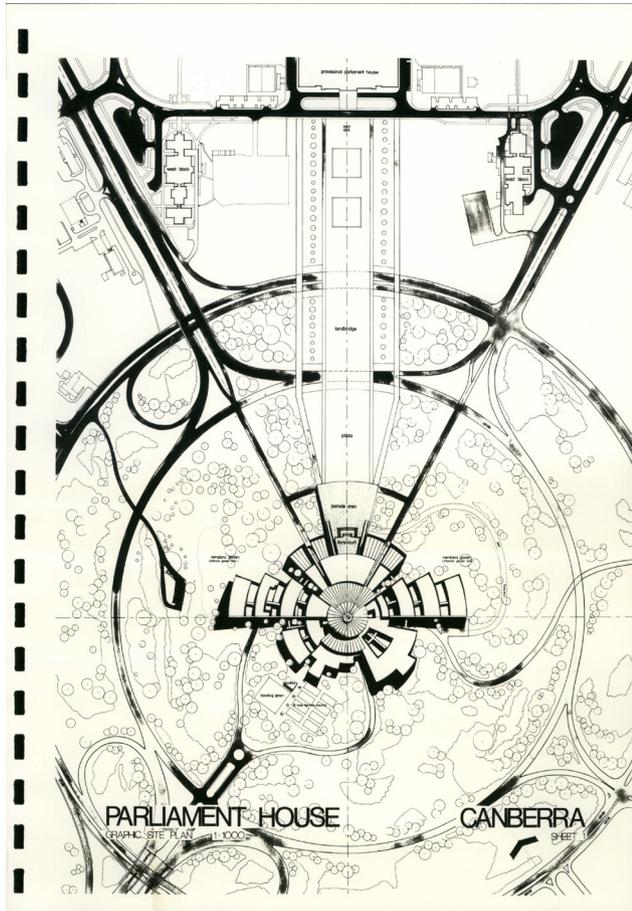
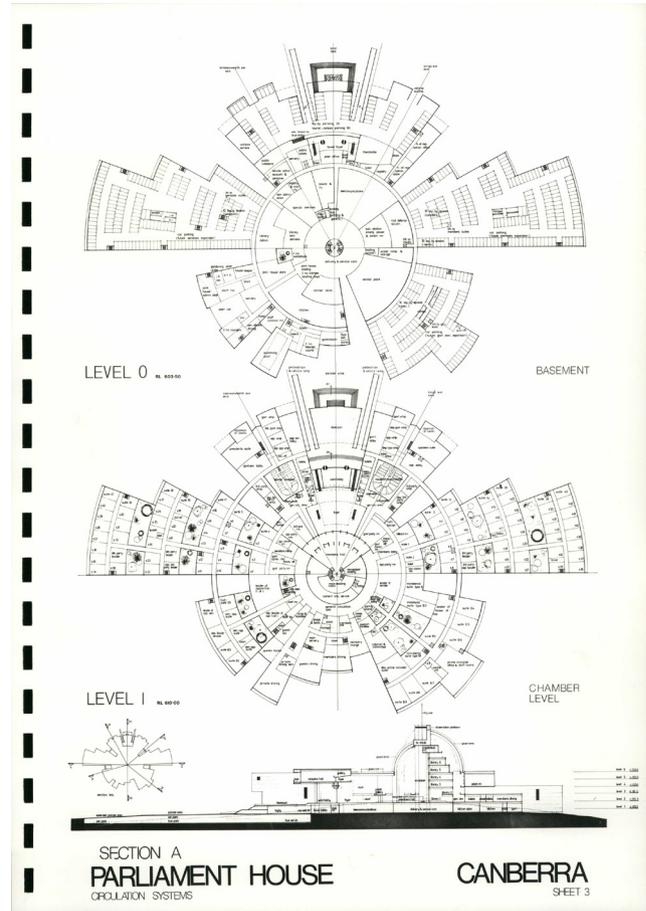


Fig. 4 Synman, Justin, and Bialek (1979). Scheme 8. Rendered site plan for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 8*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of Synman, Justin, Bialek Architects Pty Ltd]

Fig. 5 Synman, Justin, and Bialek (1979). Scheme 8. Interior plans and section for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 8*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of Synman, Justin, Bialek Architects Pty Ltd]



arrangement of its interior elements with the internalised features of the urban plan (Fig. 5). The symbolic alignment, for instance, of the Senate and House of Representatives Chambers along the urban axes of the parliamentary triangle breaks their traditional linear alignment, outlined in the competition brief. The Synman, Justin, and Bialek team describe this deviation as necessary to “[s]trongly [reinforce] the axes” of the Griffin Plan’s 1979 incarnation, and expound the metaphor of urban connection by providing an “immediate recognition and commentary for approaching visitors.”<sup>40</sup> In section, the metaphor of connection is further extended by mimicking the War Memorial’s landmark dome to “[reflect] shapes already evident in the urban design” of Canberra.<sup>41</sup> Similar metaphoric imitations are common in many schemes emphasising Symbolic approaches, including references to the Southern Cross, as in Scheme 160; references to the bicameral system of parliament, as in Scheme 236; or references to topographical features of the Australian landscape, as in Scheme 2.<sup>42</sup>

An entry that strongly emphasises a Representational conceptual approach is Scheme 148 by competition team R. Drexel, Architect (Fig. 6). Characteristic of many entries with a high Representational emphasis, this scheme describes the paramount importance of the Australian people’s democratic right to participate in government and the foundational role of public representation in the design of a parliament. The Drexel team’s report explains how “ideally Parliament House ‘belongs’ to the electing public and in this sense should be conceived as a public space.”<sup>43</sup> This design consists of a mostly orthogonal structure with no single, formal strategy to determine its overall compositional arrangement. Different

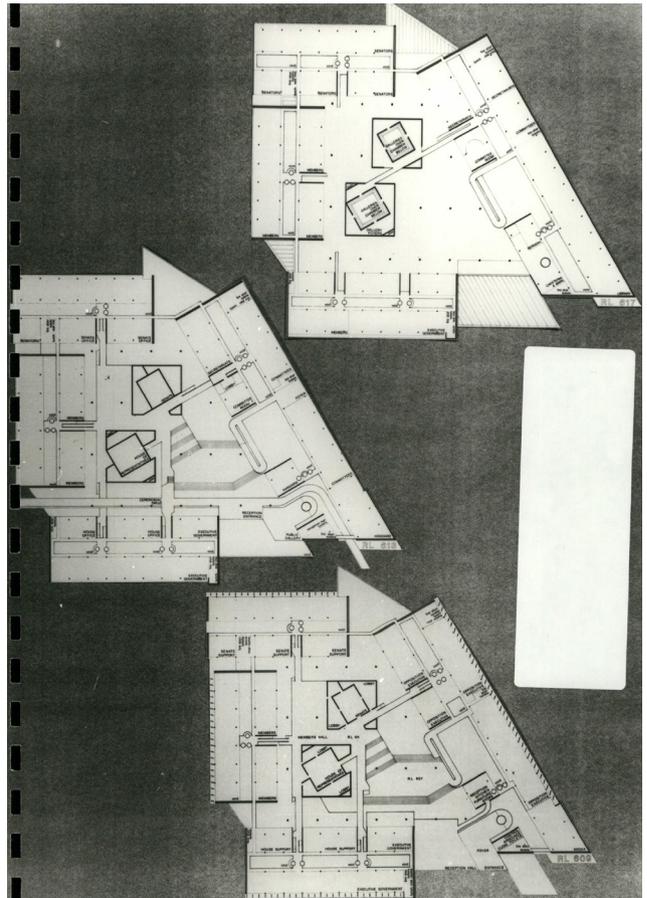
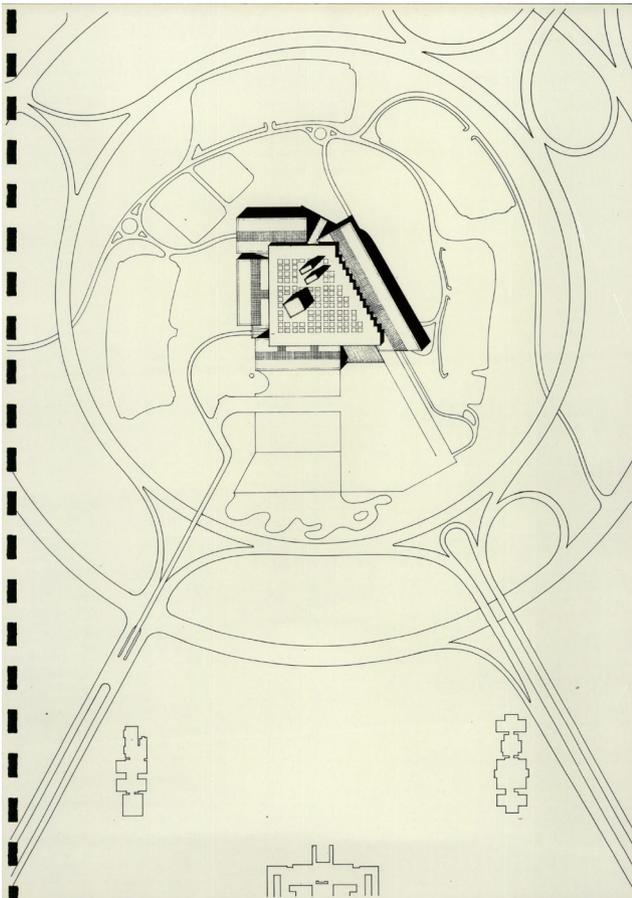
wings are oriented towards various external features such as entry roads, solar access, and views. Internally, the principle feature of its interior planning is its very large, open interior spaces, covered by a high roof supported on a repeating column grid (Fig. 7). Enclosed spaces (such as chambers, offices, and meeting rooms) within this large interior space appear almost as small interior pavilions, oriented to the various angles of the building's different wings. Passage between these interior pavilions is facilitated by wide ascending stairways, passageways, and elevated or flying walkways through the voids of the open interior space.

This Representational approach addresses the site's isolation by contesting the objectification of architecture and interior fixation. Yet, unlike Symbolic approaches, these characteristics are contested by developing experiential strategies for public engagement, not by internalising surrounding urban features as spatial metaphors. Focusing on generating a "sense of place," this design is conceived more as an urban interior rather than an isolated object in the round, a reclassification that erodes its potential perception as an objectified architectural form for an impression of a place of public gathering.<sup>44</sup> As described by the Drexel team, the "concept is analogous with a European town square wherein the civic buildings are contained but is generally a large gathering space for the townspeople," creating the "feeling that this landmark is not a distant and un-touchable object, but a place to approach, enter and in which to spend time, in a variety of ways."<sup>45</sup>

This reclassification of parliamentary architecture as an urban interior returns its interior planning arrangement to a pattern of solids and voids very similar

Fig. 6 R. Drexel (1979). Scheme 148. Rendered site plan for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 148*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of R. Drexel, Architect]

Fig. 7 R. Drexel (1979). Scheme 148. Interior plans for the Australian Parliament House design competition. [From *Printed Report—Scheme 148*, National Archives of Australia. Courtesy of R. Drexel, Architect]



to the traditional cities that Rowe and Koetter suggest were lost to the vacuous spaces of modern and contemporary urbanism. Ideas of urban interiors are common in many schemes that emphasise Representational approaches, including references to parliamentary designs as a “nodal point,” or a “small town,” as in Schemes 150 and 86, respectively; references to interiorised urban elements such as “pedestrian street[s]” in Scheme 86, interior “radiating avenues,” and amphitheatres, as in Schemes 122 and 130, respectively; “open Plaza and forum,” as in Scheme 156; or the proliferation of “internal activities, particularly to the casual visitor,” as described in Scheme 187.<sup>46</sup>

Returning to Scheme 148, its interior appears to forgo a fixation on functional efficiency for largely undesignated interior public spaces, establishing compositional ambiguity as sites for public engagement. The report described its interior spaces as “implicitly visually accessible and ‘open’ in that one can see through the building to all the wings ... contiguous with the focal point of the parliamentary system, made manifest for all to see and participate therein.”<sup>47</sup> The link between spatial ambiguity and public engagement is common in many schemes that emphasise Representational approaches, foregrounding a capacity for the Australian public to determine the use of space through shifting episodes of their occupation. This point is well demonstrated by Scheme 130, suggesting the need to “provide facilities for the Australian people to express viewpoints by open display and demonstration, by public oratory, and by presentation of petitions,” a place “for ceremonies,” as well as for “demonstrations and for displays.”<sup>48</sup>

Finally, in several schemes emphasising Representational approaches, decisions about the building’s alignment with Canberra’s urban plan and landmarks emanate from considerations of occupants’ interior experiences. Scheme 150, for instance, aligns the orientation of its interior space planning with “external views ... interesting and exciting external conditions” in efforts to support the “mental wellbeing of staff during working hours.”<sup>49</sup> This emphasis on occupants’ experiences reverses the emphasis on the exterior urban setting prevalent in Symbolic approaches. It brings the external environment into Parliament’s urban interior as views, local features, and sunlight, to cultivate sophisticated interior experiences, rather than mimetic spatial metaphors of connection. As the Drexel team put it, “the form/landscape relationship always ‘leads’ into the building, always emphasising the openness and the accessibility of this grand landmark.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusion: Interpretations of Australian parliamentary democracy in architecture and urban planning**

Each entrant’s design is unique. Yet, when considered in response to the challenges of the site’s isolation, the three identified conceptual approaches—Autonomous, Symbolic, and Representational—are apparent in the methods used by many entrants to address an objectification of architecture and interior fixation. Recognising these conceptual approaches offers valuable insight into different interpretations of Australia’s parliamentary democracy instantiated in the architectural and urban planning arrangement of each entrant’s scheme. The literal composition of solids and voids in each entrant’s drawings illustrates their decisions about the appearance, meaning, and participatory qualities of democracy foregrounded by each conceptual approach. It is important to consider these interpretations, as they demonstrate risks and potential benefits for democratic

practices when architecture and urban planning is employed to speak for the rights of others.

Scheme 305, for instance, uses a primary focus on formal structure and interior efficiency, that excludes its urban setting. Its dramatic and resolute appearance links ideas of Australia's parliamentary democracy to impressions of detached authority. The Goyette, Cole, and Lynch team embrace this impression, suggesting their design celebrates "strength" indelible to Australian national identity.<sup>51</sup> Like many schemes emphasising an Autonomous conceptual approach, the objectification of architecture and interior fixation reduce complexity in planning to clear prescriptions of use and defined interpretations. By extension, the more emphatic this conceptual approach, the more it appears to diminish impressions of Australian democracy to suggestions of idealised stability.

Scheme 8, by Synman, Justin, and Bialek, internalises Canberra's urban plan and landmarks to introduce metaphors of urban connection. Despite this distinction from Autonomous approaches, this Symbolic conceptual approach similarly emphasises the formal structure of the scheme's appearance and rigid interior arrangement. By relying on spatial metaphors to communicate ideas of urban connection, complexity in planning is again reduced by attempts to prescribe the building's meaning, rather than its use, in the compositional arrangements of its architecture and interior conditions. Such Symbolic conceptual approaches ossify impressions of Australian democracy in abstract ideals, built directly into Parliament's form. A process that appears to displace an emphasis on human experience for political posterity in planning decisions and, by extension, diminishes the indelible link between Australia's parliamentary democracy and public participation.

The fact that Scheme 148, by R. Drexel, Architect, is first and foremost conceived as a public space with users' experience front of mind speaks to impressions of Australian democracy as an egalitarian construct, epitomised by people's representation in parliament. In many ways itself an idealised abstraction, what differentiates such an approach from Symbolic—or even Autonomous—conceptual approaches is its hesitation to attempt to reduce the complexities of use and meaning to formal structures and prescriptive planning. Like many schemes emphasising a Representational conceptual approach, undesignated planning in urban interiors introduces ambiguity into the spatial arrangement. Weirick criticised similar ambiguity in the competition's eventual winning scheme, suggesting it evades—rather than declares—democratic ideals. Perhaps he's right in that instance, yet ambiguity in planning that invites public participation leaves the space for the public to decide. Democracy's unending struggle between declaration and evasion, "freedom and tyranny," is the impression of Australia's parliamentary democracy that such spatial ambiguity affords.<sup>52</sup> A type of complexity in planning that literally makes open space for people to gather, participate, and choose when to rule or be ruled.

### **Acknowledgements**

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NOTES

1. 329 competition entries were originally submitted. Material for 324 is available at the National Archives of Australia. See The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Two Stage Design Competition: Assessors' Final Report* (Canberra: The Commonwealth Government Printer, 1981), 12.
2. Andrew Hutson, "Square Peg in a Square Hole: Australia's Parliament House," *Papers on Parliament*, no. 55 (February 2011); Andrew Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins and the Competition for a New Parliament House," *Fabrications* 23, no. 1 (2013): 86–115.
3. Hutson, "Square Peg," 90–94; Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins," 90–94.
4. Hutson, "Square Peg," 99–108; Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins," 94–111.
5. Hutson, "Square Peg," 97; Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins," 112.
6. Excluding references to Lake Burley Griffin.
7. Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins," 94.
8. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Parliament House Canberra: Conditions for a Two-stage Competition*, vol. 1 (Canberra: National Capital Development Commission, 1979), 47–49.
9. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 2, 2.
10. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 1, 46–80.
11. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 1, 67.
12. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 2, 15.
13. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 2, 6; *Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Assessors' Final Report*, 3.
14. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Assessors' Final Report*, 3.
15. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 2, 6.
16. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Two-stage Competition*, vol. 2, 15.
17. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Assessors' Final Report*, 3.
18. Hutson, "The Ghosts of the Griffins," 100, 112.
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