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A WALK AROUND THE NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT BUILDING

Angus Reid

> It requires great love of it deeply to read
> The configuration of a land…

MacDiarmid's poem, Miralles' method.

> Gradually grow conscious of fine shadings,
> Of great meanings in slight symbols…[1]

I am visiting Arran for the first time, with my children. We are at the birthday party of an eighty-four year old dairy farmer. Perhaps he remembers my father, who often stayed in the village as a boy, on holiday from Glasgow. Outside, blinding stripes of white interlace the gloom of a rainy day. Occasionally you almost believe that you can see Northern Ireland along the fluorescent skyline. The conversation turns to Scotland. And then to the parliament. 'Ye dinnae like the parliament, do ye?'

And so, once again, I explain. I lived for ten years in Slovenia. I came back *because* I like the parliament. To decipher that brilliant building has been a special pleasure as I have watched Scotland from afar. I was living in a country – a small, mountainous, independent country – that is incapable of putting up a building like that. I am proud of it, but coming back to Scotland it

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[1] *Hugh Macdiarmid, 'Scotland'*

sometimes feels that I am the only one. There's poor daft Ian Rankin in today's **Scotsman**: 'I'm still trying to come to terms with what it's all about… It must make a statement even if we're not sure what statement it makes'[2]. I am not part of the prosaic Rankin constituency. You just need to look at it to know what statement it makes.

And that's what I've been doing. For five years I have dragged sceptical girlfriends and breathless colleagues down the closes and up Salisbury Crags to indulge my dawning sense of glee. We saw it as invisible potential, an empty hole in the ground, just after Dewar and Miralles died. We saw it as a cluster of elegant cranes building oddly sharpened angular blocks. We saw it as happy-go-lucky Catalan concrete patterning when the wilfully leafy wall-bits on Reid's close were first cemented in. We paced out the perimeter as it transformed from a temporary hoarding of saltire-blue to the permanence of the present-day sculpted concrete whose body bears scrapings of borrowed stone and poetry, as though the Canongate wall were a man-made glacier that had pulled its weight through history before setting and settling here.

From afar I followed the rumour that circles in Miralles' wake like scraps thrown to scavenger gulls: the roof-boats, the skating minister, the connection between 'nation' and 'nature'. The story that he lay twigs and leaves on the ground to demonstrate his building to the politicians. His love for the late water-colours of the impoverished Mackintosh-in-exile. The splendid account that when he got the job he shut up his architectural practice and disappeared completely for a summer. The tales of petty aggravation with a project manager of quite opposite sensibility. And last, the canny optimism of his wife and fellow architect to whom the physical making of the parliament deferred itself, and the sense that the completed vision still retains a mystery even to her.

It is epic, affecting and romantic. Every step seems driven by sensibility, as though rational decisions about the shape of a building require limitless reserves of intuition. As though, for all the specialised know-how, architecture belongs to the imagination.

And when you walk the interiors, it is a thrill and a challenge to hold this fusion of asymmetrical shapes and spaces in the mind. If you study the plans, the story is even more breathtaking because of the amount of radical change

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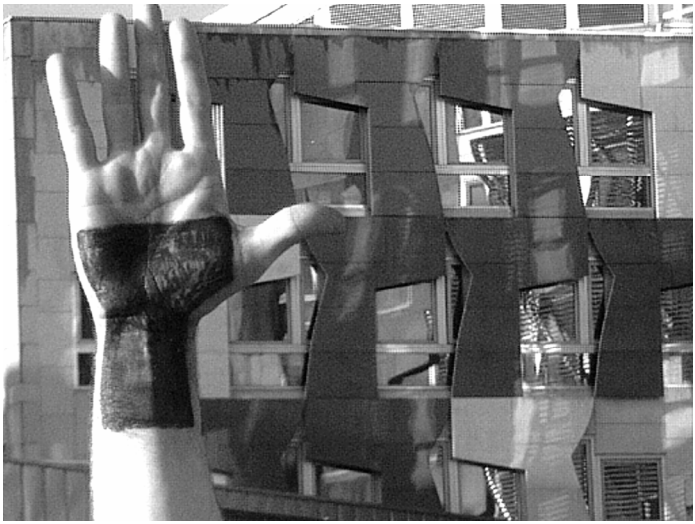
[2] ***The Scotsman**, 29/9/06*

that was going on in the design right up to the moment of Miralles' death. The vast double leaf that once hung over the chamber has suddenly flitted to the window cells on Reid's close, making an abrupt about-turn from horizontal structure to vertical motif. The towers, that give rise to a mind-bending 3D puzzle of interior perspective and volume, have changed in number, bobbed and jostled into new positions. The wind-swept and watery garden lobby has appeared out of nowhere. The route to the chamber has devised itself into a rhomboid walkway with a sharp left turn, and the chamber itself has backed towards the Palace, swung around and fanned out. The softly intuitive forms in the early designs have acquired the flavour of a decision, take-it-or-leave-it, and there, dated June 2000, is the plan that was built. But nowhere is there an explanation of the decisive signature to the final trenchant redesign that defines and orchestrates the score. What do the symbols mean?

This is where everybody stumbles. Nobody has dared to offer more than a tentative guess. But they assemble like a gesture that does not wish to be misunderstood, and they are the clue to the building.



Be like Spring, like a hand in a window …[3]

[3] *Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scotland' and E.E. Cummings 'Spring is like a perhaps hand'*

In the final stages of construction, and quite suddenly, slabs of Kemnay granite mass on the eastward facades. What on earth is it? Gun? Hairdryer? Curtain? Anvil? Wayward ionic capital? Quotation mark? 'It is remarkable,' noted **The Scotsman** dryly, 'that so little is known about such a prominent and central design feature'[4]. It is equally remarkable that no-one has an explanation, when the explanation is so obvious: they represent power, the power to change things, and the power that comes like sunlight, not from inside the building, but from without. They are raised hands, and in that mass they resemble those forceful images of republicanism, a crowd of raised fists. To see that is to recognise the determination of the design, and to experience the euphoric empowerment of what it is to have a parliament. And in Scotland, not to have recognised this is not to have grasped that power. Or not yet, because Scotland is not yet a society that has empowered either its individuals or its mass.

But this is a deeply political building and it will always reflect the state of political consciousness in Scotland. The attitude of someone like Ian Rankin shows this: power and responsibility is still figured as a beautiful interior, a game played by an elite behind closed doors. No parliament guide will tell you that those slabs of Kemnay granite represent you and me, nor that they stand for our deciding and our ability to change things, anymore than they will tell you that Miralles, in a key, late report to the SPCB that shows exactly their design, explicitly identified them not as curtains or guns, but as 'individuals'[5]. This blindness mirrors the way power is still being played out in the building as an insider affair that dictates to a bewildered and disempowered mass. But the building itself has none of that. The building, like its architect, is so straightforward that it is subversive. For how much longer can this invocation of people power remain inscrutable? For how much longer can it be openly ignored by interpreters of political life in Scotland[6]?

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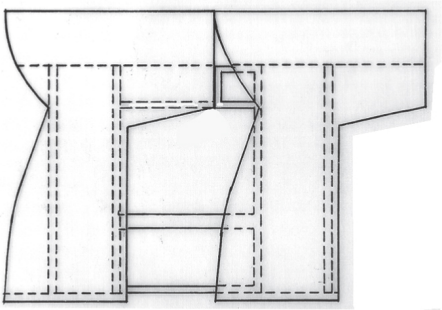
[4] *Hamish Macdonnell, **The Scotsman**, 29/12/03*

[5] *Confidential report to the Scottish Parliamentary Corpoprate Body. I read it in Andy MacMillan's copy. Hereafter referred to as the Scottish Parliament Explanatory Document, May 1999*

[6] *Even an enthusiastic apologist of the design like Charles Jencks refuses to make a stand: '…The Scottish parliament will take time to judge: maybe not 50 years but three or four visits, long enough to absorb all the richness and get used to those jumpy black granite guns, the most arbitrary of several questionable ornaments…'*



Along with the light, a mass of hands press on the public facades of the building and these shapes frame and define the windows. A window is the living aperture in a building, like an eye, and like an eye it is the focal point for the identity of a building. Plečnik, the great Slovene architect, teases the windows in his masterpiece, the Slovene National Library, into the shape of books, spine outwards, inviting light through a transparent page. The light is a metaphor for knowledge. The books, and the windows, are arranged on shelves. Ergo, this is a library! Miralles, like Plečnik, approaches his windows with the same forceful simplicity. Light is a metaphor for power, but the real parliamentary power, like the light itself, congregates outside the building, and gives it the life it has. The repetition of the fist motif amounts to a potent symbol of collective power, and the whole design of the parliament is at pains to admit as big a space as possible for that power to collect.

Unlike Westminster and indeed unlike most other parliaments, the Scottish parliament not only has an agora, as Charles Jencks has pointed out[7], but an enormous public space outside, the size of a mountain. There is room for every single person is Scotland to assemble there. The reason that Dewar chose Miralles is this reason, that '… he understood the potential of the site'[8]. For both Dewar and Miralles 'potential' means the opportunity for large numbers of people to gather. Just go up there on New Year's Day to observe the

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c.f. http://www.architecturetoday.co.uk/Articles/view.php?id=23084

[7] *See Charles Jencks,* ***The Iconic Building***

[8] *See EMBT 'Works in Progress', the Scottish Parliament, 2002*

thousands of people that relish that potential. Observe the difference between the crowded public spaces around the parliament, and the empty walled off garden of Holyrood palace. It is an object lesson in the practice of power.

This key element, the shape of the site, was not something given to Miralles but something that he needed to create, and from the beginning he insisted that he extend the site outwith the boundaries of the old Scottish and Newcastle building and towards Arthur's Seat. It is an unusual step for an architect to redraw a site and it is remarkable that this willful change remained uncontested throughout the process. The long story of submissive bewilderment in the face of Miralles' impregnable insouciance is brilliantly told in the Fraser Report. I recommend the Fraser Report as bedtime reading. It is the novella that Henry James never wrote: the genesis of a great work of art, as told by a disapproving and puritanical matron. It maintains a no-nonsense prose-style that is a model of impotent exasperation. It is hilarious and gripping, a sustained exercise in narrative that would make Stevenson jealous, peopled with outrageous characters, xenophobic prejudice, forebodings of catastrophe, an eerie supernatural element and perilously, a narrator that prides himself as a model of reliability. But when he surveys the facts he can see only madness: '… the anomaly of a conscious decision to leave a deceased person as the "principal person" for the purposes of the architectural appointment …'[9]. Poor Lord Fraser was called upon to scrutinise a supposedly serious architectural enterprise that had warped itself into a Royal Mile classic, a bone-tingling ghost-story, dictated from beyond the grave. But, as the report points out in aghast numbered paragraphs, these are the facts. And the fact is that Miralles had his way.

In the way that he drew it, the new perimeter of the site makes a definite and deliberate shape on the land. It is the shape of a right hand, crooked around to a view from the Crags, as though cradling something precious. It spills out of the old brewery site, nonchalantly closes a major road – Holyrood road, no less – and stretches towards Edinburgh's landmark magic mountain in a series of long sinewy ridges that model and define the place he insisted upon, where people can gather *on the pulse* of the nation. The incorporation of this area is a *fil rouge* that runs throughout the project from first collage to finished building, and it is the only feature, besides Queensbury House, that doesn't change.

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[9] ***The Holyrood Enquiry****, Lord Fraser, 11.29*

Rather than allow the building to dominate the park as Holyrood Palace does, he is at pains to incorporate the park into the building, sweeping forceful corrugations of unkempt grass up to the windows of the chamber, party-crashing their dun colours and textures into the debate. The effect is, quite emphatically, to break down the distance between the outside and the inside. Unlike Westminster, it would be impossible to sit in the chamber and ignore a crowd that had gathered in the agora, and to sit in the public gallery is to sit in the park. The lines of handrail and panelling mirror the topography just beyond the windows: they summarise the contours and scatter the mountain, the great gathering place, in graphic and tactile miniature throughout the chamber.

To the practice of a political elite, the separation of political power from its base, Miralles swings in with the opposite tendency, the desire to integrate, and in the plan of the parliament the hand motif – hand as symbol, and hand as template – are his means to achieve this[10]. Grounding his approach in a sign of determination, the graphic fist, he looks down at the whole site of the parliament building and sees another hand, the hand of government, that is both forceful and sensitive, dextrous and protective. And so begins his dangerous and delightful game, to define the process of representation and government through anthropomorphic images, and to play from symbol to building to site and then back again, from site to building to symbol.

Having created an extended public agora, he uses the symbol of public access, the slabs of Kemnay granite, to summarize this part of the site-plan. The long wrist conforms to the shape of the public agora, then spreads out left and right along thumb and palm, draws a line, and stops. This simplification makes for a forceful threatening image: the hand as power, a hammer with the weight of the body behind. It is the part of the hand that you would use to bang two things together or to close an obstinate drawer. It is uncompromisingly pushy.

And, in the plan, that part of the hand – the ball of the thumb and the base of the palm – corresponds to the areas of open public access to the parliament: the public foyer and the chamber. The other part of the hand – the fingers (the MSP office block), the thumb (the Canongate buildings), and the palm (the garden lobby and the towers) – belong to the civil servants, and the line in

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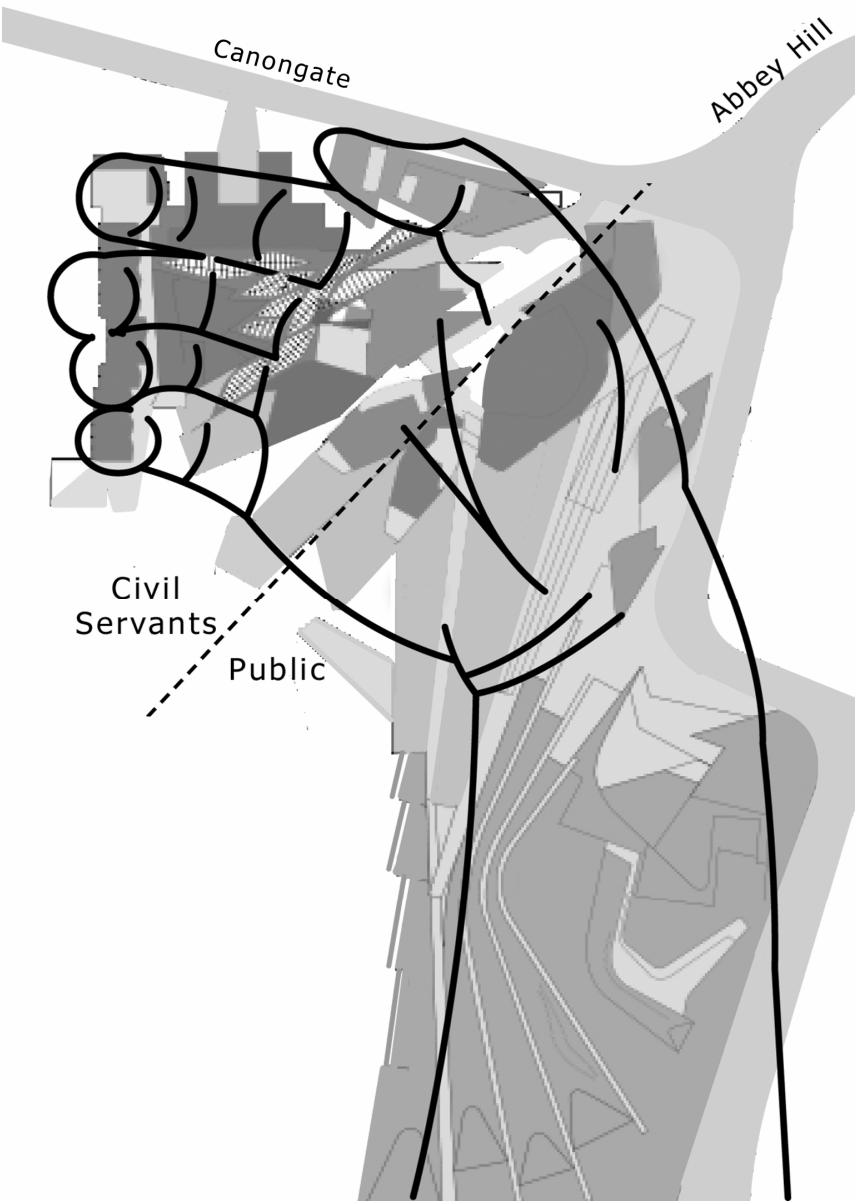
[10] *c.f. Enric Miralles '…What interests me is a sort of incorporation, of infinite integration…'* ***El Croquis*** *72, interview with Alejandro Zaera, p275*


Canongate
Abbey Hill
Civil
Servants
Public

between these demarcated areas runs directly through the fabric of the building in just as straight a line as the one that marks off the fist from the palm on the granite façade. It even runs directly through a series of interview rooms that have two doors, through which the public may enter on their side, but through which only civil servants can exit on the other.

So, on the giant plan of a right hand, parliamentary power is divided between the dexterity of the representatives, and the force of the people. The symbol is there to remind people of their power, their access and their place in the building. And then, from the site-plan template, the part that belongs to the people is raised in repeated silhouette to make a clear sign: the hand aloft, the sign of assent, the vote; and in its mass, the demos. The numbers are important. There are more of these signs than there are places in the public gallery, and there are more places in the public gallery than there are politicians. And as they will surely find out sooner or later, the parliament is awaiting more than just an election but a protest, a show of collective willpower, for the latent strength of those great black slabs to be reflected.

But until such a time the demonstration place is decorated with small gestures of friendliness: long benches, wittily twisted bike stands, and expanses of water too shallow to inhibit a determined crowd, that meantime ripple and refresh and were they to freeze over, that may well provide some classic Presbyterian skating opportunities[11].

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The summery languor of the long benches recall the influence of Gaudi, and it is the Gaudi of Guell park in Barcelona[12]. This is a significant homage because the attention to nature in the earlier project is a precedent for the later one. The famous fantasy of Gaudi that sprouts and flowers across Barcelona must acknowledge the nature of which it is a part. His architectural imagination is ultimately rooted in the physical landscape of Barcelona, and the park demonstrates the successive stages by which he seeks a relationship with given natural forms. From the outset Miralles insisted on striking up the same kind of relationship between his own architecture and Holyrood park,

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[11] *Miralles was famously admiring of Henry Raeburn's portrait of the Rev. Robert Walker '...so elegant as he skates over thin ice'.*

[12] *c.f. Benedetta Tagliabue: '...we love Parc Guell. It is a masterpiece.'* ***Icon Magazine****, May 2004*

but to understand the later achievement we must first take a stroll through the earlier one. In Guell park there is a hill, then a sequence of cavernous galleries, then a decorative piazza and last, a house. You experience the park in the opposite direction: first the improbable Hansel-and-Gretel gazeebo that stands flush to a city street on the park wall itself, then the mass of fractured ceramics that ornament the meeting point, then the twirly-topped walkways tunnelled around the gradient, and finally, and with some relief, the park. Every building that Gaudi made can be situated somewhere along this evolutionary line, in between the mass of nature and the fantasy of built form. La Pedrera belongs towards the hill; the Sagrada Famiglia is the Hansel-and-Gretel house writ vast, a gathering of civic energies on the giant scale to focus on a spiritual target.

In the park it is interesting to walk the line between these two polarities: from the unnatural exuberance of human imagination to the bare simplicity of nature, and then back from silence and solitude on the hill to the wit and spirit of the city. In one direction the clamour dies away and there is a welcome slackening of tension that registers in the use of increasingly unfinished materials. There is a sense of release and diminishing interference, the opportunity to be introspective and even to leave, to go one's own way. And on the return the ramblings converge toward a single focal point, the gate, the point of entry into civic space. You re-enter of your own free will to participate. And as you approach the city through the park, the slow crescendo of craftwork culminates in buildings that are ambiguous, on a fine line in between the real and the imaginary. The dramatic sequences of Guell park prompted what are maybe Gaudi's wildest fantasies, these deliriously crazy houses in which it is barely possible to imagine living. From the city side they are an attractive anomaly, but from the park side they are a warning: *'Here endeth the fairytale!'* The city into which you enter is built by other people and Gaudi visibly includes himself among their number even as he shows the broader principle. The gate is narrow and disciplined. To enter the city is, by necessity, to surrender a nature in which you are free, and to submit to the dictatorship of necessity and human interest, by which things are done.

It is worth understanding the stepped effects of Guell park not because Miralles imitates it, but because that is the masterpiece of civic natural architecture that he couldn't avoid. It is exuberant and inviting, and very hard to trump. And unmistakably, the approach to the parliament follows a similar path and negotiates similar pleasures and caveats as it wends out of nature and into the building, with the city beyond. But Gaudi was a fervent believer, a

spiritual architect whose intentions were firmly concentrated on the construction of a cathedral for Barcelona. Gaudi wanted to give his city community a vision of infinity, an ecstatic prayer in the form of a near vertical trajectory of light upwards, fusing at a point high in the sky and as sharp as the dancing spot on the head of a pin[13]. At the other end of the century Miralles was a cosmopolitan whose brief was urgent and contemporary, driven not by piety and mysticism but by political will and by the sense of a nation bigger than the surrounding town. The challenge was similarly monumental, but different: to give the wider Scotland a vision of itself in the place appointed to exercise its own power.

But unlike prayer, political power is ugly. Power seeks to dominate. And power such as that exercised by Westminster or the Reichstag seeks domination by means of a powerful image of itself. The Scottish parliament makes just such an image, but by a sleight of hand that borders on genius, it is both tangible and virtually invisible. Miralles, speaking at his most candid, sought to make a parliament *'unlike the others'*, *'a beautiful building'*[14]. And the beauty is there, except that it is inside, not outside. The upturned boats are to be seen from within, not from without. And the image, whatever it is that the parliament looks like, does not present itself to the camera in a horizontal plane, but projects vertically upward to be seen from above, and downward to be felt underfoot. And when you see the result you begin to recognise the conceptual dexterity of a design that is in the hands of a genuine inspiration.

Because each successive plan is in the public domain, you can follow the appearance of the giant form by which the parliament 'sits in the land' slowly dawning on Miralles until it becomes irresistible[15]. Eventually, he allows it to dictate his choices and then explores the expressive possibilities it opens up.

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[13] *One of the astonishing aspects of the Sagrada Famiglia as Gaudi planned it is that it is conceived as a light sculpture, with sockets for light beams at the top of every tower.*

[14] *Hamish MacDonald,* ***The Scotsman****, 29/12/03*

[15] *The sense of purpose precedes the form: see competition entry, 1997*

> At this moment the project is completely built. Conceptually, the project is done. And the thing is that really no-one seems too interested in knowing it … [16]

Clearly, throughout the design process, and even today, no-one has bothered to occupy themselves with an explanation of the shape of the building. It has been enough that there is a building for politicians to occupy. The niceties of the ideas that lie behind the parliament building have been rendered obscure and ignored. This tendency is a symptom of 'democracy without intellect'[17], and represents the interest of a bureaucratic class that has eclipsed the broader interest of the nation. In its blindness it is a parochial power-play 'without a substantial cultural and philosophical component'[18]. But the whole project of the building runs in the opposite direction. It is a return to first principles, an effort to think through the best model for 'democratic social openness', and by virtue of the nationality of the architect that re-evaluation takes place, inevitably, in a cosmopolitan context. But Miralles was aware even then, three months before he died, that this would be a struggle, and the problem persists to this day. Why is it that the doors to the building have never been thrown open? Expensive and partial guided tours are no substitute for the total access required. When you consider the success that greeted Daniel Liebeskind's controversial Jewish Museum in Berlin simply because the empty building was opened free to the public for two years after it was completed, giving the people of Berlin the chance to come to terms with it, then the lack of confidence in the policy makers at the parliament becomes glaringly obvious. When the parliament is in recess it could be fully opened, free, to everybody. The building requires this kind of open-hearted and magnanimous gesture, and for the story of its design to be told. Such a policy can only succeed because it is one of the great romances of contemporary architecture.

The design evolved through three principal stages that take place over less than two years and under increasingly fraught circumstances. The first is the competition entry that lays down the guiding principles behind the intuition. That first gathering of leaves and twigs expresses the building in microcosm, and opens up the micro-macro play of scale. There is a shamanic simplicity to

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[16] *Enric Miralles, March 2000, quoted in* ***Holyrood, the inside story****, Susan Bain, p 91*

[17] *See George Davie,* ***The Democratic Intellect****, EUP 1961, quoted by Kenneth White,* ***On Scottish Ground****, 1998, p11*

[18] *See Beveridge and Turnbull,* ***The Eclipse of Scottish Culture****, 1989*

the competition entry, and it says something about the broader contemporary Scottish culture that it should be recognised and trusted. The middle classes of Edinburgh enjoy a flirtation with pagan revivalism, and the thousands that gather overnight for the Beltane fire are not to be taken lightly. The plan is surprisingly mature because an entire shape for the building is already proposed: a series of long stalk-like benches that rise into vaguely leafy blocks to define the buildings and then culminate in the 'flower' of the chamber. The plan panders explicitly to Mackintosh, the aesthete of organic form: *'Art is the flower. Life is the green leaf'*[19]. The much vaunted upturned boats figure in the proposal but not in the plan, laid aside for imaginings at a later date, and the sceptical faces of the St Kilda community that become so important later on, stare out with visible discomfort. Their distrust of the mainland photographer translates easily into unease at this hijack of their hard and humble lives for the purposes of 'signature' architecture.

This is a proposal that would suit a florid museum or an arts complex as much as a parliament. The resolution of the flower petals into giant protruding abstract shapes carries more than an echo of Bilbao[20], and the relation to Queensbury House is unresolved. The MSP offices are already located in the position from which they will not move, but they do little more than provide a wall for the reconstructed ornamental garden that remakes and flatters the revamped patrician values of the town house. The flower has been plucked from that very garden and laid on the table in dazzling swathes of glass and concrete as though this were the prelude to a romantic dinner. And there is no thistly spikiness to the form, but something unmistakably rose-like. The imagery reeks of Unionist compromise. In other words, everything - except for the unresolved and intuitive approach - is wrong.

He won. This was the triumph of Miralles the elusive cosmopolitan, demonstrating that he, a Spaniard, had all the fashionable agility with wayward shapes that Gehry, an American, had used to upstage the local Spanish architects. And unbelievably, before this design had been properly digested, there began immediately the nightmare of an over-accelerated building program whipped on by the political imperative. To have employed the technique of so-called 'construction management', by which parts of a building are constructed while others are still in the process of design, is justly

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[19] *From a lecture given by C.R. Mackintosh, 1902*

[20] *c.f. Frank Gehry's Bilbao Museum, opened in 1997*

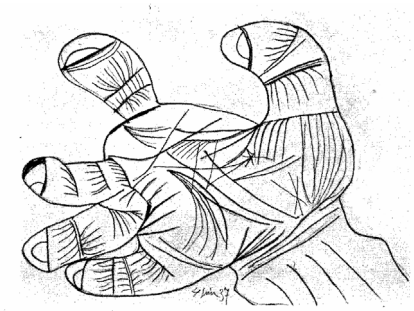
criticised in the Frazer Report, and *festina lente* as it turns out. This building would take just as long to build as any other of Miralles' long-to-build buildings.

Apresurate despacio. Hurry slowly, in Spanish. Miralles, with a great sense of savoir vivre, took the summer off. I remember being struck by a statement of Miralles from this time that I can no longer find. He said that now, perhaps, this project was worthy of his serious attention.

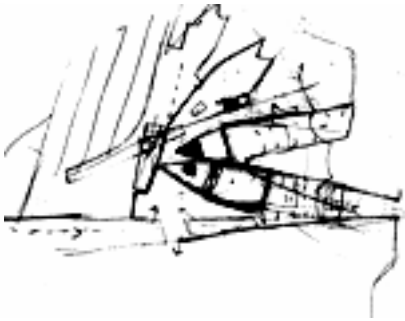
The second stage culminates in what is called 'Stage D' and falls into two distinct episodes. Stage D is a term from the jargon of construction management and represents the moment when the finalised plans of the building are handed over and the superstructure of the building can be placed on the foundations. Miralles' art, at this stage, was to postpone the conclusion of stage D for as long as he could because within a few months of winning the competition the site was already cleared and concrete was being poured into the foundations. In the interests of haste, the cart was being put well before the horse.

It was at this stage that Miralles began to explore the concept of a parliamentary building as a small part to express a bigger whole. A hand to express a body. This is not a language that is alien to Edinburgh. Paolozzi has been patiently adorning prominent places in the town with oddly monumental body parts for years. Taking his cue from the cityscape of limbs at the top of Leith Walk, Miralles set out to out-Paolozzi Paolozzi. His construction would be even more enormous and even more reticent. In the 1999 plans the complex has become a realistic hand that pinches Queensbury house between the fingertips of the MSP block and a thumb that has adopted the Paolozzoid square of the 58/60 Canongate building, a hand burying itself in the land with a defiantly non-iconic modesty. It was at this point, to deflect responsibility for the unknown cost of the building, that the intimate cabala of the Holyrood project team deferred authority to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body who looked down with horrified surprise at the tiny 'campus' complex. Parliamentary ego was now involved, and with David Steel at their head they demanded vastly more space, redesign and a bigger building. Hearing that he had a new client and a changed brief, it is said that Miralles became 'extremely angry', and in stage two chapter two the elusive cosmopolitan abruptly leaves and the furious son of Barcelona enters. At this point, to me, he achieves a total identification with the project and the plan that supposedly concluded stage D and finalized the design was handed over eight months later in February 2000.

We can get a clue about the working method from the EMBT website[21] which was made at that time. It is cast from the point of view of someone looking down through grids, charts and maps in search of the earth, in a kind of angelic European fly-over that teeters on instability as you swoop and soar over the locations of their projects. You backtrack out of Edinburgh with elasticated ease before bungee-jumping into Barcelona, rebounding into space and dropping into a tailspin over Utrecht. It is a product of that millennial zero-gravity glee, the weightless eye that technology confers upon a virtual world. The message is one of conceptual fluidity, the angelic lightness that such tools lend to the hand of the designer. And in response to his new client, Miralles channeled a graphic political ferocity down through the diaphanous melting planes of virtual design onto the plan at Holyrood[22].



Picasso, sketch for Guernica, 1936



Miralles, sketch for parliament plan, 1999

If there is a universally common language of design that we share with Spain, it is Picasso. In the bottom left-hand corner of his *political* masterpiece, Guernica, lies the crisscrossed hand of the broken republican warrior and there, in that palm, lie the triangular crisscrossed clues to the graphic energy that Miralles brought to bear on Scotland's proto-Republican right hand. Picasso had trained himself towards a new and fluid graphic language, and when the subject of protest against Fascist brutality presented itself, he was ready in an instant. He began work on Guernica on the same day that he heard the news. The Nazis, at Franco's request, had carpet-bombed the Basque

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[21] *c.f. www.mirallestagliabue.com*

[22] *c.f. Enric Miralles '...I always work from ground plans, never from elevation or three dimensional configurations'* ***El Croquis*** *72, interview with Alejandro Zaera, p269*

cultural capital and systematically strafed the fleeing inhabitants with gunfire from the air. It was a terrible harbinger of the Second World War: the deliberate demolition of a civilian target. But for all the horror, the painting speaks with the serenity of a poem. It is a perfect accomplishment in a new language and the combination of stylized line, semi-abstraction and collage became a deeply influential template for design. The human body is radically refigured, and rendered into clean simplified shapes that can confidently slide an eye around the bowl of the cranium, twist an ear and detach a finger.

Clean, semi-abstract graphic statement was a form in which Miralles was extremely adept and that is particularly well-suited - as Picasso demonstrates - to contemporary political statement. An unchanged part of the brief had been to make the building non-hierarchical, and as he resolved the metaphors Miralles had proposed that the committee rooms find their own place within the complex as boats do, jostling to find their own natural position at a harbour wall. As he rearranged them, like toys in the palm of his giant hand, suddenly they acquire purpose. He pulls their prows together into sharp convergence, giving the building its most dramatic view of itself on the carefully constructed sequence of the public route to the chamber. This gesture produces tension, a curious and familiar urgency that we know from Picasso. I think that it is nonsense to associate the committee room blocks with the fishermen's huts at Lindisfarne. What real boat ever had such a sharpened and purely vertical prow? These are toy-shapes of the most basic kind, and built to be seen in two scales. Close-up they thrill with the giant scale of the shipyard, from afar they are blocky and playful. And there is a salty saltire-iness in their abrupt convergence. Representations of the saltire are invited into the design in full view of the public as they enter the parliament. Echoes of the saltire play throughout the building and the resonance carries up those sharpened prows. At its simplest, what else is the flag but the figure of four sharpened converging points?

To meet his new client, Miralles melted Scotland's natural and national symbols together using the modernist tool-kit that Picasso had devised to make committed political art, and the tranquil violence of this particularly Spanish and specifically Barcelona-bohemian aesthetic is reflected in the decision to wrench the Canongate thumb away from its bone and to fashion it into a daringly pure form, cantilevered into space. And in the way the whole building has settled for the muted palette of Guernica in low-key shades of granite, oak and concrete. And in the raised-up near-republican symbol: not the raised fist that Picasso also drew and abandoned in the first sketch for Guernica but a not too distant shadow of it, the fingerless hand. And above all, in materials and

imagery that are deliberately anti-fascist, and that decorate the building on both sides. The oak sticks. Their meanings multiply with the play of scale, but what impulse put them there in the first place if not a reaction to the symbol of Fascism: twigs not bound, but unbound?

Miralles' response to the new demands of the SPCB was not to change the building, but to dig deep into his political conviction as a Catalan citizen and artist, and to fire back with a comprehensive mastery of contemporary architectural form. The wrenching about of the exteriors explodes into interiors that become a compendium of masterpieces met and matched. The nearly surfable tsunami ceiling of committee room 1 may recall the interior of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, but here lends aspiration and grandeur to a distinctly secular purpose, and there are no fewer than six such ceilings, all distinctly different. The upturned section of stranded Spanish Armada galleon that roofs the chamber rests on vertical sheets of drawn-down light that recall Aalto the light-savvy Finn, but this is no Nordic church. The silky concrete vaulting of MSP and public space alike recalls Kahn the advocate of concrete as a sensuous skin, but the expressive flesh-cuts of Miró-ishly spontaneous handwriting are pure Miralles. 'It is far from clear that the Architect had the budget clearly in mind when producing designs of such complexity', comments Fraser, ever the bullish philistine, in the closest he gets to a compliment[23].

By the end of stage D the melting together of politics, art and place had achieved a visionary intensity that was able to penetrate even the myth of Holyrood[24]. In Guernica, that crisscrossed republican palm connects to a body that is being trampled by a gored and rearing horse, and in the legend that precedes the founding of Holyrood Abbey is a similar scene. David 1, King of Scots, was hunting a stag in this very place when the stag turned to fight. Thrown from his horse the king reached out to defend himself from an animal that, in its rage, was sure to kill him. Except that a miracle happened. He reached up to defend himself and mysteriously snatched a cross in mid-air

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[23] ***The Holyrood Enquiry****, Lord Fraser, 9.13*

[24] *c.f. Marcus Fairs,* ***Icon Magazine*** *2004: 'I only heard that story after Enric died but I often wonder if Enric knew of it,' says Benedetta Tagliabue, explaining the pattern of stylised crosses set into the cast-concrete vault beneath the new Scottish Parliament building. 'It's based on the cross of St Andrew but I think it really came from some sketches Enric was working on at the beginning, about the apparition of the cross between the deer's antlers.'*

from in between the stag's antlers, the *holy rood* itself. The horse tramples the victim in Guernica just as the stag might have trampled the king, but the Holyrood myth offers an alternative ending to the tragic tale of republican agony. The crosses that sail above your head in the public foyer lean down like a stag's hoof with the heaviness of concrete but, as crosses, they intimate spirituality and transcendence. And in no other area of the parliament is light, the major tool by which the architect invokes transcendence, more dramatically sculpted than through the deep and eerie lightwells that penetrate the vault. For a building with a secular purpose Miralles undoubtedly draws inspiration from the church architecture of Aalto and Gaudi, and it is specifically in this area, the public foyer, that Miralles dares to transgress the boundaries that separate the secular from the spiritual. That this area was key to Miralles vision of the building is clear from his passionately persuasive tone as he defended the design to his sceptical client for what was, as it turned out, the last time:

> '…it is important to visualise the spatial quality of that place… defined by the configuration of the roof I think it is one of the places that has most improved during the design process… vaulted [and] lit by deep lightwells… many different light conditions occur, east light, evening light and direct views to the nearby hills… It will have a very strong impact of the public's view of the Parliament… This *archaic* feeling… covering an area which is based on transparency, crossing views and media communication…'[25]

But the angel that illuminates the scene in Guernica is a helpless witness and in agony. Miralles descended from that visionary top-down perspective, delivered the plans and confessed that he was unwell. The news was announced to the Scottish Parliament, and from this moment on begins the wonderful and unexpected third stage of the design.

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Imagine what it can be like to have a brain tumour removed. Imagine what that can be like when you know that the brain is your principal muscle. As Miralles re-exercised his spatial imagination in a hospital in Houston after major surgery and chemotherapy, what happened is nothing short of miraculous. The story is even more moving when you know that the operation was unsuccessful and that he was aware that the same tumour would kill him

[25] *c.f. The Scottish Parliament Explanatory Document, May 1999*

within a few months. But he continued to work from his hospital bed, communicating with his studio by fax, and at this moment comes the last and most brilliant piece of creative design. To a building that had staged a bruising encounter between politics and art he introduced a new feeling, a tender look and a daring dandyism that is all its own. There is a pure joie de vivre in the adventurous form of the garden foyer, the dynamic tranquil centre of everything in the building. It is a dazzlingly imaginative way to harmonise the plan, to make sense of the circulation and, finally, to accomplish the task that he had set for himself in the competition entry: to make a parliament *'... that is a mental place, a form in peoples' minds.'*[26] He had already suggested that this area be consecrated to a meditation on Scotland's landscape and proposed it as an exhibition space[27], but now he went one better and imagined a way to construct an entire Scotland in miniature. And the stroke of genius was to realize, at this late stage, that the familiar shape of Scotland is defined by its edge, and that the key to the Scottish landscape *is the sea*.

Lord Fraser, in his heartless way, emphasises that this was a unilateral and private initiative that derived entirely from Miralles: '… this work was not undertaken in a co-ordinated fashion, as it is apparent that the production of the finalised design took almost everyone by surprise. This was wholly unsatisfactory …' [28]

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Scotland may be land, but it is also coastline, and it is on the coastline, in a direct relationship with the sea, that most people have lived throughout its history. The parliament sits in the south-east, but mentally it must stretch all the way around the nation, to the furthest reaches of the north-west. This is one of the shocks that Miralles applies to Edinburgh and it is framed in the patrician windows of Queensbury House. For the first time in its 350 year life, a building that looks out in expectation of a symmetrical rose-garden finds itself nearly engulfed by the north Atlantic. The view is of a blustery day on the beach in Sutherland, a bucking frenzy of wave-like rooftops with a gravely serious flotilla of ships moving into anchorage beyond. That view is amazing, and yet I have never seen it in the many albums of images of the parliament.

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[26] *Competition entry, 1997*

[27] *c.f. The Scottish Parliament Explanatory Document, May 1999: 'We are considering using this space to describe different landscapes found in Scotland…'*

[28] ***The Holyrood Enquiry**, Lord Fraser, 12.49*

But it sets the scene for the drama encountered by the MSPs on the other critical route into the building, the carefully prepared sequence of their entry. This drama is Miralles' answer to the problem of Queensbury House, the very building in which the deeply unpopular Act of Union was hidden from the mob in 1707. The contemporary users of Queensbury House must make no such mistake again. They must step over the words of St Paul, rendered into Scots, that remind them to speak with 'luve i' your hairt', for if they do otherwise their voice will be no more than 'dunnerin' bress'. Properly chastened, they then enter a building filled with political urgency where the running tide is already threatening to engulf the first floor windows. They must speak with love, they must use their imagination, and above all they must do it as individuals. To descend into the parliament from Queensbury House is an extremely exciting experience and the stairway has been deliberately narrowed. You descend one by one down the harbour wall, then turn sharply *through it* to the right, and walk out *underneath the water*. The first thing you see is the mace that rests on the seabed like Prospero's staff, engraved with the magic words: '*… there shall be a Scottish Parliament!*' The experience is infused with a surreal childish glee, a sense of innocence restored, of a fairytale that is coming true.

This was how I entered the parliament for the first time, and I was amazed. So, why has this dramatic entry, that lays out an agenda of sensibility for the users of the building, been marginalized, and why has it never been introduced to the public? Once again, and this is a continuous note struck by the design of the building, the route is narrowed in such a way that it can only be taken by an individual. So, why do MSPs not use this route? Is it that, consciously or otherwise, they choose to disavow their individuality? The habit of block party politics and the three line whip are habits inherited from Westminster, and these are the very habits that the Scottish Parliament is at pains to disassemble.

But Miralles knows his political agenda, and continues apace. He belongs to a technological generation of architects for whom structure, and not decoration, is the expressive element. If committee room 1 places you beneath the roll-over of a giant wave then the underwater garden lobby submerges you, in an eerie beautiful calm, beneath the tossed-about self-righting rowboats of a fishing village. These are, of course, a collection of abstractedly elaborate cupolas that also look a little bit like leaves or eyes, but the use of wood fittings that echo the galleon roof in the chamber, and the fact that they are all moored in one direction in the way that small boats at anchor swing to face the prevailing wind, makes the harbour the dominating sensation. Even the lights in the nearby staff canteen crawl and squirm, pressed flat to the roof, like

strangely fluorescent underwater fauna on the underbelly of a boat with serious business.

It is a great feat of imagination to have placed a hidden harbour among the landlocked buildings of Holyrood. To dare to do it is to exercise a romantic sensibility that is without precedent among the sternly rational buildings of Edinburgh. The late nineteenth century neo-gothic imagination introduced the play of fantasy to architecture for the likes of Mackintosh and Gaudi, but never built its dreamings into stone on the east coast of Scotland. Instead it left them in print and folklore, in stories of shipwrecks, piracy, horror and romance, and tales of haunted underwater passages like the one that is supposed to lead from North Berwick to the Bass Rock. I know this from Stevenson who was, amazingly, one of the first in Scotland to explore underwater – to have the garden lobby experience – as he donned that screw-down metal helmet to descend into Wick harbour alongside his lighthouse engineering uncle. It was, so they say, an overwhelming experience for him and one that he didn't care to repeat, although he never lost his taste for sea-faring.[29]

Like a latter-day Stevenson organising chapters in his story of Scotland, Miralles draws on the fantastic possibilities suggested by Romantic folklore to arrange the successive levels of his building into an expressive logic. The level of access is *underground* for the public and *underwater* for the civil servants. The next requires a steep climb upwards to the level that rests on the land, either the common beach of the chamber where parties meet under the same upturned hull, or the unexpectedly highland parley place of committee rooms 3 and 4. By a feat of disciplined planning, committee room 4 holds court exclusively in the rugged landscape of the park and the ceiling arises above it in a concave skein, like mist. You could be in Glencoe. And then, for those that make it all the way up, at the top of the towers the guiding vertical etiquette of oak is abruptly cut, and the now billowing ceilings fold over backwards and part, like the clouds that they are, to evaporate upwards into the sky. The water cycle evaporates upwards on the east side of the courtyard and distills down again as rain in the west. Does that sound familiar? In Scotland, rainfall in the west is much higher than in the East, and the building itself imitates the national weather pattern. The interior façade of the MSP block, the west coast, is a sensuous rain-catcher whose diagonal patterning is

[29] *see: http://www.caithness.org/geography/walksincaithness/wickwalk.htm*

devised to catch and guide the drops down the whorls of the bigger fingers' fingerprint.

And the national landscape is stated within the microcosm of the courtyard[30]. The division between land and sea is drawn in a jaggily indented east-coast sequence of firths that define the wall of the garden lobby. Stand on the crags and see the way the diagonal cuts that make up the wall of the lobby echo the vast diagonal that is the Firth of Forth. An earlier plan had placed a map of Scotland on the floor of the chamber, but now he seized the imaginative initiative, and in graphic walk-through miniature this self-confessed landscapist[31] uses the built form to imitate the shape of Scotland itself.

On the west side of the courtyard the MSP cells, like the enclosed coastline in the hidden centre of the building, combine sea and land in their willfully leafy nesting spots by means of an imagery that is partly nautical and partly horticultural. I like the compressed space of these offices and not just because they don't pander to the parliamentary ego. They are smart and business-like and there is a sense of propulsion, a purposeful fluid dynamics that squirts the decision-maker out of the contemplative space at the back end of his vaulted syringe, down through the channels of converging underwater currents, and up the main stair to the chamber. The black-suited MSP cormorant, whose signature is written in the seagull motif carved into the concrete vault of the cell[32], is invited to drop from his rocky perch on the cliff, to dive, to swim and to emerge onto the beach, the eating place and the conference of birds.

Everything leads to this point, the staircase through the central foyer, and at this point every thread comes together. There is a dramatised vector of

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[30] It is interesting to follow the successive stages of this idea. The competition entry lays out a symmetrical rose garden, but this is amended by September 98. The garden is then 'landscaped', before acquiring a map-like summary of the north coast, the Moray firth and the firth of Forth in a series of planted beds. This version persists from March '99 to September '99. It then empties to accommodate the enlarged requirements for interior space, before the 'built' landscape harmonises sea and land with the previous conception of garden as map in May 2000.

*[31] See **El Croquis** 72, interview with Alejandro Zaera, p 263 '…no tengo ningún reparo en aparecer en el lado de los paisajistas…'*

*[32] Miralles expands at length on the meaning of the child's 'seagull', or 'eyebrow' motif, explicitly linking it both to the function he foresaw for these rooms, '…the existence of a place where immobility might be permitted', and to the vaulted structure itself. See Cejas, 'Eyebrows'; **El Croquis** 30+49 50, p206*

decision running through the building toward the chamber, and in the course of crossing these spaces, which is to say in the course of making up my mind how to vote, I am reminded of *who* I am and *where* I am and *whom I represent* as I decide what to do. And my mind is to be made up in the moment that I cross the foyer and pass under the lintel of the parliament lost in 1707 to lend my voice to the debate. Ahead lies the chamber. Behind, you can see down to the enchantment of the underwater world, and up, through the waves, to the real and forbidding walls of Queensbury House. To the right is the landscape and to the left is the city. To the right is Arthur's Seat behind parliamentary walls where the fingerless slabs that represent the peoples' consent come curling around in their mass of muted colour. To the left, and past more of that same innumerable granite gang, is the newly opened view into the Canongate and the Palace. The entire development of the design collects its effects to empower this position. It has a grandeur and an originality that is entirely its own, and fitting to the purpose of responsible political decision. It takes place, Miralles seems to say, through the combined forces of imagination, realism, consent, land, historic duty. It is a public act that takes place in full view of everybody, living and dead. And it must be given momentum. The building empowers the possibility. Independence.

If I agree that Scotland should be an independent republic, then I don't agree because I am propelled by the xenophobic agenda of a nationalist. I helped to pick up some small pieces after the Bosnian war[33] and I have learned to despise the contemporary curse of nationalism. But when I am deciding which way to cast my vote in the Scottish parliament, then the building itself helps to persuade me because, look! Stevenson is here, Mackintosh is here, and Picasso and Paolozzi and Le Corbusier and Kahn and Aalto and the Radical weavers and look! - even the St Kildans have arrived.

The reassuring presence of the St Kildans arrives by virtue of the playfulness of the last phase of design, and only after Miralles has demonstrated that his building has the St Kilda temperament. It is wary of photographers. It understands the virtue of reticence. But it is quietly self-confident, distinctly practical, and it still knows a good ghost story when it hears one.

That boat-wrecking Scottish coastline brings with it the hint of a great yarn, and a touch of eerie Spanish spritualism. The chamber hosts MSPs, the public, and a company of shadowy figures that look strangely like bottles, like whisky galore and delirium. These figures are see-through and from the public route

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[33] *see www.ringfilm.com, and my documentary feature, The Ring*

their shadowy profile makes a window onto the present business of the chamber. They may invoke the gathering in a rocky place of that other now vanished North Atlantic parliament, but their transparency speaks for other ghosts as well. After all, the Spaniards came with an Armada to wrench away the English crown but drowned in their thousands around Cape Wrath. As MSPs leave the chamber and descend through the waves, are they accompanied by a silent crocodile of dripping Conquistador shades that are still around and still out to avenge the murder of Mary, Queen of Scots? There's one window on the passage out of the chamber where the floor slopes, and the converging angles of the walls conspire to make you feel drunk, or at least faintly seasick. It looks directly towards the Palace. There's something a bit tawdry about the Palace when you see it through this window. It looks distinctly stand-offish.

But Miralles cruises the northwest coast for other less unconscious reasons. The legacy of the St Kilda parliament is a silently potent example of the republican utopia.

> To sit on a boulder of rock, in the strangers' gallery of a parliament where all its members stand and speak at once in an unknown tongue is a curious experience… The St Kildans meet every morning, either in front of their cottages or on the rocks, and discuss how they shall go about the business of the day. One or two of the debates at which I was present became so animated and the din so prodigious that I thought the matter must inevitably end in blows and bloodshed; but I was greatly mistaken for after awhile some satisfactory understanding was arrived at and they all went forward harmoniously to share the toil and danger of the day.[34]

The beach-combed interiors of the Holyrood building cannot reconstruct St Kilda but they can invoke its memory, and this gathering of spirited islanders – whose independence was never in doubt – is the principal memory, the mental image that is held in the cupped hand. For all that the building embodies the legacy of Spanish republicanism, it is imaginative, not ideological. It cherishes the memory of other parliaments and specifically that lost gathering, far to the north-west. This is the '*... form in peoples' minds*' of what a Scottish parliament should be[35].

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[34] *Richard Keaton, 'With nature and a camera', 1898*

[35] *The original competition entry explicitly identifies this objective. See competition entry 1997*

And the person in the mountain gazes down into the cup of her hand. She has gathered up the sea and the land, and she holds the town between finger and thumb. The weather turns within this scoop of microcosmic Scotland. And there is a drama: a host of boats have docked, and their arrival arouses the islanders to an urgent sense of purpose. The promise of serious business. She smiles, and she remembers. And … who is she?

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> Myth is the hidden part of every story, the buried part, the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get there. Myth is nourished by silence as well as by words. A silent myth makes its presence felt in everyday words; it is a language vacuum that draws words up into its vortex...[36]

I know from my own experience as a filmmaker that to keep a big long project alive requires an excessive and partly hidden idea. Something that people can only imagine because it's too big to be seen. The curiosity that propels the question 'Will it work?' is enough to motivate squadrons of industrious effort. The question lures us into the unknown and nourishes the need for ecstatic experience. Like the enigmatic shape of the Sydney opera house. So, Miralles' conceptual agility turns the beauty outside-in, it defers political function to the facades with people massed on one side and MSPs picked out in individual cells on the other, and then flips the building through 90 degrees to declare its recognisable shape not outwards but upwards, over the heads of photographers and tourists to the sky, to the angels, the pilots, the cartographers… and to the watcher on the hill. Pinching Queensbury House between finger and thumb he constructs an invisibly beautiful centre of modern government in the shape of a vast hand. And still, even that is not the really big idea.

The really big part of the big idea is that most of what he built, the true presence and personality of the parliament, is not to be found in the building at all, but in the magic mountain. The parliament is just a hand running into the ground that connects to a visibly larger body. The really big idea is that he dares to personify a hitherto shapeless landmass into a benign sphinx-like presence, kneeling down on all fours to examine the goings-on that have gathered in its palm. You can no longer come over the hills on the A68 and see the strange mass of Arthur's Seat without knowing that it has the Scottish

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[36] *Italo Calvino,* ***Cybernetics and Ghosts****, 1967*

Parliament curled up in its paw. Without knowing that it bestows a whole topology of attention.

The land attends the building. That is the point. The attention that the land pays to the building has replaced the attention that might have been bestowed on it by God, or by the Queen, or by geometry, or by itself in a narcissistic assertion of self-importance. You can search, but it is hard to find any other building outside the Miralles oeuvre that makes the same point so explicitly. And in terms of the architectural precedents, Gaudi's attention to nature looks different in the light of Miralles' awareness that nature attends. The old clerical discipline has given way to a new and beguiling narrative. In Barcelona Gaudi declared: *'Believe in God, or here endeth the fairytale!*' In Edinburgh Miralles has proposed a different order of events: *'Here beginneth the story again: I am the land, and I remember, and this is what happens next...'*

It amounts to a committed and playful sensibility that is rare to find in a political building, and the plan to awake the gaze of nature reflects the political reawakening of contemporary Scotland. It is something new and it changes our view of our country, our view of ourselves and our view of the past. It is distinctly different from buildings elsewhere in the UK. This is no abstract formalism, but a design that draws its inspiration directly from the land, and from its political tradition, its history and its myth.

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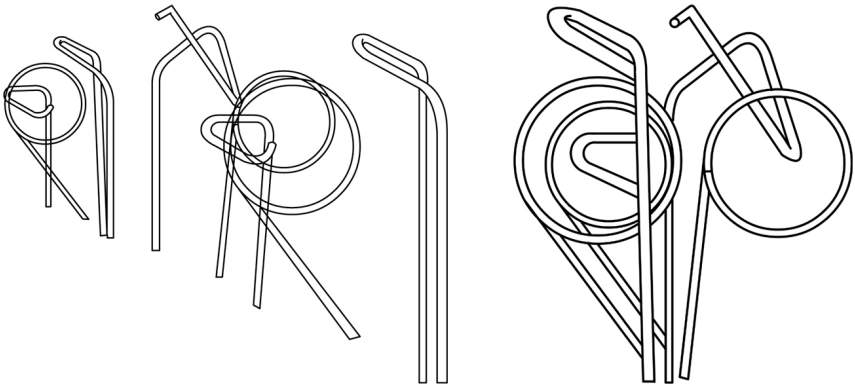
It is nine months since I walked through the parliament building, took in the fluid originality of its design, and came reeling out into the High Street. I thought that I knew the High Street but suddenly, compared to what was going on in the parliament, for the first time it appeared severely rectangular, full of admonition, and oppressively inflexible. What a change!

In that year the clean intuitions that pressed the parliament buildings into shape and volume have acquired serenity, and settled into dialogue with the landscape beyond. The successive terraces of parkland that collide with the building only emphasise the subterranean public façade. The eastern façade is ever more clearly the game that Miralles played with his own metaphors for nature. The giant glass awning and macrocosmic concrete leaf that shelter the public entry have been pulled out like a vast awning from the face of a nearly natural phenomenon. It is as though he transplanted to his own building the irrational desire to create a doorway into Salisbury crags and burrow Scotland's parliament inside that very cliff-face.

But first, lock up your bicycle to one of those bike-stands that look like twisted paperclips, the detritus of bureaucratic boredom. Then pause to sit on the bench placed precisely to offer a view of nothing other than the bike stands themselves. Wherever Miralles places a seat he invites meditation.



The arbitrary paperclips align to form, in midair, an exquisite miniature bicycle. This pun is a key to the whole approach that Miralles design has taken. Just because the parts are disassembled doesn't mean that there is not a single form that lies behind the pieces. There is a miniature form, logical and appropriate, right there on the political plaza, just as there is a massive form across the whole site that plays with nothing less than the whole country. And both patiently await anyone who cares to notice the game, and to play it for themselves[37].

To observe the precision with which things line up is part of both the design process and the building itself. On the public route, just before the stairs, the glass wall suddenly folds into a corner that has no apparent purpose; but it's only if you stand in that corner that you can see the point of exact convergence between the overhanging prows above your head. Although these details are intentional, nobody cares to point out the purpose behind the intention, as though they were carried through in remote control after Miralles' death in blind deference to a plan that no-one understood but no-one dared to change. But thank the stars for such loyalty, as the miracle of their coherence and unity across the entire complex is breath-taking, and it continues to rest in the hand.

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[37] *c.f. Enric Miralles '…my way of working is closely linked to the idea of just glancing around, amusing yourself…'* ***El Croquis*** *72, interview with Alejandro Zaera, p264*

Or, specifically, in both hands, left and right. The whole public route, down to the detail of the banisters, obeys a calculated asymmetry, like a non-stop Laurel and Hardy act, tossing the ball from left to right. Halfway up the stairs you must pass through a *double* doorway that echoes the *double* doorway just above, that is the gateway to the chamber for MSPs. This is the lowest ceiling in the building and the ceiling is within easy reach. Can the soles of MSP feet feel the touch of the public that they represent as they pass above their heads? The doorways themselves, left and right, are identical, but the perspectives they frame could not be more different, one horizontal and the other vertical. The building may be harmonious, but left and right are never the same and pursue the same path with markedly different temperaments. One banister is a tube, but the other is a shape whose folded contour echoes the sharp prow of the Canongate wall, itself clearly visible across the complex. The shape is under your *right* hand and, in a sense, you grasp the whole building as you ascend, a haptic summary that greets the *left* hand on the way back down. This sensuous differentiation of right and left is so emphatic that the right-hand banister steps away from the wall altogether and marches up the steps independently.

The direct address to the senses emphasizes the way that, in every part of the building, you are attended to as an individual[38]. It invites the individual to participate, and invites the individual to decide. And it is almost painfully aware of the fragility of the individual, and refuses to impose itself. The public façade is the only side from which the parliament is big; from elsewhere it is studiedly non-monumental. See the game of hide and seek that the different greys play with the surrounding buildings from Canongate graveyard. Given the deaths of both principal client and architect, it is odd but not inappropriate to wander into the solemn stillness of a graveyard to be able to see the most sensuous façade, but clearly it is intended thus, and the elevations are precise. It is no coincidence that when you stand a certain way up the graveyard the uppermost edges of each building rise to touch the so-called Radical Road, that skirts the hem of Salisbury Crags. The overall scale of the complex has been deliberately coordinated into a view of the land, and, moreover, a view of the Radical Road, built by unemployed weavers, a view that is deliberately *political*. And Miralles, you feel, is on their side, as it is from there that the whole building reveals itself. It is as though he sought to give concrete form to the wildest dream of the Radicals, nineteenth century labourers who were

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[38] *c.f. Scottish Parliament Explanatory Document, May 1999 '...the sense of the building as a series of individuals helps us to find the character of the construction...'*

among the first to shake Edinburgh with the threat of collective disturbance[39]. And the fruit of their labour, that nearly natural walkway, is so embedded in the design as to be almost a part of the parliament complex itself.

When I climb it and look down today from the path that first invited me to imagine the enterprise, the parliament no longer makes me anxious. It is pointedly modest. It refuses to dominate the surrounding buildings, and seeks neighbourly relations with the nearby housing estate as well as the Palace. And the pattern, the moored boats, vanish beneath the vortex that their roofs imply like a wind-rose, a momentary eddy in the stream. The building is simply a place to come together, a gathering place, not a monument to power.

And there is a last gift held in reserve for walkers of the Radical Road. As you round the crags and descend toward Newington, one great stump of rock stands out beside the old quarry. The dimension and mass of this arbitrary stone, the inclination and even the pattern into which it has fragmented are so close as to be a template for the inclined pillars that step through the parliament from the public plaza to the underground cavern and the underwater grove. To make his sentinel Miralles recruited the mass and form of this principal structure directly from the park. Is this a surprise? Surely it is the duty of an artist to notice, and draw attention to the use and beauty of given things.

[39] *c.f. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_War*

… So I have gathered unto myself
All the loose ends of Scotland
And by naming them and accepting them
Loving them and identifying myself with them
Attempt to express the whole …[40]

This poem of MacDiarmid's runs through this essay because it seemed to me to be something that Miralles had read, for the gentle spaciousness of the shared ambition to gather 'all the loose ends of Scotland'. Imagine how surprised I was to realise that MacDiarmid had appropriated another and altogether less political poet, E. E. Cummings, in his 'attempt to express the whole'. But it would be wrong to see this as plagiarism. Both MacDiarmid and Miralles appropriate others in order to express a constructive political vision by means of an address to the senses as well as the mind. If they share a socialist conviction, they also share a studied gentleness. And in the vision of the form best suited to Scottish democracy, Miralles the Spanish landscapist sees fit, among many other things, to paraphrase the rock; and MacDiarmid the poet, the communist and the Scottish nationalist sees fit to the leaven the dogma of his ideology with his own paraphrase, an image of infinite patience and care, the 'perhaps hand' of Spring.

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[40] *Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scotland'*