UmBau 27
Plenum.
Orte der Macht
Sonderausgabe
Biennale Venedig
2014

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Weary Monuments
Notes on the Exhibition Concept

Parliaments have a dual function in today's world. On the one hand, they are functional places of political debate, workshops of legislation and arenas where government and opposition parties meet. On the other hand, they are symbolic places that are supposed to represent the power and dignity of the relevant political system. Parliament buildings recount historical events and tell us about the utopian concepts of the assemblies they accommodate, making them into monumental buildings. With the word originating from the Latin verb "monere", meaning "to remember", they are places of remembrance and admonishment in the literal sense of the word.
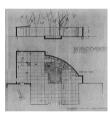

Collage of the concept,
Christian Kühn
July 2013

Austrian Pavillon
Venice
State 1950

Expansion 1954
Josef Hoffmann
ground plan and
section

As a listed building designed by Josef Hoffmann in 1934, the Austrian pavilion housing the exhibition of parliamentary architecture at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice is itself a monumental edifice. At the time it was built, it represented an Austrian state already under authoritarian rule, also referred to as Austrofascism. Hoffmann's initial design for the Austrian pavilion dates back to 1913, when Austria was still an Imperial dual monarchy. 20 years on, all that remained of the original design were the arch motifs that in 1913 were intended to form a loggia facing the Canal, and that in 1934 would flank the passage through the pavilion, half-façade, half-element of the interior.

In his 1934 project, Hoffmann had planned to decorate the portal frames with sculptural elements, but due to a tight budget, he was only able to apply a sgraffito of people at work to the frame facing the courtyard. Being reminiscent of the pre-war Austrofascist corporative state, however, it was removed after 1945. Some ten years later, Josef Hoffmann was yet again assigned to modernise the pavilion. In the original project, he had planned to build a low wall to close off the rear part of the pavilion, but this was never

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realised. In 1938, Hoffmann finally succeeded in installing the rear wall after protesting against the lattice fencing that had been erected in its place. From the initial open situation emerged a well-proportioned, closed courtyard whose walls featuring the same horizontal fluting were rendered in the same way as the other facades. The courtyard's concrete paving grid of around 90 cm also dates back to this period. In 1954, Hoffmann was commissioned to redesign the pavilion in a way that deliberately broke with the symmetry of the complex: the fluted courtyard wall was demolished and replaced by a smooth wall to close off the now extended courtyard, its floor plan following the segment of a circle. On the left hand side, the courtyard received a flying roof made of reinforced concrete with a circular opening for a tree. According to the taste of the time, Hoffmann installed a large kidney-shaped water basin in the centre of the courtyard. Twenty years after its initial erection by the corporative state, the pavilion had become a representative of the Second Austrian Republic: we had become

a democratic state. We had arrived in the period of post-war modernism.

Almost at the same time, the parliament building in Vienna underwent its hitherto biggest architectural change. Having suffered serious damage during air raids in 1945, it was renovated by architects Max Fellerer and Eugen Woerle and inaugurated in 1956; one year after Austria was re-established as a sovereign state in the 1955 Treaty of Independence. Just as Josef Hoffmann had done in his extension project in Venice, the architects here also cautiously demonstrated their commitment to modernism. Whilst most parts of the damaged building had been reconstructed and only minor details modernised, the architects decided to modernise the heart of the parliament building, the plenary hall, including only rudimentary elements of the old hall. The genesis of this project – as Nott Caviezel points out on page §§ of his paper – has not nearly been analysed as thoroughly as it should have been for the forthcoming restoration project. Without a complete analysis at hand, monument protection will jeopardise this project: as far as monumental buildings are concerned, monument protection stops at a point where remembering the history of a building comes into conflict with the warning not to forget its utopian ideas. Conflict with monument protection is bound to arise as soon as documentary evidence shows how long those concerned had grappled with the question of designing the hall's front wall. This debate lasted until 1956, when the federal eagle (steel, repoussé) finally prevailed over all proposals made by the architects to portray "the people" on tapestries, or to visualise them as sculptures. According to their logic, the federal eagle is definitely worth maintaining as an historical element. But is it still in a position to represent current utopian aspects of democracy?

Changes to the procedural schedule prevented us from carrying out our original plan to deal with the question of appropriate representation of democratic institutions based on the ongoing renovation process of the Austrian parliament building, and to present our results in the context of international examples. However, the questions that occupied us while we were preparing the exhibition remain with us: which language does monumental architecture use? And what are its means? Whom does it address? And what should buildings representing advanced democracy look like, given that they no longer need to seek footing in monumentality, 200 years after the USA's Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution?
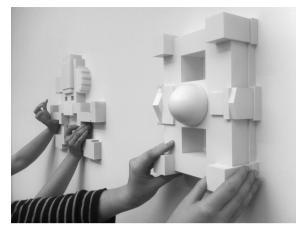
The Parliament of Parliaments

We regarded research into the world's parliament buildings as an essential approach to the subject. A superficial analysis of their dimensions, geometry and urban settings already delivered a multifarious picture of relationships. However, our research turned out to be more difficult than expected, since there was hardly any plan material available for most of the objects. During lecture courses lasting several months at the Vienna University of Technology, a group of 60 students embarked on the tedious mission of searching through publicly available image and plan material for as much precise information as possible on their form, interior organisation and urban locations. This work brought forth three-dimensional CAD models and site plans on a standard scale that were used as a basis for the models and the publication. Searching for an appropriate abstraction of the r epresentation turned out to be a major problem.

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In spite of all the vagueness that such a method inevitably causes, we managed to compile a collection of national parliaments that is the first of its kind worldwide.

Bruno Latour's postulation that non-human entities should have their say in a "parliament of things" should apply to parliaments as functional and symbolic places as well. Joined together to form a "parliament of parliaments", they reveal their architectonic-formal relationships. Columns, gables and cupolas have remained popular elements until today. The architectural symbolism of Classicism obviously dominates the majority of parliament buildings, which is all the more astonishing, given that two-thirds of currently used buildings were only built during the last 50 years.

Trial hanging
November 2013

To explore the intricacies that prevail here would mean delving deep into the depths of cultural hegemony, (post)colonial structures and their gradual erosion. For the purpose of this exhibition, we have therefore confined ourselves to the task of presenting the envelopes of these parliament buildings in a standard form as models on a scale of 1:500. Tilted at an angle of 90° and applied in a grid to the wall, they lose their grave monumentality. In this position, their symmetry takes on a mask-like appearance, and together they form an ornament that seems to grow out of the walls. The free space between the walls is available for events such as a series of discussions organised by the editors of the Italian architecture magazine *San Rocco*. Against the backdrop of a parliamentary plenary hall, this series will offer an opportunity to discuss opinions on the relations between space and politics and to contemplate on ideas sparked by this exhibition.

It took us quite a while to work out how to arrange the parliaments on the walls. In the end, we opted for an alphabetical order according to the initial letters of the country code, which led to a coincidental morphological distribution. Within this order, we slightly rearranged the models to suit aesthetic aspects. The "national flags", which are fixed on a

map of the world at the front of the room, serving as a guideline for visual communication in the exhibition, also reveal a certain tendency toward entropy. What appear to be flags at first sight are actually charts showing the colour ratios of each banner.

An integral part of this exhibition is the catalogue, graphically designed by buero bauer, who was also responsible for the "flags". It works like a colour fan, bringing together all information about each parliament building and country. Besides a short text, an axonometric projection of each building and basic project data, we also supply a site plan and statistical information on each country. Visitors can unfold this fan in order to find any typologies they like—according to years, styles or continents.

Voices from the Twitter garden
As a deliberate antipode to the architectural pathos in the pavilion's main room, the courtyard is an incidentally organised open space that visitors first perceive as a green wall, but which then envelopes them in a cocoon of leaves. This contribution by landscape architects Maria Auböck and János Kárász continues Josef Hoffmann's modernisation of the pavilion; the square concrete grid is broken up, and plants climbing the wall grow in patterns developing various different thicknesses and views. The plants chosen for the Biennale come from all over the world; some of them have already become native in many countries, while others are regarded as interesting exotics: Parrotia persica, Punica granatum, Acer palmatum viridis "Dissectum", Lagerstroemia indica, Nerium oleander, Cercis siliquastrum, Gleditisa triacanthos "Skyline", and Acer buergerianum.

For Auböck and Kárász, this garden is a metaphor for the current process of the development of opinions and formation of the political will: spongiform, atmospherically charged, limited by time, and flourishing through controversy:

While parliaments provide public space for a firmly established ritual, this place unfolds as a "floating space", only defined by the movement of a visitor entering it. This experience in movement is a core theme of landscape design that has

EMPIRE

fascinated horticultural artists for centuries. The gardens of 18th century enlightenment, which are based on the phenomenon of perception through movement, bridge the gap to the history of landscape architecture. The extremely slow growth of a tree can also enhance this kinetic experience, thus generating a temporary canopy governed by a different principle of order – one of dense closeness, light and shade, or loud and quiet passages. It suggests that we lose ourselves in it, and provides an inspiring place to contemplate, linger and to meet others. What we see and enter is the cancellation of the customary, the seemingly authentic. These large slabs in the courtyard make room for the young, proliferating trees; the formal structure seems to be slightly out of balance, reshaped, and becomes blurred.

Integrated in this garden is an interactive sound installation by kollektiv|rauschen who continue the concept of incidental space with an even more fleeting medium. It deals with political discourse using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and other networks. The garden thus becomes a carrier medium for discussions, conversations, demonstrations and protests that directly address the pavilion as a representative of government power:

"Excerpts, bits of text, hashtags, themes, topics and banalities that we compiled from the www are narrated by native speakers. These recordings form the basis of our composition. We then added audio samples to them: the shouting of protestors, chanting, and demonstration noise, all directly addressing the "democratic" representation of the main building, responding to it and partly protesting fiercely against it. We see the garden as a phenomenon and symbol amidst natural phenomena such as rain, fire and flocks of birds. Acoustic expressions coming from the various different protest movements crystallise at this Wall of Sound. One of the most important components of this composition is the interactive level: visitors can interact with live events via the Austrian pavilion's Twitter account. A text-to-speech programme converts their tweets into spoken language."

Technically, this installation uses a combination of conventional and parametrical loudspeakers to integrate visitors in discussions. The further they venture into the garden, the more they are exposed to individual voices.

Kollektiv|Rauschen regard themselves as neutral agents who neither make a comment, nor take up a position. This installation is an attempted representation. Visitors are invited to determine their own position within the sound field of the impatient masses.

In the picture stream
Whilst the 196 parliament buildings on display in the main room of the exhibition almost resemble a collection of death masks, the side rooms are dedicated to the complexity that unfolds as soon as one regards a project more closely in its historical context. The two projects were chosen because of the similarity of their constellations: the parliament building in Vienna, designed by Danish architect Theophil Hansen, and the project for Albania's parliament in Tirana, designed by Austrian architect Wolf D. Prix, Coop Himmelb(l)au. Two "foreign" star architects working on the creation of a new national showcase building. In the case of Coop Himmelb(l)au, we exhibit an already realised project for comparative reasons – the conference centre in Dalian that could easily engulf the Viennese parliament building in its vast envelope.

ΞTHNICITY

Both building histories are presented in the form of streams of successive pictures delivering the background of the project in historical and modern sequences: previous buildings, plans, sketches and models, and impressions from the building sites. They are accompanied by historical moments in which these monumental buildings surpass themselves, such as the parliament in Vienna upon the proclamation of the First Republic, staged in a setting similar to the famous frontispiece of Hobbes' Leviathan.

The current state of the Viennese parliament unfolds in a movie created by Vera Kumer, who conducted an anatomical investigation of Hansen's building together with students from the Vienna University of Technology:

"After breaking up the room during the recording process via the stepwise movement of the knife (camera) through the body (room), the two media of film and photography are then connected by means of overlapping slices to those axes that

Proclamation
of the Republic
Vienna
1918

an arch. As we can read in a letter to his fiancée in 1800, for the poet Heinrich von Kleist, an arch was much more than that: "Why, I wondered, did the arch not cave inwards, as it has no support? It stands, I replied, because all the stones seek to collapse at once – and out of this I drew to me an indescribably reassuring consolation, which stood by my side up to the decisive moment that I, too, would not collapse, even if I lost all courage."

The walls of the pavilion with the parliament models, the video objects on the ceilings of the side rooms, and the broken up and planted floor of the courtyard: these basic elements corresponding to the three dimensions of architecture form exhibition spaces between which a new space opens up – the plenum of places of power.

had already been defined via the movements through the room. The pictorial composition of the individual frames consists of several parts of a human perspective. Several perspectives per step in the room are joined together to form a single picture. This pictorial composition corresponds to t he sensory and cognitive perception of a person walking through a room, experiencing its spatial context and morphology. This video is a film recording of the parliament building in Vienna between June and October 2013 that guides the beholder through a sequence along clearly defined axes derived from the inner morphology of the building and its sequence of rooms."

The material is shown on several overhead screens running at the same time. Their cupola-like forms point to the many similar motives found in the parliament of parliaments in the adjacent room. In these installations, monitors interchange with mirrors, confronting visitors with their own reflections while the monumental forms disintegrate in the stream of pictures.

In the reflections – as in the possibility of intervention in the sound installation – the represented are finally present and have to ask themselves if architecture is still an adequate means of representing their presence as a person to be represented. The answer probably not only depends on the objects alone, but also on the subjective power of imagination. An architectural element such as an arch could simply be

EXPENDITURES

WORLD

THE ALPHABETIC SERIES OF TERMS
REPRESENT THE VOCABULARY IN THE DESCRIPTIONS
OF THE 196 NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS,
EXHIBITED AT THE AUSTRIAN PAVILLON
AT BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2014.

Fotos: Andreas Balon

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