

**THE PERCEPTION OF ABSTRACT SYMBOLISM AND ITS  
EFFECT ON POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE**

Towards a Pan African Parliament in Durban

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## **DECLARATION**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of  
Architecture, in the Master Programme in Architecture  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was / was not used and that my Supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters of Architecture in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Daluxolo Mtshali

27 May 2013

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And to architecture: for being the onyx that held the gold in place.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my mother Zanele Phekana, my big brother Vusi Mtshali and my little sister, Mpilo Mlotshwa- you guys save my life! And to my father Mthetheleli Mtshali for raising the bar and giving me what I needed to reach it.

“Finally arrived at nowhere with all of nothing but on time for forever”

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## ABSTRACT

*The focus of this research is in the area of political architecture and the way it has been affected by the way people perceive architectural symbols that represent abstract political agendas and ideologies. Such a study is important in order to create political buildings that respond better to their region and the society present there. The research approach adopted in this dissertation includes an extensive study of relevant literature and the implementation of practical research through case studies of the Apartheid Museum and Constitutional Court, using semi-structured interviews with key figures and standard questionnaires to the general public visiting the buildings. The findings from this research provide evidence that people's perception of abstract symbolism represented architecturally is affected by their age, familiarity with architecture and level of education. Furthermore, it was found that political architecture should embody the true nature of its region and the society, while still representing the political agenda of the present power. The main conclusion being that the abstract political message becomes positively interpreted and adopted by the society, and the building becomes the physical symbol of that abstract political intent. This dissertation argues for a political architecture that symbolises the diverse identities of all South Africans so that the architecture can, through its symbolism, bring about positive social change.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1.1 Background**

The debate as to why Africa as a whole is unable to develop and integrate socially after the eradication of colonisation has been on the agenda of most political, economic and social forums ranging from university lecture rooms to national parliaments all the way to the United Nations Conference sessions. On May 25, 1963 the UN created the OAU (Organization for African Union) with the objective to promote solidarity amongst African states and their people and to eradicate all forms of colonialism (Herwitz, 2012). The OAU's vision and objectives were based largely on the Pan-African movement ideologies, a theme that all people of African descent share histories, interests, and concerns and should unite to develop their common culture. The founding of the Pan-African movement is credited to Henry Sylvester Williams (1869–1911), a scholar from Trinidad, West Indies, who convened the first Pan-African congress held in London in the year 1900 (Adi, 2007).

More recently, once apartheid was abolished in South Africa in 1994, the mandate of the OAU changed from eradicating colonization to its other objective, promoting solidarity amongst all African people. This objective was discussed in subsequent conferences and caucuses until it was enlivened in Thabo Mbeki's famous speech to the Constitutional Assembly just prior to the adoption of South Africa's new constitution in 1996 when he proclaimed proudly, "I am an African" (Mbeki, 1996). In this speech he sought to reawaken the African Renaissance of the 1930's and to instil a sense of pride and identity to those brought low by oppression and those in fear since liberation. The African Renaissance became the popular name for the Pan-Africanist agenda enshrined in the OAU's objective to achieve solidarity and greater unity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa (Herwitz, 2012).

In Durban, South Africa, African leaders met on 9 July 2002 to form the African Union, which was to be the successor of the Organisation for African Unity and it became the paramount Pan-African institution under jurisdiction of the United Nations (Gottschalk, 2008). The AU took on the responsibility of promoting, amongst

other agendas, the living heritage that all Africans had to educate Africans of their pasts and to seek to unite them on the grounds of a shared history and identity (Herwitz, 2012). The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) was established in 2004 and is the legislative arm of the AU, which allows it to pass and enforce laws that protect the citizens of the member nations from human rights abuses and to promote the building-up of their national identities. The problem, since 2004, has been that the PAP never received its legislative powers for many political reasons and this has prevented it from fulfilling its mandate of promoting the social and cultural aspects of identity. In January 2013, however, the PAP was given its legislative powers and now seeks to put into action the policies of national identity and heritage promotion it has discussed and recommended since its inception in 2004 (Kotch, 2013).

The membership of the PAP is made up of 5 members of each of the 54 African country's parliaments, which constitutes the 270 members. Until January 2013 the members have served a part-time role in the parliament, meeting for three months in two-week periods, thereafter returning to their normal parliamentary positions in their home countries. This has caused a problem with members seeking to further their own agendas carried over from their home parliaments. But under the new legislation, the members of PAP will be individually selected by their parliaments as full-time PAP representatives and will therefore be able to focus only on the issues pertaining to the PAP agenda. There is not much media publicity about the affairs of the AU, which is a critique often sustained by the organization because the AU is meant to be the mouthpiece of the people, and this communication with the public is essential if the public's issues are to be addressed at the parliamentary level. The revised membership structure will, in theory, solve the problem of hidden agendas and a new public relations focus should also increase awareness and relevance of the organisation to the people it serves- the individual African citizens. Once the organization has relevance it can start to propagate its mandate- to promote the new African identity. There is however a need for a new PAP headquarters to house the offices of the new members permanently; to house the parliamentary functions and to facilitate the interface between the PAP membership and the ordinary citizen to, "...Strengthen the partnership of government, people and communities toward a better African way of life... providing the people of Africa with a permanent state of the art structure to house their parliament." (Dlamini Zuma, 2007: 1).

### **1.1.2 Motivation of the Study**

In February 2013 the PAP received its legislative powers, which allow it not only to be a legislative consultant to its member nations but also to enforce its own human rights and economic practise laws without interruption from the member nations implicated in the injustice. Member nations now also elect special parliamentary members that work full-time at the PAP headquarters so they can all work together to fulfil the vision of the African Union.

Most importantly, however, is the fact that the Pan African Parliament is the social organ of the African Union that is responsible for changing the negative image Africans have toward their fellow Africans, as a result of colonization, and has identified this as the reason for the wars and cultural and racial disputes prevalent throughout Africa. In order to heal the African identity and reunite Africa's people, the Pan African Parliament believes that public buildings, in all the African countries, should symbolise this new unity and foster the social integration of all the different people in the country the building is built in. It is through public buildings symbolising everyone, rather than one particular group, that will allow Africans to identify with the building literally and subconsciously identify more with the country that building is in and, most importantly, the diversity of people the country is made up of.

This has necessitated the design of a new building to house the Pan African Parliament permanently from which these positive goals can be realised and proliferated through the symbolism contained in the built form.

### **1.1.3 Problem Statement**

Since the emancipation of all African states by 1994, the attitudes of African people have since changed as the process of equality and transformation has started to take hold. However, in most cases contemporary urban society is faced with symbols of the previous political power expressed in architecture of the cities' public buildings *inter alia* political architecture, which it must now lay claim to, but this seems somewhat unnatural because that architecture is symbolic of a history past and hated.

Parliamentary buildings, in most cases, do not represent modern aspirations of the people nor do they respond sensitively to place.

## **1.2 AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1 Aim**

The main aim of this research is to formulate a framework to better inform the design of political architecture in South Africa through a better understanding of how people perceive abstract architectural symbols.

### **1.2.2 Objectives**

1.2.3.1 *Identify* and reinterpret the framework of the AU, relating it to the built form and possible barriers that may affect its implementation.

1.2.3.2 *Evaluate critically* how current political buildings compare against the African Union's framework for new African political architecture.

1.2.3.3 *Explore* political architecture and its relation to abstract symbolism.

1.2.4.4 *Formulate* recommendations as to how abstract symbolism can be better perceived by the general public specifically in African political architecture.

## **1.3 SETTING OUT THE SCOPE**

### **1.3.1 Delimitation of Research Problem**

The issue identified for this study is twofold. The first issue is one of symbolism and the use of architecture to communicate that symbol to individuals, and the collective to create social change. The second is of identifying specifically what the aims of the African Union are towards the built environment so that the architecture (symbol) can represent correctly the ideals of the organisation. The research will be limited to issues relating directly to the built environment; political, economic, and social issues in the research area will be mentioned but not explored. The focus will be to create an

architectural statement that embodies the aspirations of the African Union for Africa's political future, but one that relates also to its context of Durban.

### 1.3.2 Definition of Key Terms

**Perception:** the ability to become aware of something through the senses and to understand its characteristics.

**Abstract Symbolism:** the practice of using the compositional qualities of a building in a way that communicates a message through experience.

**Pan African Parliament:** the legislative arm of the African Union that has legal powers above those of the member countries. It is mandated to ensure that member nations do not commit crimes against their own people in any way and has the power to enforce their rulings with military intervention or economic sanctions. The Pan African Parliament is also responsible for interfacing with the African people and is the public department of the African Union.

**Political Architecture:** public buildings only, whose intent is to represent governmental ideologies, whether past, present or future.

### 1.3.3 Stating the Assumptions

- Architecture can be used as a symbol to communicate a message that can influence society.
- Better perception of architectural symbols will lead to a better understanding of architecture.
- Political buildings hold a special significance to society because they represent certain aspects of that society's characteristics.
- Architectural symbols are not always recognised, interpreted and understood clearly by the general public.

### **1.3.4 Research Questions**

The research seeks to answer the following main question

1.3.4.1 What is the impact of political architecture on society?

And the following sub-questions

1.3.4.2 How can a building represent the culture and identity of a multicultural nation?

1.3.4.3 How can a building communicate a political message or agenda?

### **1.3.5 Hypothesis**

Political architecture will be more socially significant if people are able to perceive the abstract symbolism expressed in the architecture clearly.

## **1.4 KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORIES**

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

There are currently many theories and examples of creating symbolism or representations of the past, from commemorative buildings, active re-use of old structures to simply translating the architecture of old through the use of modern materials and building techniques. But what about symbolising the future? There is a framework necessary for the creation of socially significant buildings that cause people to look ahead at what could be in the future, buildings that embody ideologies and inspire people to identify and adopt the ideologies symbolised by an architectural work. The following sub-chapter outlines the approach that will be taken in the research to establish an outline for the above-mentioned framework.

### 1.4.2 Phenomenological Concepts Relating to Place and Meaning

According to Fred Lukerman (1964:16) the idea of 'place' involves the integration of elements of nature and culture. The definition of 'place', as advocated by Walter (1998) is a geographic entity, rooted in "a portion of space". This portion of space is not an empty stage on which events and activities unfold, but instead one invested with myriad meanings. The notion of a Platonian conception of place as advocated by Walter (1998) can be understood from two senses which are; a place being the concrete setting for human lives, activity and movement: 'place' provides both the real, concrete, settings from which cultures originate to entangle people in webs of activities and meaning and the physical expression of those cultures in the form of landscapes (Agnew & Duncan; 1989: preface).

A place could also be a socially constructed entity that is necessarily invested with human meaning. Far from being a static and historic form, place may be thought of as a *process of becoming*. People are active participants in the historically continuing process of the making of place; within the context of their times, they construct places by investing in them human meaning from themselves (Agnew & Duncan; 1989: preface). Our perception of that space affects our understanding and behavior in that space and therefore what part of ourselves we invest into it becomes important as a result. According to Rogers (1992) the second view recognizes that all social life is "regionalised and regionalising" and that place-making is situated in specific time-space contexts (Rogers; 1992:245).

Constructed places are not confined to the here and now i.e. concrete settings of the present, but include places of past experiences (memory). Those memories that reside in the imagination or even those that exist in simulations and iconographies also affect how we as people map, overlap images and create interpretations of a place. Space is thus not uniform and homogeneous as was conceptualised by the bygone colonial planners but it has its own name, sense and experience and the architecture must reflect that. The place has to be recognized and considered as a phenomenon of direct experience. Places are thus sources of identity for every single living being and thus the importance of adequate experiencing, creating and maintaining of every single place is obvious.

A phenomenological approach investigates the man-environment relations, the effects which environments have on people i.e. the effects of particular organizations of space, time, meaning, and communication on human behavior, emotion, and mood. A focus on human needs, cultural, historical and natural contexts within a place will serve to contribute to the study in its investigation of how to respond to local context and culture. Space only becomes place when it is given a contextual meaning derived from cultural or regional meaning.

### **1.4.3 Critical Regionalism**

A term first used by architect Alexander Tzonis and historian Liane Lefaivre, who believed that there was a need for architecture to break away from being a mindlessly reproduced architecture simply for the sake of cultural or vernacular concerns (Lefaivre, Tonis, 2003). They introduced the idea of architecture responding to the place it was in, and its locality being reflected through the way the architecture was designed to accommodate site, climate, and materials available in the region.

Kenneth Frampton later asked the question, “how does one design a building in this modern age, yet still retain the core source of the area that gives it its identity?”(Frampton, 1987: 27).

Frampton(1985) also mentions that modern architecture must maintain an ‘*arrière-garde*’(Frampton, 1985:20), which means that it should not speak too loudly of the future so as to be unidentifiable with the present, and also it shouldn’t be based too much on the past so as to become nostalgic. Architects recognised as critical regionalists like Tadao Ando, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen seem to attach a deep understanding and response to the places surrounding their buildings. This is reflected in the sculptural, simple forms they use, and the way the buildings sit on the site.

They also tend to represent culture and identity of the place not in the literal form the building takes, but rather to make the building a simple element or stage on which to celebrate the identities prevalent in that culture. The architecture becomes almost non-descript but contains elements symbolic of the culture in its very DNA i.e. the

materials used in its construction. These buildings become well integrated to the social context because (theoretically) the architecture doesn't prescribe the expression of the culture but rather allows space for that expression in whatever form it may exist in, taking into account the fact that that expression is likely to change over time.

#### **1.4.4 Genius Loci**

Genius loci is an aspect of the popular social theory of phenomenology. Genius loci was first introduced by Norberg-Schulz in 1979 and can be summarized as the sense people have of a place. In his later publication, "Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) he explains that the idea of a place should be viewed from the perspective of an everyday user, where that person makes a contribution to the spirit of that place too. However Jackle (1987) believes genius loci is better observed from the perspective of a visitor. His reason is that as a visitor, one seeks to actively find the spirit of the place and it is the obvious traits of the place's character that form its spirit. One can also not be biased because one has no previous experiences associated to that place and that allows a visitor to see more clearly and objectively the characteristics of that environment.

The word 'spirit' has physical and psychological implications in the case of genius loci. Physically the 'spirit' is a reference to the human and tangible characteristics of the place; the way things look and feel like; the cultural expression of the people around; the scale and form of the buildings and the skyline all form part of the physical symbolism of the place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The second manifestation of 'spirit' is the natural. These are characteristics particular to the natural composition of the area: topographical landscape, inclusive of cosmological and temporal perspectives that include the natural changes brought about by changing seasons. Emphasis is placed on how the human aspect is static, while the natural is always changing (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The architecture must be built *from* the earth and he describes genius loci as "a place in nature that should be interpreted when designing within the built environment" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980: 25-32).

Norberg-Schulz describes space as being given meaning by the people using it and the various activities they do within that space. In this respect his theory seems to sympathise with that of critical regionalism, but he has a much deeper concern for the life that happens within the building.

“Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify with an environment, or, in short when he experiences the environment as meaningful.”(Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The philosophers who impacted on Norberg-Schulz’s theoretical understanding like philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger will be conferred to gain a better understanding of the topic of genius loci. There is a lack of clarity on exactly how to embody this phenomenon of genius loci into the design of a building however particularly the abstract characteristics.

#### **1.4.5 Space Syntax Theory of Spatial Perception**

In order to understand how people perceive architecture it is essential to understand not only how form and symbols are created architecturally but also how the experience of walking through a building’s many different spaces informs one’s perception of the overall intent of the designer. Political buildings have to not only symbolize something from the outside but that symbolism should also be carried through on the inside, to everyday users and visitors to experience.

“In describing our experience of architecture we describe not only the attributes of things, but also the intellectual processes of which the thing is a manifestation. Only with the simultaneous presence of both do we acknowledge architecture.” (Hillier, 2007: 134)

Hillier (2007) theorizes that a building is the physical and spatial transformation necessary to address a symbolic question. Its form is a result of the functions defined by the spatial needs and the appearance is a symptom of the prevailing cultural ideal within the particular society the building is to be placed and what the designer intended that building to represent to society.

Hillier (2007) explains that within a building, all the related spaces cannot be experienced all at once, but are experienced consecutively and cumulatively, creating a movement. That experience of the movement to each smaller space informs you to the whole symbolism of the building. The configuration of space becomes a vehicle for symbolism, as it is the experience of each smaller part contributing a part to the complete perception of the whole (Hillier, 2007).

Our minds automatically recognize configuration of things especially when the configurations or spaces are related. An example would be a place of worship. We already have an idea of what a place of worship should be like to experience based on previous experiences with them by passing through the successive spaces or its configuration. Therefore once we enter a new place of worship, our minds register what it is and measure the experience against the past experiences. We then judge that particular place of worship to be successful or not and adjust our understanding of what a place of worship should be accordingly (Hillier, 2007). One can imagine how much information your brain has stored over your entire lifetime with regards to architecture and the subconscious ideas of space we have. This brings impotence to the study of precedents as that is how our brains perceive the present- through the past, and also shows the importance of creating a new experience within the building in order to change the perception the user has of that particular type of architecture. If you cumulatively add every ideal of every built form of every person within a society you then have a culture (*op. cit*). These are expectations that society has of its architectural identity but these ideals cannot be easily expressed in words because they are not experienced consciously and therefore exist only in our subconscious minds. These ideals about spacial perception are therefore non-discursive i.e. they cannot be explained or talked about, only experienced.

Non-discursivity of space is another important aspect to the theory. It essentially describes the spatial configuration of the building as how it communicates with us without words but rather with how the spaces are constrained physically in height, depth, sound, light, etc. We intuitively register these subliminal messages as rule systems, which teach us how to behave in a socially acceptable and recognizable way

in that particular space. When we talk about ‘knowing’ a building, we are saying that we understand the building’s rules and we use them to govern our behaviour within the bounds of the social situation defined by the architecture. If we understand the rules we become architecturally perceptive (*ibid.*).

Architecture, then, must not have a culture (or common grammar) because, as Hillier (2007) explains, it extracts the cultural underpinnings of a structure to reveal the creative thought behind the reasons that building is the way it is (based on form and spacial quality). Hillier (2007) also proposes that architecture is therefore a science with room for an artistic element in the expression or communication i.e. the symbolic meaning of its scientific findings based on tangible facts particular to that building.

This theory ties in well with those of *genius loci* and critical regionalism in a peculiar way. It adds a real scientific credence to both theories explaining why it is important for a building to be contextually sensitive and what the consequences are of designing a building, or spaces within it, poorly. It advocates a non-cultural architectural expression but, as critical regionalism does, dictates that the intention of the building should be expressed in the way the spaces within are created. Façades become secondary and simply cosmetic elements or expressions of place that the users will be able to identify with, but it is important that the façades reflect the typology of building it is clearly so that people using the building can be governed by the rule-set implied by that typology. This is incredibly important in political buildings, as there is always a very specific intent that the state or organisation is trying to embody in the architecture and impart on the public.

#### **1.4.6 Conclusion to Key Concepts and Theories**

Political architecture has a social significance particular to itself. Its social significance depends both on alienation from, and adoption into the society they are placed in (Yaneva, 2012). They must therefore be physically and spatially appropriate- incorporating all of the elements particular to the place *inter alia* social, political, economic, contextual and urban. However, the architecture must be peculiar to firstly arouse interest and also to symbolise something new that that society is not accustomed to and must become used to. The process of being aware that one’s surroundings have an impact on their perception of where they are and that that

affects their experience of an architectural environment need to be more fully understood and synthesised and, in this way, an understanding of the above concepts and theories can be used to inform the research topic with more specific methods of communicating abstractly, literal ideas to the users of the buildings in ways they can perceive in order to instigate social and political change in the minds of a building's users.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

The relevant material is a compilation of data from various sources where data is unlikely to be collected using one source. The decision of which research methods and materials to use is dependent on the aims and objectives, therefore it is crucial to select the correct method as a means of reaching the objective rather than because it is simply preferred over another method (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). Theoretical and case study approaches have both been used in this research document to investigate and analyze the applied concepts and to test the theories. There are two types of background research, namely primary and secondary sources.

### **1.5.2 Primary Research**

Primary research is a study of a subject through firsthand observations and investigation (Dawson, 2009). Primary sources are a major component of the research, used in order to answer the research questions and to give focused direction to the investigation. The main data collection tools used in this research are research observations i.e. physical traces and environmental behaviour, standardized questionnaires and focused interviews.

- Observing physical traces is the systematic observation of the physical surroundings to find reflections of previous activities. Traces may either be conscious changes people have made to their surroundings or left behind unknowingly. For researchers, such environment-behaviour traces begin to assume how an environment became how it is; what decisions its designers and builders made about the space; how people really use it; how they feel

toward their spatial surroundings and ultimately how that particular environment meets the needs of its users. Researchers therefore begin to form an idea of what type of people use the space, their culture, affiliations and the way they present themselves (Zeisel, 1984).

- Observing environmental behavior is systematically watching people use their environment- individuals, couples, small or big groups. Alternatively, it is observing how a physical environment supports or hinders behaviours taking place within it, and the effects the setting has on relationships between individual and groups. Simply put, it is looking at how people behave in and use space (Hall, 1966). Observing environmental behaviour generates data about people's activities and the relationships needed to sustain them, regularities and irregularities in the behaviour, expected uses, new uses and misuses of a place and about behavioural opportunities and constraints that the environment provides (Zeisel, 1984).
- Focused interviews is a means of posing questions used to find out what people think, feel, do, know, believe and expect. These investigations can be used with both individuals and groups to find out how people define architectural situations; what elements they consider important about architecture; what effects they intend their actions to have in that situation and how they feel about it (*op.cit*).

Individuals interviewed were:

- Stefano Vatteroni: Former partner at GAPP Architects and Urban Designers, who formed part of the design team of the Apartheid Museum and other landmark projects in South Africa. He explained about the significance of political buildings and how symbolism could be represented in architectural works.
- Mfanelo Mbenenge: An attorney and acting judge in the Eastern Cape who provided a judicial perspective as to what architecture symbolizes and how it can impact on how a political system is run.
- Lerato: A tour guide at the Constitutional Court who offered insights

on who, when and why people visit political buildings.

- Ntokozo Xaba: An ordinary office worker at the Constitutional Court explained what it was like working in a politically important building and what it meant to himself.
  - Ruben Reddy: A Durban architect who had his office in the Durban CBD spoke about what the Durban city centre's public buildings represented and what is wrong and right about their representations.
  - Nosipho Hlongwe: A security worker at the Apartheid Museum who spends many hours watching people's reactions to the exhibits on display at the museum.
  - In-Sun Kim: A South Korean tourist visiting the Apartheid Museum for the first time was asked her thoughts on the experience of the Apartheid Museum and what it made her think about South African politics and history.
  - Sharon Daniels: A tourist from Barbados who was interviewed at the Constitutional Court. She offered her opinions on what the building symbolized to her and what it made her think about the South African political system and the South African people as well.
  - Lindinhlanhla Mngadi: A young professional who studied international business in the United States of America and now works in Johannesburg, representing international clients. He was asked about what international visitors initially think of South Africans and whether their perceptions change after they have visited significant political buildings along the popular tour routes.
- 
- Standardised questionnaires are used to discover regularities among groups of people by comparing answers to the same set of questions. Questionnaires provide useful data when the researcher begins with a well- defined problem, knowing what major concepts and aspects they want to deal with. The analysis of questionnaire responses can provide accurate statistical data that can help understand the opinions of the general public (*op.cit*).

### 1.5.3 Secondary Research

Secondary research involves the collection of information from studies done by other researchers that will contribute towards a resolution of the research problem (Dawson, 2009). Secondary sources are primarily used in the construction of a conceptual framework and the literature review component of the research. Therefore, they provide background information on the area and serve to supplement and interpret the primary data. This information is collected from books, journal articles, report documents, maps, plans and research documents.

Observing physical traces as well as observing environmental behaviour involved the researcher observing how people interact with the existing political buildings, *inter alia*, Constitutional Court in Braamfontein and the Apartheid Museum in Gauteng. In order to do a conclusive study, it was important to view all sides of the building to get the overall level of interaction between the viewer and the buildings. It was also important to make the observations at different times of the day and different days of the week. Therefore, the observations were done during the week and on the weekend, and secondly during peak times *i.e.* morning or lunch, and again off-peak *i.e.* evenings. The Apartheid Museum was chosen because it is a contemporary heritage building rich in abstract symbolism with political connotations. It communicates a historic ideology but has translated it into modern techniques appropriate to the present time. It is also an important tourist destination and so can offer an insight into symbolizing the local history to the international visitor. The Constitutional Court is a conversion of a historic landmark into a modern building within a complex of museums, offices, shops and training centres. It is symbolic of a unified and equal South African society and must therefore symbolize all prevalent cultures sensitively and tastefully, while also leaving room for interpretation of its meaning. It is a politically important building *inter alia* it is the highest court in South Africa and because of its function, it is highly publicized so the effects of publicity for political buildings can also be investigated.

Focused interviews were conducted in either the form of structured, semi-structured or informal interviews depending on the setting though the basic outline of questions was established beforehand. The number of respondents per session ranged from a minimum of one person to a maximum of 12 people ranging in age, gender, social

status and also ethnicity. The respondents were all coherent and not influenced or intimidated by other members of the group or by the researcher to ensure accurate results.

Standardised questionnaires and focused interviews required the respondents to supply the researcher with some background information such as sex, age, race, educational level, occupation as well as citizenship. The latter was important in establishing the perceptions of different South Africans and foreigners. It also proved crucial to getting a wide range of respondents- old and young. Respondents familiar with the area and others foreign to it were also interviewed. This ensured that the data collected is balanced and not biased towards any particular group/s.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERTURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Symbolism is an important aspect in the design of politically significant buildings. Since the beginning of organised civilizations, particular cultures have been characterized by certain architectural patterns that were peculiar to that culture. As empires grew, they would proliferate their architecture on the nations they conquered as a symbol of conquest and also of shaping the future of that area into accordance with the powers that conquered.

*By acting as a symbol and object of the democratic gaze, such [public] buildings can change political cultures.” (Yaneva, 2012: 17).*

This is the importance of political architecture; *inter alia*, its ability to reshape society through the symbolism embodied in its literal and abstract expression. This literature review seeks to identify the presiding political power in Africa and explore in greater detail its aspirations for the political future of Africa. The current techniques that are used in representing symbolism and how the user perceives it will be evaluated and the various limiting factors that are specific to the region. The main aim of the literature review is to understand in what ways architecture can support the objectives that will be identified, with particular attention being paid to the representation of abstract symbolism in the architecture, to reach those objectives.

### **2.2 Political Architecture**

#### **Introduction**

Political architecture begins where politics does. Politics is defined in the online dictionary *dictionary.com* as “The profession devoted to governing and to political affairs.” This apparently simple definition alludes to the very nature of urban environments themselves, which are defined as densely populated areas where people live together under common government or leadership (*dictionary.com*). It appears then that politics arose when urban areas began because the groups of people living close together in growing towns- and eventually cities- needed a system of government to administer the running of that place. It is here, in the beginnings of

densely populated ancient towns and cities, where those in politically powerful positions began building town or city centres where publicly important buildings were built. These centres became important as tools for expressing the culture of the people living in the city, monuments to the success and power of that state or city and also important public works projects that provided work for the large populations. In the following section political architecture will be discussed in detail, from a brief history to its current relevance and future importance (Lefabvre, 2003).

### **Brief History**

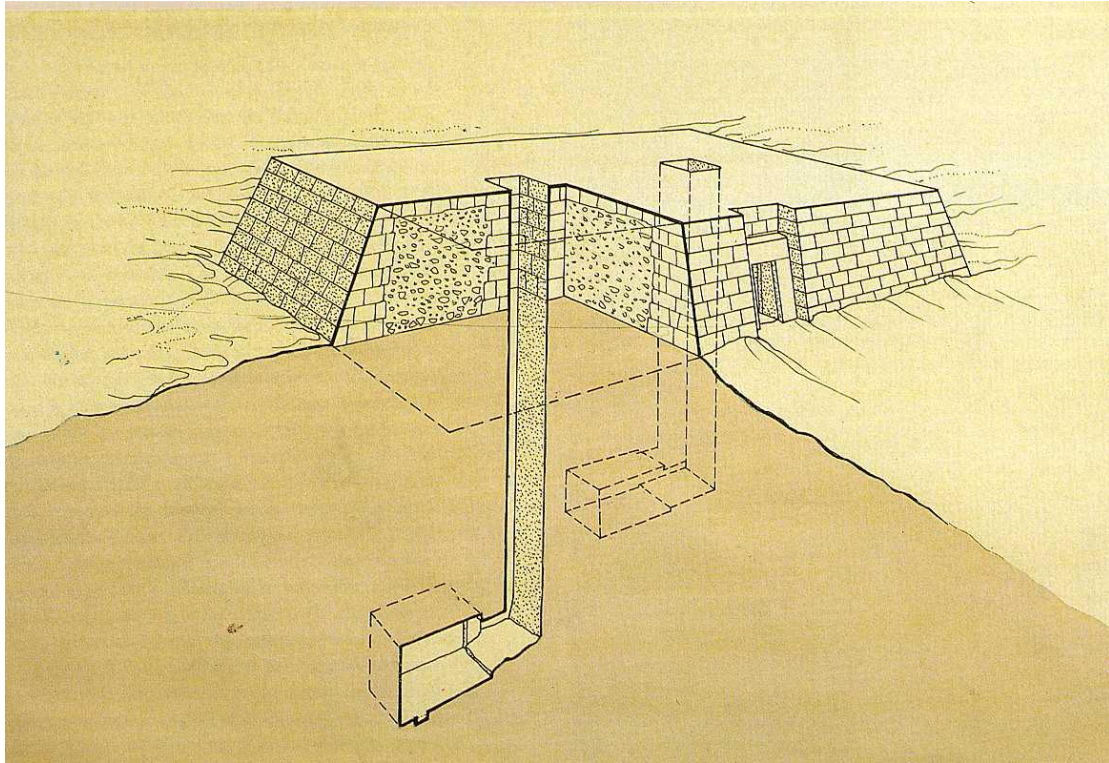
Permanent settlements began around 8000-5000BC with the mastery of food production in the areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, India and Mesopotamia. Figure 1 shows the Jarmo house in Mesopotamia from around this period.



**Figure 1** Scale model of clay Jarmo house (8000-5000BC). Source: [teachmiddleeast.lib.edu](http://teachmiddleeast.lib.edu).

These permanent villages were constructed from clay bricks and plastered with mud (Hawkes, 1976). As the villages began to grow, the density in the villages steadily increased and by 3000BC the larger villages had become towns with housing, shops, religious structures and workshop areas (*Vanished Civilizations*, 1983). These cities

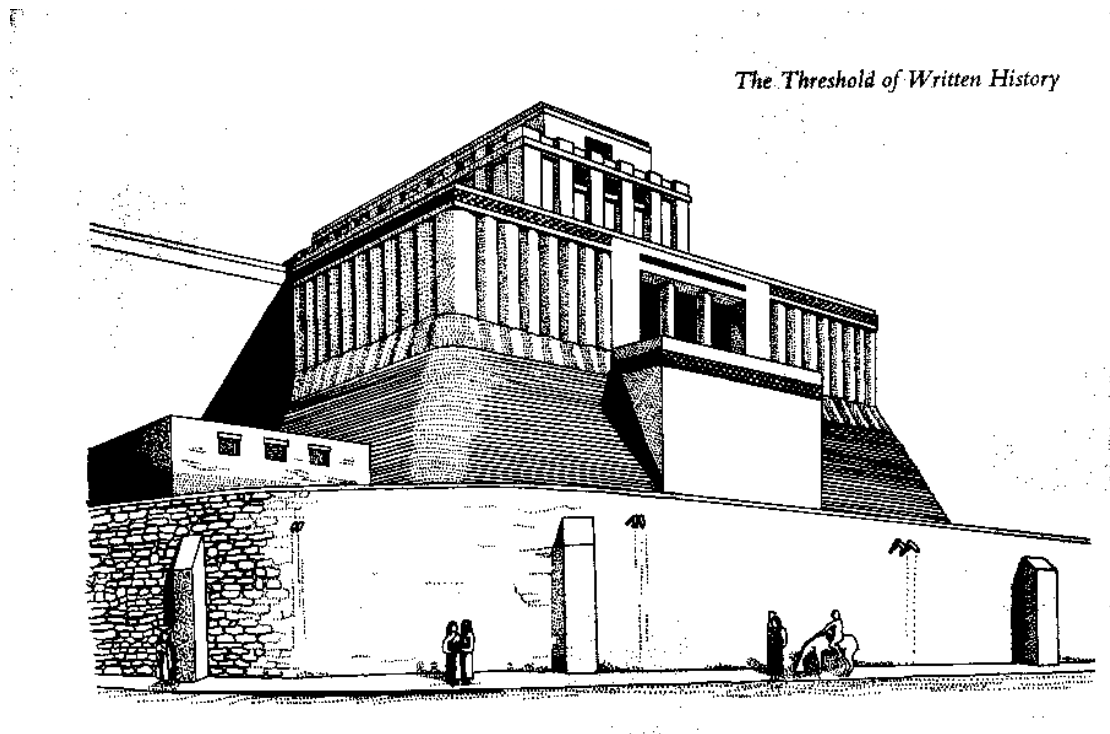
had developed, at this time, their own social structures, which had developed from chiefdom structures when humans were exclusively hunters and gatherers, migrating



**Figure 2 Drawing of a typical Mastaba tomb. Source: studyblue.com**

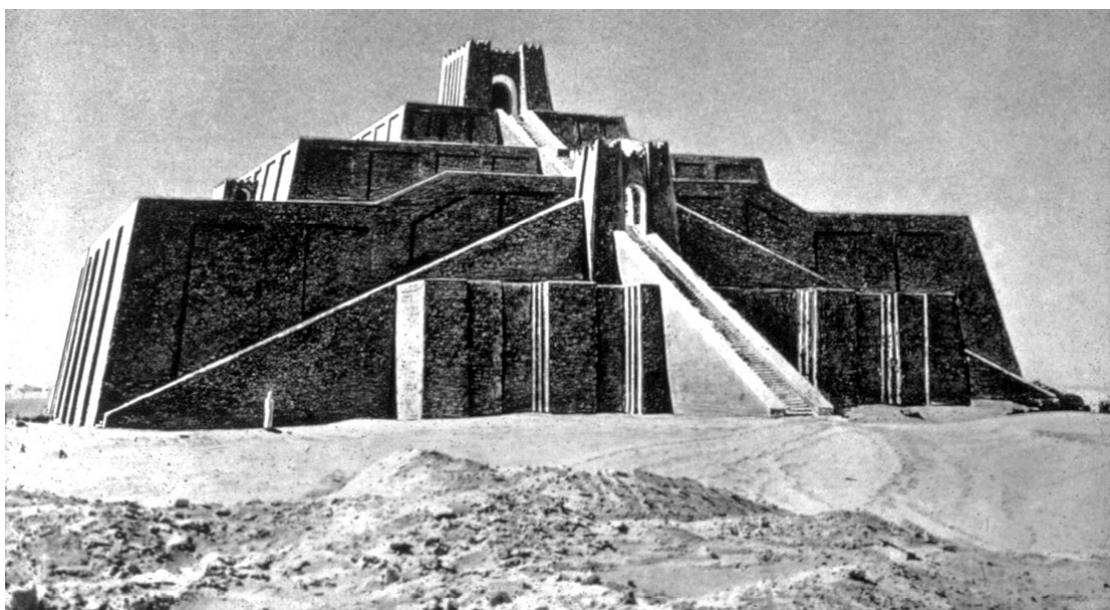
with their food sources. Subsequently, as these towns and peoples moved towards unity, there arose the need for a leader and ruling class that would act as religious, administrative, military or business leaders- or any combination of the former. As these cities developed, so too did the skills of craftsmen, technologists, scientist, mathematicians, etc. and these highly skilled labourers grew too expensive for the general public and could only be commissioned by the wealthy ruling class. Because of this, the projects they worked on, developed and perfected were initially religious and burial structures i.e. Mastaba tombs in Saqqara, Egypt (Figure 2) and Temples in Eridu, Mesopotamia (Figure 3).

In the Eastern Mediterranean settlements i.e. Dimini, stone walls were being constructed around the cities for defensive purposes and important public buildings and palaces were placed at the centre as the most defensible position (Hawkes, 1976). This is where the term *town centre* stemmed from and, from that one can see the attitude of a town's civilians towards their public buildings. Soon the ruling classes



**Figure 3 Artist's impression of the grand temple at Eridu, Mesopotamia. Source: [people.wku.edu](http://people.wku.edu)**

began to understand that there is a psychology associated with the image or perception of a city centre's buildings and the public image of the nation; the general rule being the grander the public, religious and royal structures erected at the city centre, the more powerful the nation was. The scale of these projects was limited by the financial means of the ruling power, the skill and size of the labour force, the access to building materials and the ego and esteem of the nation's people (*ibid.*).



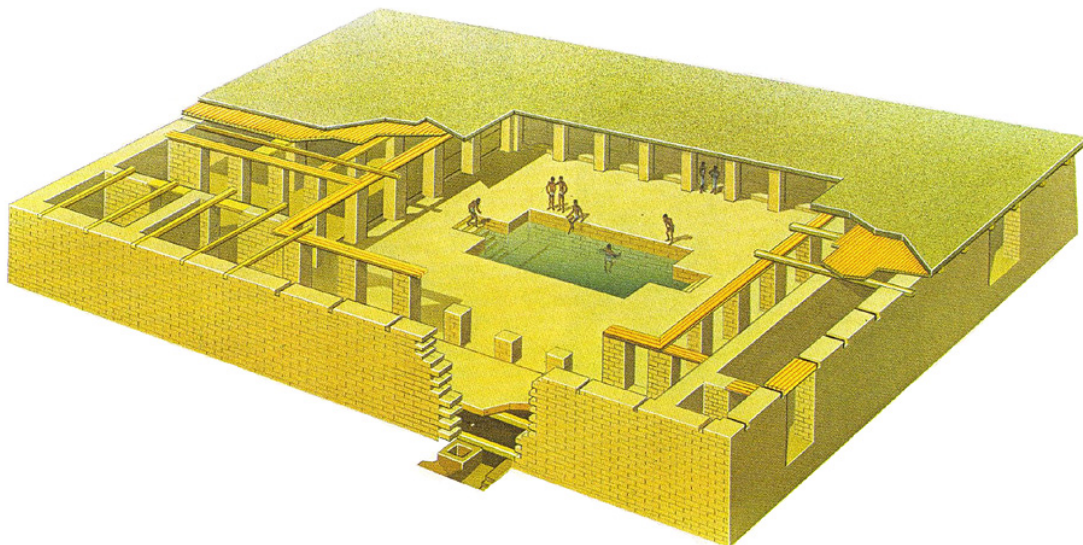
**Figure 4 An artist's impression of the Great Ziggurat at Ur, Mesopotamia. Source: [hudsonfla.com](http://hudsonfla.com)**

By the year 2000BC Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Indian architecture had progressed greatly as the labour force became more and more skilled and technological knowledge increased. The Egyptian mastaba had developed into the stepped pyramid and culminated in the construction of the Great Pyramids at Giza which are monumental in scale and stature to this day. The Mesopotamian civilization had developed the Ziggurat (Figure 4) and architecturally complex temples. Their houses used arches and vaults and showed that their standard of living within the cities was comparatively high.

At the same time India's civic buildings of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (Figure 5) were more functional than aesthetic, competent rather than ambitious. Cities in the Mediterranean like Troy II were also at a similar level of development around this time (Hawkes, 1976).

This begins to show that there is a correlation between the advancement of a civilization in terms of technology, art, architecture, religion and economy and the grandness of its civic buildings. These political buildings could be seen then, to be the culmination of the above factors and an expression of those civilizations' advancement and power.

At the height of its power, the Egyptian empire built many elaborate temples, palaces and overscaled statues depicting their gods, wars, historical events and their Pharaohs.



**Figure 5 The Great Baths at Mohenjo-Daro, India. Source: [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)**

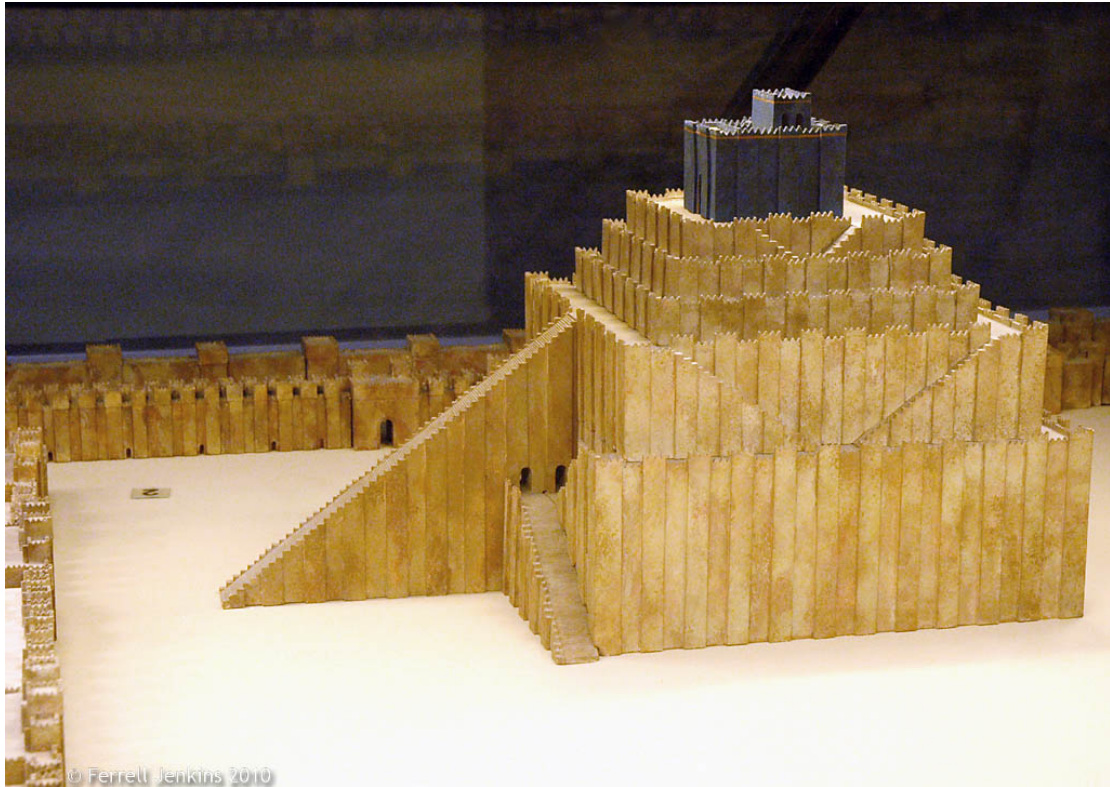
This political influence that spread over the entire southern Mediterranean meant a proliferation of public buildings at home and in conquered territories. These became hugely significant symbolically as the structures and statues represented the political power of the Pharaoh over that area and its peoples (Hawkes, 1976). Egyptian rulers soon learnt the power of influence architecture had on shaping the perceptions of people *inter alia* a massive statue of Pharaoh Rameses gave authority and power to people's idea of him even though he lived in a palace hundreds of kilometres away.

Burgeoning civilizations in Mycenae and Knossos of the Eastern Mediterranean; Anyang, China and the Americas were beginning to express their cultures through architecture and were making huge strides in stone, timber and brick construction. These developments, coupled with their military successes and subsequent wealth, led to the building of the palace of Knossos (Figure 6) by king Minos in Crete.



**Figure 6 A reconstruction of the palace of Knossos in Crete. Source: [jubran.deviantart.com](http://jubran.deviantart.com)**

By the year 1000BC the Egyptian empire had declined and there was no architectural progress at that time (Hawkes, 1976). This proves too that architectural progress is related to the growth of a nation. In Babylon however, the Ziggurat (Figure 7) had now developed into a larger structure, more complex in composition but similar in character to the ones at Ur (Figure 4).



**Figure 7 A scale model of a typical Ziggurat c.500BC. Source: [ferreljenkins.wordpress.com](http://ferreljenkins.wordpress.com)**

In the Eastern and Western Mediterranean the kingdoms of the Greek were growing in power and technological expertise. They began exploring physics and mathematics in great detail and their discoveries were expressed in the architecture of their public buildings. Their use of metal tools allowed them to cut and sculpt marble, an incredibly dense stone highly prized to this day. Advances in transportation allowed for the moving of huge quantities of building materials up to hilltops where such structures were usually built and for the hoisting and connecting of large stones incredibly accurately (Hawkes, 1976). Structures such as Solomon's temple in Jerusalem and the temple of Artemis in Corfu (Figure 8) are popular examples of the character of political architecture of this time (*op.cit.*).



**Figure 8 A reconstruction of the temple of Artemis in Corfu, Ephesus. Source: [ephesuswonders.com](http://ephesuswonders.com)**

From the above image it is evident, the increase in architectural value these public buildings have. These buildings were placed on prominent sites overlooking the citadels and huge sums of public and private funds were spent on their construction. They came to symbolise the stature of the ordinary people's economic, religious and social power but also their intellectual and philosophical ideals. Political architecture steadily began to encompass more and more of the social aspects particular to a given nation and author Jacquetta Hawkes (1976) argues that it [political buildings] became all encompassing *viz.* they became the most important structures to the citizens of a city to such an extent that began associating their identity with the buildings and what they represented.



**Figure 9 A reconstruction of the Pharos lighthouse in the bay of Alexandria, Egypt. Source: [7wonders.com](http://7wonders.com)**

Around 500BC onwards, political architecture followed a common thread throughout the world. Nations would grow, develop their own architectural style and then, as nation conquered nation, the conqueror would proliferate their style of architecture over that of the conquered nation's. An example of this phenomenon is the Pharos

lighthouse in Alexandria (Figure 9) in Egypt, which was built in the Hellenistic style in buildings such as the Parthenon in Athens, during the Alexandrian Empire. It used the principles of Greco design and technology but was decorated in the traditional Egyptian style (*ibid.*).

Around the entire Mediterranean periphery the Romans had occupied and were proliferating the Greco-Roman circa 500AD. India had developed intricately detailed temples such as those at the Ajanta caves in India (Figure 10). In Persia, the major structures like the Temple of Gareus and the palace at Ctesiphon had more similarities to Roman architecture than to Mesopotamian architectural tradition. The Americas saw a revolution in stone building design with the construction of early classic pyramid temples in the jungles of Guatemala around this same period (Hawkes, 1976).



**Figure 10** An interior photograph of a temple in the Ajanta caves in India. Source: [wondermondo.com](http://wondermondo.com)

Since then the development of political architecture followed the same patterns even to modern examples such as Adolph Hitler's architect Albert Speer's idea of creating monumental, imposing city centres where Hitler's Nazi Germania would display its power and sovereignty to the entire world. Speer's architecture was

heavily influenced by Roman architecture but was hugely overscaled and with less decoration. The austerity seems consistent with the character of the German nation at the time, one of precision, devoid of emotion and a very clinical focus on efficiency and performance. In Figure 11 is an example of a model built from Speer's plans for an Olympic stadium. It is based on the roman architectural principles but monumental in scale (*op.cit.*). This monumentality has been seen consistently throughout the history of political architecture and exists even in modern America where the capital, Washington D.C. has many monumental buildings and statues celebrating the history of the USA and the struggles won in unifying the nation (Karp, 1983).

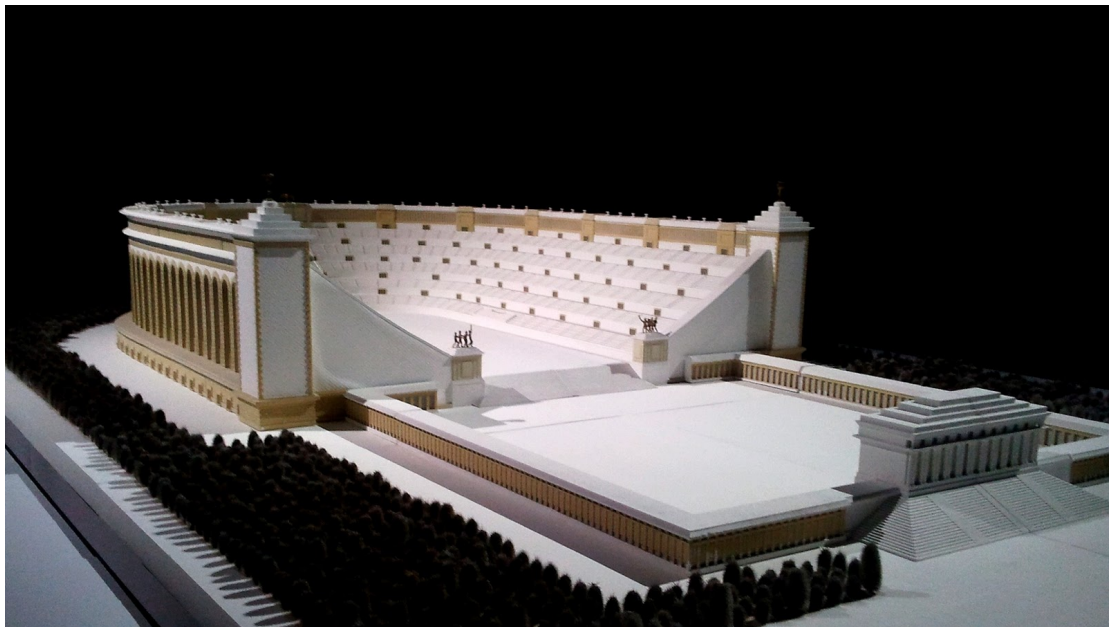


Figure 11 A scale model of the Nuremberg Reichstadtparteitag's Deutsches Stadion based on the Panathenaic Stadium of Athens. Source: [deutschelandostmark.blogspot.com](http://deutschelandostmark.blogspot.com)

### **Political Architecture in South Africa Today**

In the same way that the emperors of Rome used the gladiator games held at the Coliseum to please the masses and gain political favour so too can the same trend be noticed in today's South Africa. The ruling party uses the provision of infrastructure and housing as a measuring-stick to gauge its progress. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the building of RDP houses has become political because of its association with politics (Christopher, 2001). In this way any typology of architecture can also become political in nature if it is associated with a politically significant event i.e. the World Trade Centre.

South Africans, as a nation, are extremely sensitive to political issues because of apartheid. The links between architecture and a political power are extremely close because of the political agenda embodied in the symbolism of the architecture (Msomi, 2011). Architecture is *always* a physical expression of ideas and intentions (Hawkes, 1976) and so the way political architecture in South Africa is expressed is the same *viz.* it is a product of the socio-political climate it is conceived from and a political building should therefore seek to embody ideals needed in the future ideals of a divided nation similarly to how the Egyptians used political architecture to unify the lower and upper kingdoms into one unified state (*op.cit*). That architecture must express the old traditional history of South Africa's myriad cultures also a new culture that is common to all, so that there can be unity across the social and cultural strata of the country. This is the true goal of political architecture, to bring about social change in the minds of a nation's populace.

### **Post-apartheid Architectural Apartheid**

In the same way that political debate is a never-ending discussion as to what the masses need from the prevailing political order, perhaps the same debate is required in the field of political architecture. Historic precedents show that the political architecture of the day reflected the apex of that society's political aims and aspirations (Msomi, 2011) but that that architecture was *of the people* i.e. it related to who they were as a people.

Critical regionalist ideas seem not to have affected the political architectural spectrum throughout the European colonization of Africa in the late 1800s during the *Scramble for Africa* (Evans, 2011) where monuments to the colonial era still exist and run. In South Africa even the highest political house, the Union Buildings in Pretoria, are a building adopted by the current South African ruling party but is a building which speaks of British authority and dominion rather than one of African prominence and power (*op.cit*). There may not be fault in the architecture per se but the real problem is what effect the architecture's symbolism has on the minds of the largely black South African population. What the building represents, symbolically, is a time where their [black South African's] rights and liberties were suppressed and quashed. The result being that the black South African who has won democratic freedom has for

his/her political buildings, monuments to an apartheid regime that was so damaging to his esteem (Peters, 2007). Perhaps terms like *architectural apartheid* (Brignell, 2008) can be used literally, as a term to mean the proliferation of apartheid agenda through political architecture. Whether or not architectural apartheid can be proven or not is debatable but the fact remains that it is inappropriate for a nation to have public buildings but especially political buildings that do not represent the true political climate of that place (Msomi, 2011). It is therefore evident that for an architecture of a unified, culturally diverse nation like South Africa, its political architecture should also be unified and culturally diverse as it moves into the future.

### **2.3 Reinterpreting the AU's Framework for New Political Buildings in Africa**

The African Union has, throughout many of its recent sessions, caucuses, and conferences discussed and debated what the real form of this new government should look like architecturally. The Pan African Parliament, as the interface between organisation and citizens has a particular symbolic importance to the public realm in the built environment. In a recent publication of the *PAP VOICE* (Cole and Sithole, 2011) it was decided that the new building should create a simple, unique visual landmark

- “Show transparency between people and governments
- Create a modern, neutral building, symbolising unity
- Use African art in a modern way to represent the different cultures represented in the PAP
- Create a green container of human activities
- The building should respond to its urban context”

*(ibid.)*

These objectives are in line with the PAP's future outlook and are an embodiment of the image the organisation wants to present to the public. The main objective of the building according to Dlamini-Zuma (2007:1) is to “Strengthen Continental solidarity and build a sense of common destiny among the peoples of Africa”. This is one of the

PAP's main objectives but it relates specifically to architecture as creating a symbol of the abstract idea of solidarity and common destiny.

### **A Brief History of the Modernist Architectural Movement**

The PAP has specifically stipulated that the modern architectural style be employed in the design of its new parliament building (Cole and Sithole, 2011). To find out why this style of architecture was specifically chosen, it is necessary to explore in greater detail the meaning and expression of this style of architecture.

Modernism like most architectural styles was a response to a change from classical art to a more emotive, but abstract modernist art that sought purity with the expression and abstraction of objects into pure, geometric shapes. This was as a result of the First World War and the changes in social order it brought (Frampton, 2007). Master artists like Hans Hofmann were inspired by poets and theorists like Ezra Pound and Theodor Adorno who challenged the idea of classicism in thinking, as a direct result of rapid technological advancements that were changing the way people lived from day to day. They advocated new beginnings, calling the old 'obsolete' and 'unnatural' (Frampton, 1980). The main architects who studied and popularized this new style of architecture were practising after the second world war and this is the time the style was truly proliferated, especially in public and institutional buildings.

“I do not mean by the beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures, which the many would suppose to be my meaning; but, says the argument, understand me to mean straight lines and circles, and the plane and solid which are formed out of them by turning- lathes and rulers and measures of angles; for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful but, like other things, but they are eternally and absolutely beautiful.” (Plato, translated 1953: 610-611)

Designers like Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Louise Sullivan and Oscar Niemeyer were influenced by such writings as Plato and other great philosophers who they believed to understand the true construct of timeless beauty and these principles are evident in their respective works throughout the world. The style is characterised by very simplistic, pure forms, planes and voids; clear material expression lacking all applied decoration. This was a result

of the abstract idea of honesty and freedom of expression characterised by the modernist movement, being expressed in the built form (Heynen, 1999).

“For I will open up space for many millions to live, not securely, but free for action.”(Translated from Goethe, 1962:verse 11563f)

Writings that underpinned the modernist architectural movement focussed on issues of liberation of the mind and actions which found itself expressed in open-plan living spaces, the blurring of the divide between nature and building and the consideration of context (Frohburg, 2012). Another important characteristic that manifested itself physically in architecture was “an expression of the lightness inherent in tensile structure and synthetic materials”(Calquhoun, 1962: 508). These were new to architecture and seemed appropriately timed because of the changing mind-set of society. In many instances these new modernist buildings introduced people to a new way of living and working, which affected society until now (Frohburg, 2012).

Frohburg (2012) in his short essay *Freiraum* highlights the huge social implications the modernist movement has and its appropriateness to public buildings. Because the buildings are simple in planning and appearance they afford the opportunity to make artworks the determining factors of its character; this feature is what made modernism appropriate in various contexts around the world, leading to it being known as the *international style*. It has also proved timeless as its aesthetic foundations (based on form and proportion) do not change over time. Many theorists and architects like Lewis Mumford (1947), Kenneth Frampton (2007), Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre (2003) criticize modernist architecture’s tendency towards being too austere and creating a feeling of *placelessness*. This response came as a result of many laypeople and professionals (from the 1930s until now) complaining that these *sculptures* could be duplicated and placed at random around the world because they neglected issues of social, urban and geographical context (Mumford, 1947).

### **Critical Regionalism**

An offshoot of the modernist architectural movement, which embodies the core ideas of modernist architecture but also, concerns itself with issues of context (Tzonis, 2003). Critical regionalists believe that the building should reflect the place it is in,

from the materials selected to the form the building takes. Social context should also be considered so that the building doesn't alienate the society, but rather fits into, and showcases the abstract essence of that society. The spatial qualities of the spaces created and the visual composition of the buildings remains true to the modernist ideals, but it differs from modernists' obsession with "creating a blank canvas lives can be imposed onto" (Mies van der Rohe, 1933) in that it aims to make the building the physical representation of that place's abstract character.

Lewis Mumford (1947) was the theorist most controversially associated with promoting the critique of both regionalism and modernism. Of modernism he was, "...opposed to mindlessly adopting the narcissistic dogmas [of modernism] in the name of universality, leading to environments that are economically costly and ecologically destructive to the human community." (Mumford, 1947:100) but in the same breath he called for the rethinking of regionalism, which he believed to be overly local material, construction and historical preservation, which was a hindrance to progress in the field of architecture. Most established architects in the 1950s were defensive of either the modern international style or the regionalist approach and the true synthesis of the two opposing perspectives only really took hold in the younger generation of architects that began to practice in the 1950s and 1960s (Tzonis, 2003).



**Figure 12 Kenzo Tange, City Hall, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan (1955-1958). Source: [farm3.staticflickr.com](https://farm3.staticflickr.com)**

J.B. Jackson, a young North American architect, thinker and regionalist was, in the 1950s greatly stirred by the rebellion Mumford led against modernism. A major problem he and his contemporaries faced was that they had been taught architecture of the international style but were sympathetic to the cause of the regionalist in that it was sensitive to issues of humanity and familiarity. They were to become, in the 1950s in Europe and the 1960s in North America, the real critical regionalists (Tzonis, 2003). They were so called because they were both critical of modernism and regionalism. The ethos of critical regionalism appears as one of compromise between two extremes; taking from both the features that were positive to the human experience of architecture (mostly found in regionalism) in opposition to the imposition on the natural and social environment (mostly found in modernism); and rejecting the extremist views that alienated humans from the future i.e. regionalism and the past i.e. modernism. Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1954) also reconciled modernism and regionalism in a less confrontational way, citing Walter Gropius and his Bauhaus contemporaries as being unconcerned with history, writing of his work in the same article as being “seen through a language which closely adheres to reality”(Rogers, 1954).

1956 saw the completion of Kenzo Tange’s Kagawa Prefectural Office in Japan and Tange, in response to Rogers’ enthusiastic appreciation of the work, famously stated, “I cannot accept the concept of total regionalism. Tradition can be developed through challenging its short-comings implying the same for regionalism.” In this statement he was criticizing both schools of thought but accepting them at the same time. This compromise is what Lefaivre and Tzonis (2003) call critical regionalism. It is an on-going critique on itself and its relevance, which makes it infinitely flexible- as architectural style should be because contexts are infinitely dissimilar.

A look at the Pan African Parliament’s framework for the new parliamentary building shows a citing of modernism but a description that may more appropriately be called critical regionalism (as it places emphasis on issues of place and the human experience). Place in architecture means the whole context surrounding a building i.e. topographical, social, cultural, religious, economic, political and technological characteristics prevalent in a given area at a particular time; these all fall under the

characteristics of the modernist and regionalist styles so a combination of the two seems more appropriate to accommodate the requirements stipulated by the PAP.

## **2.4 Modernist Techniques of Symbolic Expression**

### **Introduction**

Calquhoun (1962) was very concerned with the direction that modernist architecture was taking and was most concerned about the image that, what he calls, buildings with meagre architectural qualities have on the people that experience them. He believes that architecture arises when the architect takes the construction, program requirements and other literal aspects of a building and considers the whole world around the building; he then organises the literal aspects so that they all come together to symbolise something meaningful *in* that world. He writes in *Essays in Architectural Criticism* that “all forms of symbolic expression emerge from and feed on the world of fact” (Calquhoun, 1962: 29) and this is to say that all buildings are made up of small symbols which are abstract, but represent something real i.e. glass symbolising the transparency of water, concrete representing the solidity of rock, but on the other hand Yaneva (2012), Frohburg (2012) and Prak (1968) all believe that there is another more abstract nature to symbolism in modern architecture. This chapter will be discussing the abstract symbolisms of the modernist architectural movement.

### **Abstract Symbols of Modernist Architecture**

In his book *The Language of Architecture* Niels Luning Prak (1968) writes about the abstract symbols found in modern architecture. Because of modernism’s theoretical foundation, he describes architecture as a language that the designer uses to communicate with the user. Modernist architects were seen as very passionate and ideological (Frampton, 2007) but also adept at implying subtleties into their work that brought about an emotional response, or at least a change in behaviour, in the user (Lefaivre, 2003). These theories were proven in the changes brought about in society as modern architecture orientated society to a more efficient, technological attitude that became more concerned with the future than with the past.

There are specific aesthetic symbols that modernist architects use to communicate a particular message to a user or viewer of the building. These are, as previously explained, based on the fundamental theoretical foundation of the modernist movement. The central idea of modernism is “freedom in a new, dynamic spacial arrangement” (Frohburg, 2012:4) and creating absolute, timeless beauty (Plato, translated 1953 cited by Frohburg, 2012). In that statement alone it is clear that modernism uses the arrangement of physical things like walls, pools, windows, light, volume, etc. to symbolise an abstraction i.e. freedom.

### **The Symbols**

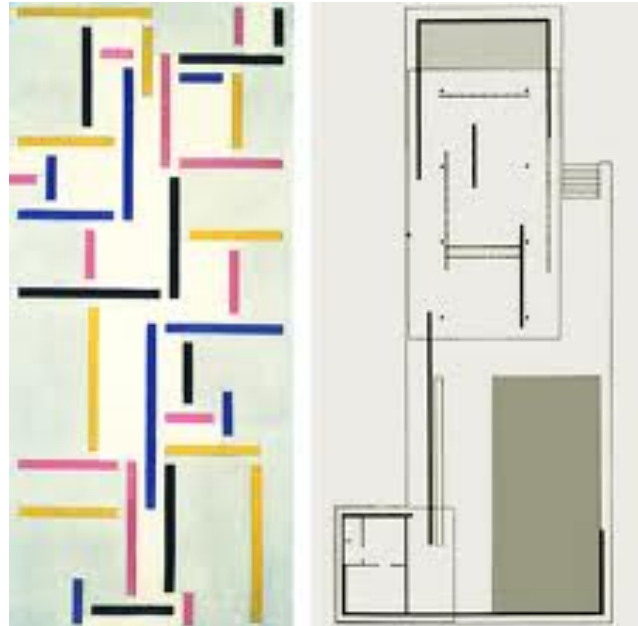
Goodman (1976, 1984, 1985 cited in Mitchell, 1990) has carefully distinguished between denotation and exemplification as subsets of the word ‘symbolism’; they represent different types of reference. In denotation (naming, describing and depicting) an object is representative of another object i.e. a picture of the Eiffel Tower denotes the Eiffel Tower structure in Paris. However, in exemplification, reference runs in the opposite direction, “from symbol to certain labels that apply to it or to properties possessed by it.”(Goodman, 1985 cited in Mitchell, 1990). In this way we can say that a building exemplifies strength, power and presence and a description of that building could call it ‘masculine’ based on the properties possessed by it (Mitchell, 1990).

Mitchell (1990: 201) describes how symbolism is derived as the process of extrapolating characteristics of a building and referencing those back to real things that possess those qualities and this will be used to denote the symbolism in architecture’s main symbols as they relate specifically to modernist expression.

### **The Solid**

Firstly we will investigate the symbolism of the wall as a solid element in this architectural style. Remembering that modernism is based on the abstract idea of freedom and liberation of space (Frohburg, 2012), the wall was one of the first elements of construction to be re-examined.

This is because the wall is the main element responsible for the enclosing and, therefore, the definition of a space. With the advent of tensile members like structural steel beams, the wall could be ‘liberated’ by making it thinner, which made it appear less heavy and monumental. There could also be fewer walls as larger openings could be easily created. The modernist style of art was influential here; as an obsession with pure geometric forms manifested itself in the way the walls became arranged, in



**Figure 13 An example of the German Pavilion plan placed alongside an example of formalist art showing the clear similarities that the solids in the painting have with the walls in the plan. Source: 4rts.wordpress.com**

planes, rigid squares and rectangles or perfect circles (Frohburg, 2012). These characteristics are clearly evident Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe’s German Pavillion in Barcelona (1929) where the wall planes are arranged in such a way that they appear to be sliding across each other and are always parallel or perpendicular. In this way the person walking through the building was unhindered by walls and their movements became more natural and the spaces had a liquid flow into each other, which was a huge departure from the flow of space in regional architecture of the time (Tzonis, 2003).

## The Opening

The next architectural element to be reconsidered, or perhaps properly considered, was the window opening. The window had been considered as a necessary element to bring illumination into a space but it was the modern movement that started to look more deeply into what a window or hole in a wall could symbolize.



**Figure 14 Pringiers House, Sri Lanka by Tadao Ando. Source: Architectural Review.com**

Le Corbusier began to view the window as a design element integral to the composition of the façade, while some modernists asked why windows were windows at all and why they too couldn't be planar elements, symbolic of openness and visual freedom. Glass technology allowed for fully glazed openings and this gave rise to considerations of views and the window as a frame of a view. This is evident now in Tadao Ando's buildings where the walls orientate the user towards the openings, which frame interesting views and illuminate the interior space (Figure 14).



**Figure 15 San Jose City Hall, USA by Richard Meier in 2005. Source: vimeo.com**

Richard Meier, who is heavily influenced in his work by Le Corbusier also uses voids but in a different way. He uses advanced technology to achieve the lightening of a previously heavy element i.e. the dome (Figure 15), and in this way reinterprets the types of spaces they enclose, making them more open and, therefore, liberated. There is another symbolism important to glass relating to public buildings. Yaneva (2012:18) writes that “...glass is fragile and breakable. Could we not apply this property to young and untested parliamentary institutions?”.

### **The Pedestal**

The podium or pedestal is not a new symbolic element in the design of buildings, it has been used throughout history as a foundation or podium on which to place a building upon, which symbolises importance and emphasises overall form and serves to spatially separate the building from its surroundings (Frampton, 1980). The podium is the base that the sculpture is placed on to give it prominence from in its surroundings. The pedestal is a large, solid object that contrasts well with a dynamic, transparent building, it can however be the opposite, where the building is simply elevated, forming a void or anti-space below the main structure. These two strategies cause the same effect (Yaneva, 2012) and these effects can be seen in figures 16 and 17. Figure 17 is an example of a solid pedestal and figure 16 a void. These techniques are especially useful for public buildings to raise the building up and giving it monumentality and a grander scale, showing that that building is important (*ibid.*).



Figure 16 Boston City Hall (1968) by Kellman, McKinnell & Wood. Source: [cityprofile.com](http://cityprofile.com)



Figure 17 UN headquarters, New York City (1952) by Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer and Harrison & Abramovitz. Source: [un.org](http://un.org)

## Materials

The materials used in modern architecture of utmost importance to the overall symbolism the designer wants to express through the building. In modernist architecture there is an absence of cosmetic decoration in favour of the more simplistic, minimalist appearance emphasising the liberation of space and thought. Material selection is usually based on the structural properties of the material and its appropriateness to the area the building is to be designed in. The modernist movement usually favoured concrete slabs and steel columns, with plain white walls and fully glazed planes of glass. Because of the lack of decoration, the buildings sometimes tend toward austerity and this is clearly evident when the buildings are empty. This is not the intention, however, because the buildings are seen as canvases for the exhibition of art and beautiful furniture (Van der Rohe, 1933). There is also some embellishment in the treatment of construction materials where, in the case of the German Pavilion, Chrome-plated steel columns and stone-clad feature walls are also used; these make the actual structure apart of the artwork, negating the need for the addition of artwork.

Later in the development of the modernist movement when critical regionalism became more widely practiced in the 1950s and 1960s there was a more considerate view taken to construction materials that were available locally and these became what was celebrated simply and elegantly in the same spatial arrangements as

modernism (Yaneva, 2012). Because local materials were more often being used, there was greater meaning in the buildings socially, as the buildings themselves became more a part of their surroundings and region (Tzonis, 2003). Technology has not been forgotten and it influences the design of modernist architecture to this day as modernism is always concerned with the adoption of contemporary technology to ensure its own social relevance (*op.cit*). Some scholars have highlighted the scheme of cause and effect, writing that architecture isn't simply a reflection of society, but is equally capable of affecting society and people's behaviour (Foucault 1979, Evans 1982, Markus 1993 cited in Tzonis, 2003).

The Pan African Parliament building must have a social significance and a real sense of presence and prominence as an important public administration building. This specific typology of building possesses the potential to affect an entire society's perspective on the institution it represents and it is essential that it reflects meaningful and appropriate symbolism so as not to alienate itself from the public but rather to encourage the public to experience the spatial qualities that it should possess. It is the experiencing of these symbolisms that inform the user to the abstract ideas being represented in the architecture and the overall symbol of freedom of mind and liberation of spirit that the organisation wants to communicate to the general public. The building becomes a powerful tool for facilitating the interface between the organisation's abstract ideology and the people it wants that ideology to affect.

## **2.5 Limitations of Abstract Symbolism**

### **Introduction**

In the active interface between building and user there can be certain problems that affect the communication of the symbolism within the architecture and the user experiencing the architecture. Because the building uses abstract, not literal, symbolism to communicate the messages, it is essential that the user is able to identify and understand clearly the symbolism imbedded in the designer's choice of spatial arrangement, materials, structural systems and overall architectural expression. These are called problems of perception (Yaneva, 2012 and Prak 1968). The problems are based on the fact that all people are individuals and are different. Hillier (2007) explains that in order for people to identify with space and its characteristics and

abstract qualities, they draw on past experience of similar spaces and these memories cause them to identify the abstract and literal symbols necessary to identify and judge the space. Because we are all different we all perceive space differently and this makes the job of the designer particularly difficult because he/she must design a space that can be clearly understood by an infinite number of different individuals but that space (and building) must still be appropriate to the context (cultural, social, ecological, urban) the building finds itself in. The following subsection will be exploring the various problems associated with perception of space and the symbols therein.

### **The Problem of Perception**

Yaneva (2012:34) writes, “The physical shape of buildings, their sightlines, material arrangements and dispositions are interpreted as important for facilitating the establishment of particular social relations and practices...” but “...a building’s meaning can be grasped only when we unveil the hidden social determinants behind architecture. We are expected to engage in a critical reading of architectural objects and processes...”(Yaneva, 2012:39). Table 1 below (Yaneva, 2012:32) reproduces the cause-effect relation between architecture (List B) and its symbolism to society (List A).

Table 1

<b>A- Society</b>	<b>B- Architecture</b>
Social Needs	Forms
Economic, social, political, Religious, cultural factors	Style
Society’s ideas, forms of economics, social organisation, distribution of resources and authority, beliefs, values	Size Appearance Location
<b>List of elements to provide explanation</b>	<b>List of elements to be explained</b>

For use of this study the table can be viewed as Table 2 below. The political factors relating to society (A) must be symbolized through the architecture (B).

Table 2

A- Society	B- Architecture
Political factors	Forms
	Style
	Size
	Appearance
<b>Element to provide explanation</b>	<b>Elements to be explained</b>

It follows that if one doesn't necessarily understand the architectural elements, then the symbolism of that building will be lost. This is where Richard Neutra (1954), Albena Yaneva (2012), Liane Lefaivre (2003) and Alexander Tzonis (2003) all agree, in their shared belief that the designer is responsible for studying and understanding the way society will perceive his/her building's symbols because the end goal of the designer should not be to have his/her building but that the work of architecture be adopted and owned by the society it is built in (Krier, 2009).

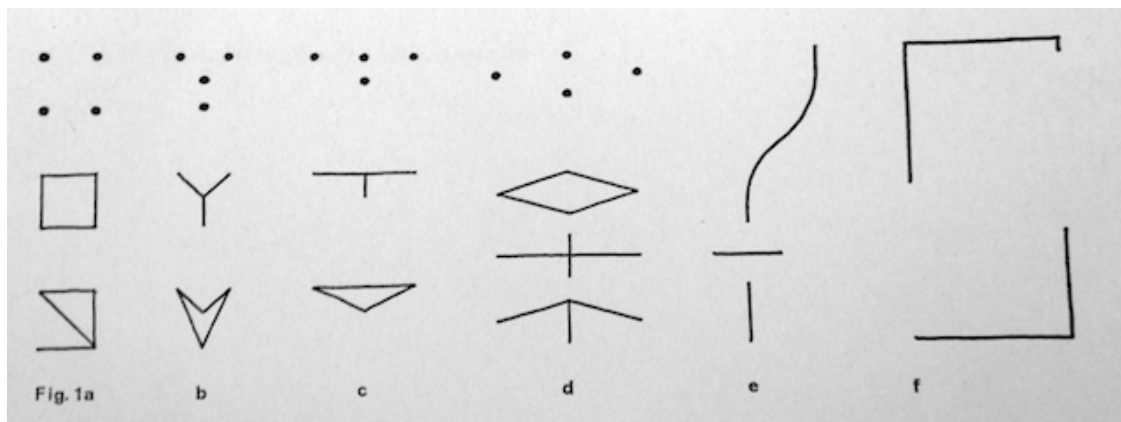


Figure 18 The diagram of symbol given to test subjects for perception testing. Source: Prak, 1968:8.

Pivotal to a designer is the understanding of the basis of people's perceptive understanding of architecture. Peter Zumthor (2010:65) writes in *Thinking Architecture* that, "We all experience architecture before we have even heard the word. The roots of architectural understanding lie in our architectural experience: our room, our house, our street, our village, our town, our landscape- we experience them all early on, unconsciously, and we subsequently compare them with the countryside,

towns and houses we experience later on. The roots of our understanding of architecture lie in our childhood, in our youth; they lie in our biography”.

The designer must also keep in mind that the symbolism is different for him/her, a contemporary observer and an observer later on (Prak, 1968).

Perception of the outside world is common for most people, as a study conducted by Niels Luning Prak (1968) for his book *The Language of Architecture* where he and his team presented a diagram of patterns (Figure 7) to random test subjects from around the world. They asked what the person felt or thought about each symbol on the figure. The results were startling as they were contrary to the ideas about how reliant perceptions of symbols were on locality and social background.

Prak (1968:7) writes about the test findings, “by confronting test persons with ambiguous figures, it was shown that... the images received on the retinas of our eyes are organised into meaningful patterns; this organization, when faced with choice, shows a preference for one type of perception over the other. Thus perception is a dynamic process, in which we actively participate.” The above preferences can be grouped into four main headings:

1. Proximity
2. Repetition
3. Simplest and largest figure
4. Continuity and closure

### **1. Proximity**

Objects that are seen as close to each other in our visual field are seen as a group. For example, windows placed close to each other on a façade are seen as a group even though they illuminate different rooms within the building; viewing angles an observer has of a building become important (Prak, 1968). This can be illustrated by a view down to a building makes the building seem smaller and less important while a view up to a building makes it appear grander, larger and more monumental.

## 2. Repetition

It is in our nature to perceive equalities in object representations even when they don't exist. We are biased towards repeated materials, shapes and colours and even though we consciously know two elements are not the same, we subconsciously perceive them to be similar and sometimes identical simply because certain characteristics are repeated in them (Prak, 1968). This is evident in Alvar Aalto's House Muuratsalo in Denmark (Figure 8 below), where although the building is made of clay brick, because the orientation and colour of the bricks changes, we perceive them as separate elements.

## 3. Simplest and Largest Figure



Figure 19 House Muuratsalo, Denmark by Alvar Aalto. Source: [blenda.com](http://blenda.com)

Our minds simplify forms as much as possible. The point configurations of figure 1 (in Figure 18) for instance, are seen as the line configurations for the row just below them. Only with an effort can they be seen as the figures of the bottom row. Perception, as Prak continues, follows the outline of a building to determine form i.e.

the largest possible form in Figures 1a and 1d. The proximity between the centre points causes Figures 1b and 1c to be seen as Y and T rather than in complete outline. The symmetry along the horizontal axis causes Figure 1d to appear as a rhomb, notwithstanding the proximity between the two points in the centre and its resemblance to Figure 1c. The eye will perceive differently in different circumstances but a general rule would be that simple forms like rectangles, circles and squares are easier to discern than complex geometries and symmetry easier than asymmetry (Prak, 1968). This evidence proves Le Corbusier and other modernist architects' principle that simple form is easier for the mind to understand than complex form.

#### 4. Continuity and Closure

Finally, lines tend to run on beyond their end points and subsequently flat planes (like Van der Rohe's planar walls) appear to extend beyond their physical bounds. The curved line of Figure 1e is perceived as continuing on beyond the interruption while the lines of Figure 1f appear to be an outline of a square even though they are not. This phenomenon introduces perceptual dynamics as our mind's tendency to continue forms or elements that end abruptly because our minds seek to complete incomplete form in order to understand it (Prak, 1968). This is a technique used by architects to give coherence to their work for example: the use of repetition in curtain walls for offices (Figure 20) and the alignment of detached houses in modern estates (Figure 21).



**Figure 20** Curtain walling system in modern skyscraper. Source: [freeimages.co.uk](http://freeimages.co.uk)

**Figure 21** Contemporary detached housing estate. Source: [theplan.it](http://theplan.it)

Deviation from these principles causes visual contrast. This is a tool that can be used to disrupt the perceptions to cause visual interest and intrigue. This technique is used

to steer away boredom and routine so that the building stands out from its surroundings. “The new architecture is anti-cubic, that is to say, it does not try to freeze the different functional space-cells in one closed cube. Rather it throws the functional space-cells centrifugally from the core of the cube, and through this means height, width, depth and time approach a totally new plastic expression in open spaces.” (Van Doesburg, 1924). A modern example of this is the Seattle Central Library designed by OMA and LMN (Figure 22).



**Figure 22 Seattle Central Library's amorphous form is perceptually confusing but visually interesting. Source: archdaily.com**

Perception of abstract architectural symbolism is based on our past experiences of architecture that makes us identify emotionally in a building making us feel small, humble, awestruck, curious, uncomfortable, invigorated, etc. Everyone's past experiences are different but people living in certain societies share general experiences of the built form, so that even if, for example, one has never lived in a suburb, they have visited and experienced a suburb sometime.

Perception of physical forms is more easily understood and can be a powerful tool for the designer in terms of how they want the building's image to be portrayed. Form, materiality, scale, volume and even colour become important factors in the composition of a design and must be aligned with the design objectives. The job of the architect becomes one of translation. Marrying the abstract symbol to the physical, then translating those into a language clearly understandable to the user of the

building. It is important for the designer to study, in detail, the contextual issues facing a society to provide the most appropriate architectural solution to their specific societal sensibilities.

## **2.6 Emerging Issues and the Need for Empirical Research**

### **Introduction**

Now that the characteristics and limitations of abstract symbolism have been outlined and explored, there are certain issues that arise when contextualising these topics into the sphere of the Pan-African Parliament's vision for its architecture. The current public opinion on issues of perception of symbolism should be investigated in greater detail along with the most important aspects of synthesis between abstract architectural symbolism and the PAP's vision, so that the research can inform both the public (societal needs) and the organisation's needs. The following sub-headings relate to the interface between the organisation and society as they relate to symbolism in architectural expression.

### **Public Inclusion in Governance**

The Pan African Parliament is mandated to discover, discuss and address the current issues of the general public in Africa as a whole. The parliamentary building itself must therefore be accessible to the general public so that forums and discussions can be cultivated meaningfully (Pan African Parliament, 2013). Because of this prescribed need for a strong relationship between political and societal, it becomes essential to include public facilities that will make the building attractive to visitors but also to maintain the integrity of the more private parliamentary side. Modern parliamentary buildings have become more public- to an extent- in an effort to make the process of governance more transparent and meaningful to the general public (Yaneva, 2012). Their inclusion in the real process of legislature or their observation of the process demystifies the process and also fosters an awareness of accountability and responsibility between the policymakers and the general public they serve. An example of this strategy is evident in the Welsh parliamentary building, the Senedd, where the concept was to create a political building that was as much for the people as it was for their representatives (Yaneva, 2012). The design was to embrace the idea of an open, transparent government that gave authority back to society and the

responsibility back to the politicians (Correnza et al, 2006:3). The abstract concept of openness is achieved through its ubiquitous use of glass, which is both a visual link but a physical divide. The main council chamber is visually accessible to the public and the public can comment in real-time through a microphone system to the politicians seated below them and receive instantaneous responses (*op. cit.*). This type of parliamentary building draws large numbers of diverse visitors from school and university tours to tourists and immigrants and has an ability to "...stimulate participation; participation in the democratic sine qua non. By acting as a symbol and object of the democratic gaze, such buildings can change political cultures," (Yaneva, 2012: 17) and this objective is in line with the African Union's framework for changing the political landscape all over Africa.

### **Modifying the General Public's Perception of Symbolism**

Because public buildings use public funds, they belong to the taxpayers of that region and they are, therefore, under scrutiny by the public for their appropriateness, expense, design and functional composition (*op. cit.*). This aspect of appropriateness *now* must be reconciled with the objective of moving the society *forward* politically. This introduces the need for empirical research to understand what public buildings mean to the general public now and what deficiencies they see, and the opportunities will follow from that analysis. The objective is to find out what needs to be done to achieve a change in the public's perception of the process of governance and to use appropriate architectural tools of symbolism to change the perceptions so that the new political culture can be altered from what it is now to what it should be in the future, according to the African Union's framework (discussed under subheading 2.2).

The understanding of what is to be symbolised architecturally and to whom it is to symbolise to create a clear and understandable architecture that can be read by the user and interpreted subconsciously into meaningful expressions that enrich the experience of both architecture and the political system it houses- both for visitors and workers. This is the way that architecture can be shaped to facilitate social and political change, contributing positively to the user's experience of the urban environment that surrounds the building.

## **2.7 Conclusion to the Literature Review**

The subject of symbolism in architectural expression will never be a science because it is a question that has no answer; it can only, through experience and investigation, be better understood. With use of the concepts and theories in the previous chapter, it can be understood that although not a phenomenon with definitive results, that perception and our experience of architectural symbols in the abstract, is something that is real and variable. Issues of place and procession through space, and the characteristics of the journey as one moves through a building experiencing its materiality, scale, volume and repetition or diversity all contribute to one's comprehension of the meaning of that architecture. Context is also a major determinant, with *genius loci* and the phenomenological characteristics of the place the architecture exists in being the foundation of our interpretation or perception of that architecture as a whole.

Public buildings have a particular polar character in that they must be symbolically appropriate and comprehensible now but must also be symbolic of a time to come- an uncertain future. They have a particular responsibility to the society they are placed in because they have the power to influence the thinking and social paradigm of the people in their region as they symbolize the political powers that have control of the region. In the following chapter case and precedent studies, informed by the discussion in this literature review, will be used to better test the concepts and theories mentioned in this document. Findings from empirical research will also be included to justify conclusions and to explore emerging issues in greater detail to inform the analysis of the case and precedent studies and to add credence to the conclusions that are to follow.

## **CHAPTER THREE: PRECEDENT STUDIES**

### **3.1 Introduction**

From the previous sections in this research paper abstract symbolism has been explored and investigated on an academic level. The following section will investigate the findings discussed in the literature review chapter and relate them back to the concepts and theories unpacked in chapter one, as they relate to architectural expression in existing public buildings around South Africa and internationally. The concepts and theories will be used as headings in this section to compare the existing examples against each other. The limitations and successes of each building will be highlighted to gain a better understanding of what abstract symbolisms can be used successfully and which are poorly perceived and should therefore be excluded. From the key concepts and theories in chapter one, and the literature reviewed in chapter two, the following headings have been formulated:

- i. Response to Environmental Context
- ii. Aesthetic Expression
- iii. Interface Between Public and Private
- iv. Abstract Symbolism

The above headings will be used to critically assess and analyse the three precedent studies: the Capital Complex in Chandigarh, India designed by Le Corbusier as an example of political architecture with a focus on symbolising the future; the Mpumalanga Provincial Government Complex as a contemporary example of a political building in the local context, and the Tjibaou Cultural Centre as a re-interpretation of vernacular architecture in the modern era.



**Figure 23** A map showing the global locations of the three precedent studies chosen. Source: [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com) edited by Author.

The three examples selected are major political architecture projects in their relevant countries and the impacts and intent of each design will be documented and analysed. Also of importance are the geographical locations and how each has addressed environmental and climatic conditions.

### 3.2 The Capitol Complex, Chandigarh



**Figure 24** A map showing Chandigarh (highlighted) in India, near the Pakistan border. Source: [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com).

## **Introduction**

In a response to their independence from colonial rule in August 1947, Indian leadership was endowed with a new power- politically and economically and wanted to provide the country with a direction they would follow into the future (Le Corbusier, edited by Boesiger, 1953). The prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru selected celebrated French architect, Le Corbusier to be the Architectural Advisor in charge of the major design decisions of the establishing of a new political capital in Chandigarh, along the foothills of the Himalayas. Nehru selected Le Corbusier because he and his advisors wanted to provoke a new spirit of modernisation and progress in the people of India in an effort to 'catch up' with the western powers like England, America and Russia. Le Corbusier appointed Pierre Jeanneret, Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry as the chief architects serving below him with nine other local architects serving below them. The design was to focus on the future, to disregard the past and traditions of culture and identity that Nehru believed held India back from progress. In order for a new Indian nation to be created, they needed an architectural monument to house the seat of power and a place to be the reference point for this new ideology in the minds of Indian people (Prakash, 2002). The complex houses the High Court, Legislative Assembly, Secretariat and the unbuilt Governor's Residence.

## **Response to Urban Context**

The site is a 800mx800m square on a flat plane near the city of Chandigarh in India, near the border to Pakistan. Before the project, there were nine small villages where 9000 people lived and farmed on the land. The city of Chandigarh was smaller in size than the other major Indian cities and the reason it was chosen is because it was the site of the village of Chandi, the Hindu goddess of transformation and change (Prakash, 2002). This gave it a spiritual foundation that resonates in the Indian culture and the subsequent redevelopment of the city maintained the slower, more feminine characteristic of the old village (*ibid.*).

In order for the construction of the capital to commence, eight of the nine villages in the area were cleared and its residents displaced. This was in keeping with Le Corbusier's uncompromising intention to create landmarks in the wilderness, backed by the Himalayas, secluded and therefore untainted by the ever-changing city. The urban context was not considered except for the village of Chandi, which featured

greatly throughout the entire design process. It was integrated aesthetically into the composition of the overall urban design as a scene into India's past, which Le Corbusier believed to be essential in the creation of a political centre. The little village is celebrated not just by its proximity to the complex but it became essential to maintaining any semblance of nature. Villagers were encouraged to water their livestock from the huge pools and to use the vast open spaces for recreation. This was the human and natural element essential in Le Corbusier's composition where nature was to be offset by the strong geometries of the built form. In an effort to further enhance the visual impact of the complex as a complete artistic composition, a hill was created between the Capitol and the city of Chandigarh. Because of its relative seclusion from the city, there is little urban connection to speak of, except to reiterate that the goal was to isolate the Capitol from the urban context altogether to free the development from the proverbial shackles of the old ways of thinking and doing. For the purposes of this study, the entire complex will be used as a general study but the High Court building will be studied in detail.

### **Response to Environmental Context**

Chandigarh is located near the foothills of the Shivalik Range of the Himalayan Mountains. The climate is subtropical and humid with very hot and humid summer months where temperatures reach 40°C typically with winter and autumn being cooler



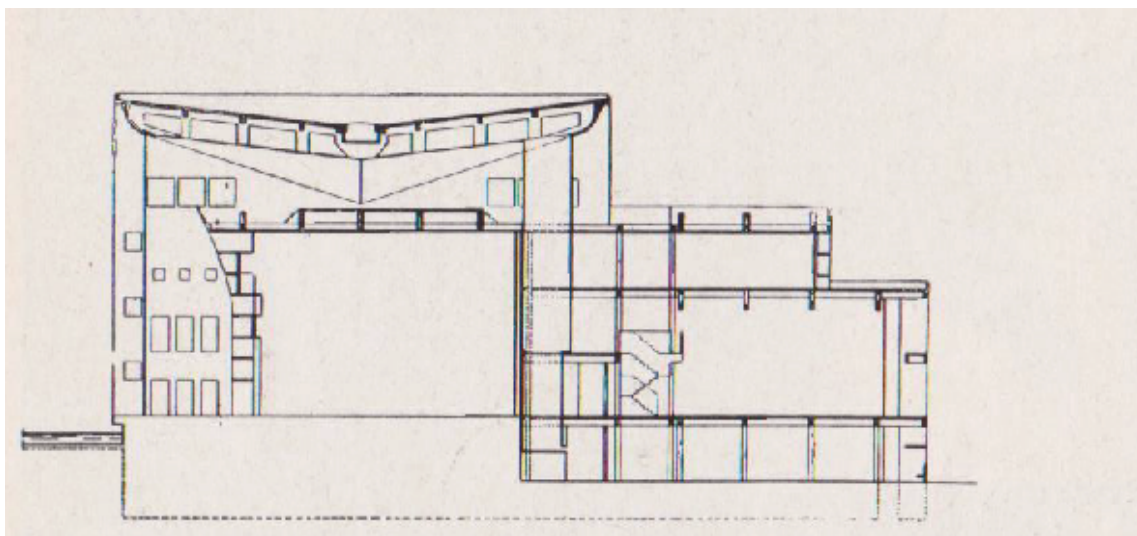
**Figure 25 The High Court Building, Chandigarh, India. Source: Choay, 1960: 49.**

(between 9 °C and 20 °C). Because of the monsoon, the area receives heavy rainfall between the months of August and September from a strong and persistent north easterly prevailing wind.

These prescriptive climatic conditions necessitate a very responsive architectural response to deal successfully with the various weather conditions. The designers of the Capitol were very aware of this and selected robust materials that were good insulators from water and sun (Prakash, 2002). The material they chose to use primarily was concrete reinforced with steel rebar.

This was because concrete increases in strength over time and also because it is plastic i.e. it can be poured to form any shape; concrete also has good thermal qualities and because of its mass is very good at absorbing radiant heat in the daytime and releasing it at night which contributes to a more stable air temperature within the building.

The High Court building has large overhanging parasol roof which acts as a double ceiling, keeping radiant heat away from the main building; deep porticos and louvers 1,4m deep protect the rooms and passageways from direct sunlight at midday and afternoon and Le Corbusier's famous concrete brise-soleil adorns the entire north façade and protect it from direct sunlight and also from the reflection of the sun from the pool before the building (Le Corbusier, 1953). The building is, until today being used without mechanical cooling or forced ventilation, which is a testament to the building's sound environmental design in the harsh climate.



**Figure 26 Section of the High Court showing parasol roof, which shades the main structure.**  
Source: Prakash, 2002: 105.

## Aesthetic Expression

This is the most controversial area of the building's entire design, even more than the fact that thousands were displaced to make way for the structures. The question of what the buildings represent is clear: the designers were to design a modern, forward-looking political capital, strong and permanent, that would instil a sense of awe and divorce the people of India from their past, orientating them toward a new modernised future. The issue of appearance is also not contested i.e. the buildings and the complex as a whole is loved by most visitors, professionals and critics as a beautiful exercise in architectural form making and proportional composition.

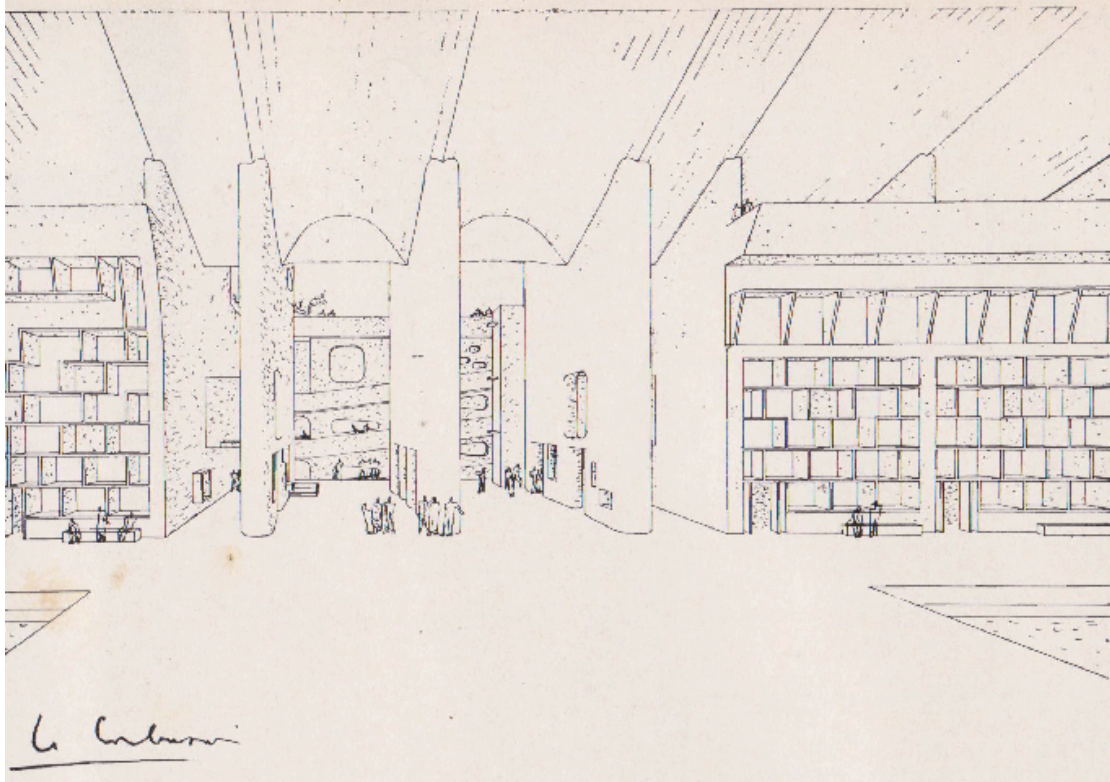
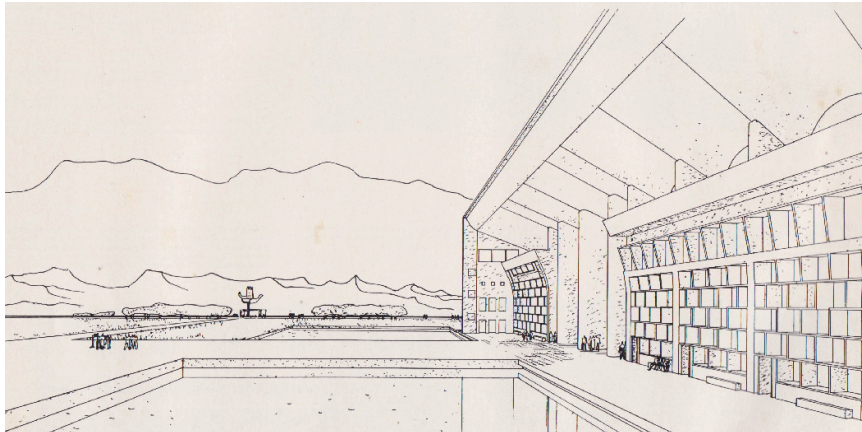


Figure 27 The entrance to the High Court. A sketch by Le Corbusier. Source: Boesiger 2953: 130.

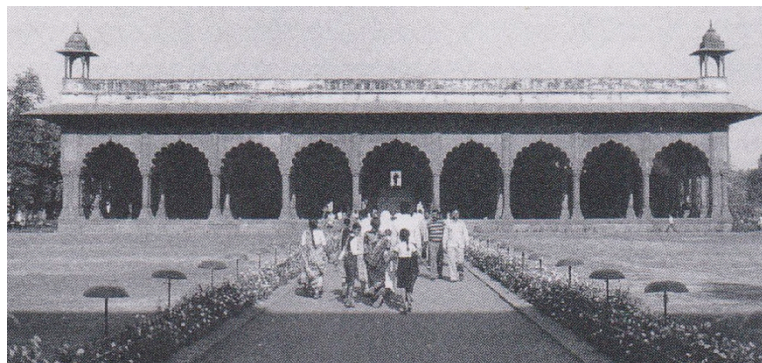
The real issue in contention is that of architectural appropriateness in terms of its style and architectural meaning. The buildings are designed uncompromisingly in a modernist, and brutallist style that the architects in charge, were all famous for. They were convinced that modernist architecture had a transient nature, able to be appropriate in almost all contexts around the world because it was fundamentally designed for living.

As previously discussed in this paper, the major problem with modern architecture is not in its functional strength but in its facelessness that people find hard to relate to. Because of the fact that modernism doesn't refer back to any particular country, but rather to a way of thinking, it alienates people that do not like change (Jencks, 2000).



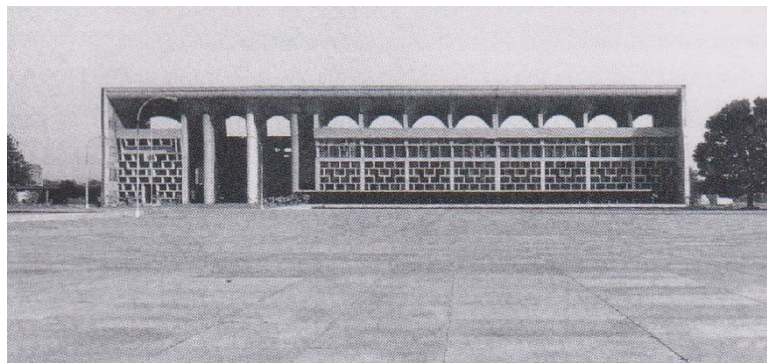
**Figure 28 The passage through the reflection pool to the High Court, highlighting the sparseness of the site. Source: Boesiger, 1953: 129.**

Naturally, the Capitol Complex is also subject to the same criticism that its architecture is not inherently Indian in character and therefore has no place in India as it could be from anywhere else in the world. But this argument is refuted by the lovers of modernism who highlight the very fact, that it is not specifically Indian, as the strength in the design, because it introduced Indian architecture to the world debate. The intention was to make the architecture *not* vernacular and *not* colonial so that the people of India could be introduced, architecturally at least, to the global way of doing things (Nehru, 1959).



**Figure 29 The new abstraction of the old. The Diwan-I-Am Red Fort. Source: Prakash, 2002: 22.**

The high court building is a very prominent building on the sparse site. Its true size is disguised by the fact that one enters the building on a raised level, with the lower levels behind (Prakash, 2002). The building is essentially a thick concrete frame that surrounds two blocks- one of administrative offices, another of various courtrooms and libraries. From the outside the functions within the building cannot be perceived and no signage exists to denote the functions. In true modernist style the various solar shades make up the entire north and south facades with the east and west facades left blank except for a small opening on the east façade. The pool before the building is intended to create the impression that the building is taller and more monumental than it is because it was not to overshadow the Secretariat and Governor's residence in apparent scale (*ibid.*).



**Figure 30 The new abstraction of the old. The High Court Source: Prakash, 2002: 22.**

The thick frame grounds the building firmly to the ground and gives monumentality and masculinity to an otherwise sensitive and 'light' structure. The curves in the arches of the parasol roof contract attractively with the rigid geometries of the rest of the design and the elongated concrete columns in the entrance are curved and



**Figure 31 The enamel door to the Assesmbly Building. Source: Prakash 2002: 55.**

rounded, softening the transition between the outside and the inside of the building.

The parasol roof was designed to mimic the arches of the Diwan-I-Am Red Fort in Delhi but most visitors do not perceive this reference at all. Art features prominently in the design of this, and other structures on the site. In true modernist tradition, the use of abstract artworks is used to reference the character of India's past heritage (*op.cit.*).

The reason the designers chose abstract art was also because Nehru was apposed to the referencing of the Hindu, Christian and Muslim deities in the public architecture as this would become a cause for contention. The use of colours Le Corbusier believed to be culturally significant to the country were used to paint over the bare concrete columns in the entranceway and a few of the recessed walls. These interventions were minor but the door to the Assembly building is made of intricately detailed enamel. The over-scaled door is made of enamel and is an abstraction of Le Corbusier's obsession with the solar man and represents the sun's continual rebirth and its sustaining of all the natural elements that make up man's environment. This is an idea similar to that of Hindu belief but is not the main inspiration for the artwork.

## Public Interface

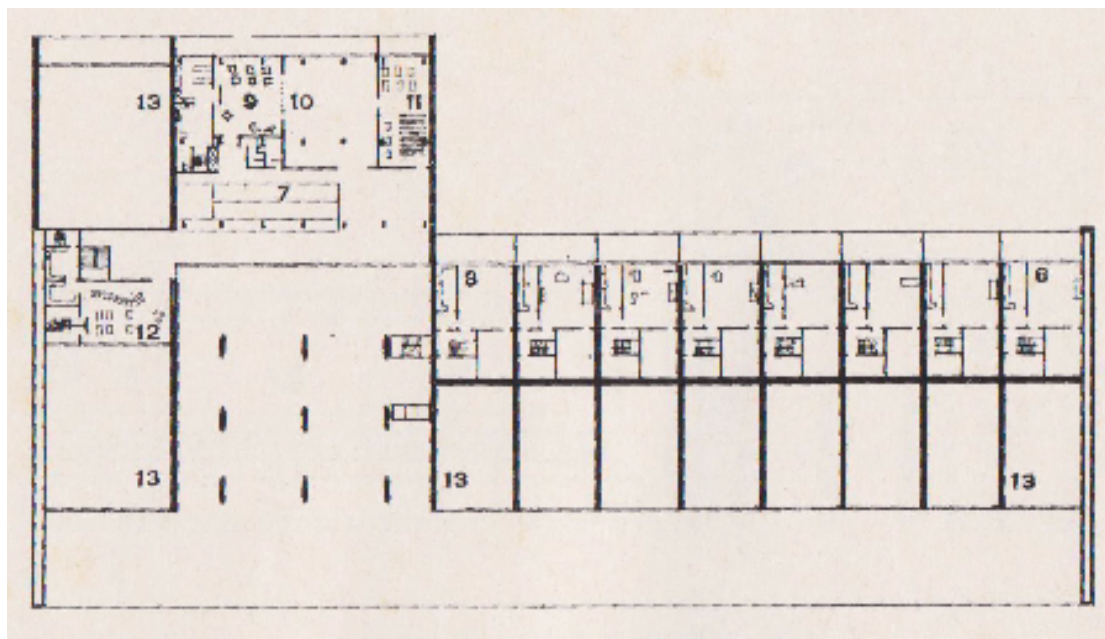


Figure 32 The public facilities at the rear of the building with the courtrooms to the right in a separate block. Source: Boesiger 1953: 126.

It is important to note that the political climate in the country at the time was a mixture between the traditional empirical rule and that of the British colonial rule, which succeeded it. The ordinary citizen was never very important in either of the ruling systems and this continued into the years following India's emancipation from British rule. The state and issues pertaining to its rule were private and the architecture reflects that in its functional composition.

The most striking examples in the High Court building are clearly evidenced from the physical separation between the courthouse public facilities like libraries and restaurant, and the courtrooms. Proportionally the courthouses where the public and private interface is made to appear a quarter of the size of the administrative offices, although they are about the same size in reality. This conscious separation between the public and private interfaces of the building show a political intent at representing the state's *seperateness* from its citizens. The fact that the interior spaces are also concealed in shadow represents the privacy afforded to the state.



**Figure 33** The tall structure hovering over the user. Source: [tyylit.com](http://tyylit.com)

On a larger scale the entire Capitol Complex is monumental in scale, much more than is necessary for the relatively few buildings on the site and this large space between buildings serves again to highlight one's insignificance and some visitors have even called it isolation. The public do not have access- visual or real- into the administration block but this could also be because the building is a courthouse and so issues of security and therefore restricted access are at the fore (Choay, 1960).

Regardless of the reasons, however, the building fosters a disconnected relationship between the public and the private.

### **Abstract Symbolism**

Nehru, in a speech to the Indian Institute of Engineers said, "... it is totally immaterial whether you like it or not. It is the biggest thing in India of this kind. That is why I welcomed it. It is the biggest thing because it hits you on the head and makes you think." (Nehru, 1959:49). This quote states unequivocally the intent of the commission to create a powerful statement, both political and architectural, both to the people of India and the people of the rest of the world. That statement was that India had arrived on the world stage and that it would catch up to the rest of the world. It is important to realise that this complex was the pinnacle of a new political order that was also building huge, mechanised factories and learning institutions that would only really affect the younger generation. To the older generation these radical changes were grotesque and *unIndian* in character (*ibid.*).

To the next generation, who grew up marvelling at these structures on a massive plinth, artistically arranged and perfectly acclimatised, the symbolism is very different. For those later generations, up to now, the buildings are symbolic of a bridge between the India they live in and the India they have the power to create and shape and own (Nehru, 1959). It is interesting to note how people in the same place can so differently perceive modernist architecture, and Le Corbusier always maintained that good architecture aroused debate and that was his intention in this design too. In this way Le Corbusier and Nehru created what was to them both, a masterpiece.

### **Conclusion**

The symbolism of the entire complex of buildings is to show a new concerted effort on focussing on what the future of the entire nation can be by embracing western ideals but adjusting them to suit Indian sensibilities. The climatic response is very well developed and the buildings have aged and weathered over time, representing the age of the country's independence. Annual ceremonies still take place in the Capitol and these practices further internalise meaning into the architecture. They now symbolise India's independence and represent the foundation of the new Indian

sovereign state that maintains some of the old village way of life and builds towards the future uninhibited by cultural, religious or nostalgic constraints.

### 3.3 Tjibaou Cultural Centre, New Caledonia

#### Introduction

The reason why this cultural centre was chosen as a precedent study is because of its political significance to the area and the two countries it claims to reconcile. Firstly it is built in New Caledonia, on the island of Grand Terre overlooking the main city of Nouméa, which is a historically French colonized city where countless atrocities involving the natives and the French settlers took place. The building was funded by the French National Government as a gesture of political goodwill and reconciliation and the intent was to create a museum where culturally significant items and festivals of the Kanak natives could be housed and celebrated, and used to bring the culture forward into the modern age.



Figure 35 Exhibition space in one of the round cases. Source: Buchanan, 200: 112.

The building, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, was completed in 1998 at a cost of \$90million. It has, ever since, received sterling reviews and critiques from international media and the architect was awarded the Pritzker Architectural Prize for this design. The media has lauded the building as a symbol of New Caledonia's new hopeful future, free of the scars colonization caused and a place where the Kanak people can remember their ever-changing culture and where tourists and visitors can experience their heritage in art, music, painting and dance (Message, 2006).

The interesting thing about this building that will be explored is the reason why the building is not used by the actual Kanak people it was designed to serve. The building receives large numbers of international tourists and local visitors from the city throughout the year but a few visitors have noticed an apparent lack of Kanak visitors.



**Figure 36 Large sized case on lower level exhibiting sculpures from the same Pacific region. Source: Buchanan, 2000: 115.**

This fact is not highly publicized but the Kanak chiefs argue that they cannot support such a building because of what history *it chooses* to represent (Pitosef, unknown, cited in Message, 2006). This buildings symbolic representation will be explored further to understand the problems relating to symbolism in architecture that design decisions can make.

## Response to Urban Context

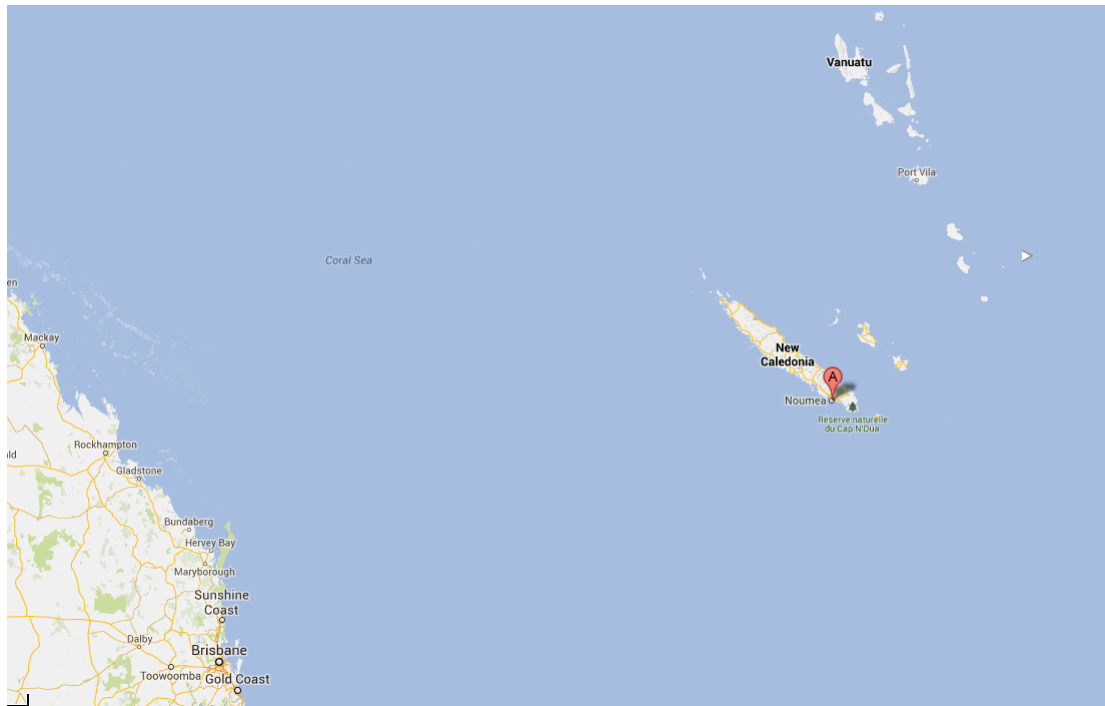


Figure 37 A map of New Caledonia off the Australian West coast with Noumea highlighted.  
Source: maps.google.com.

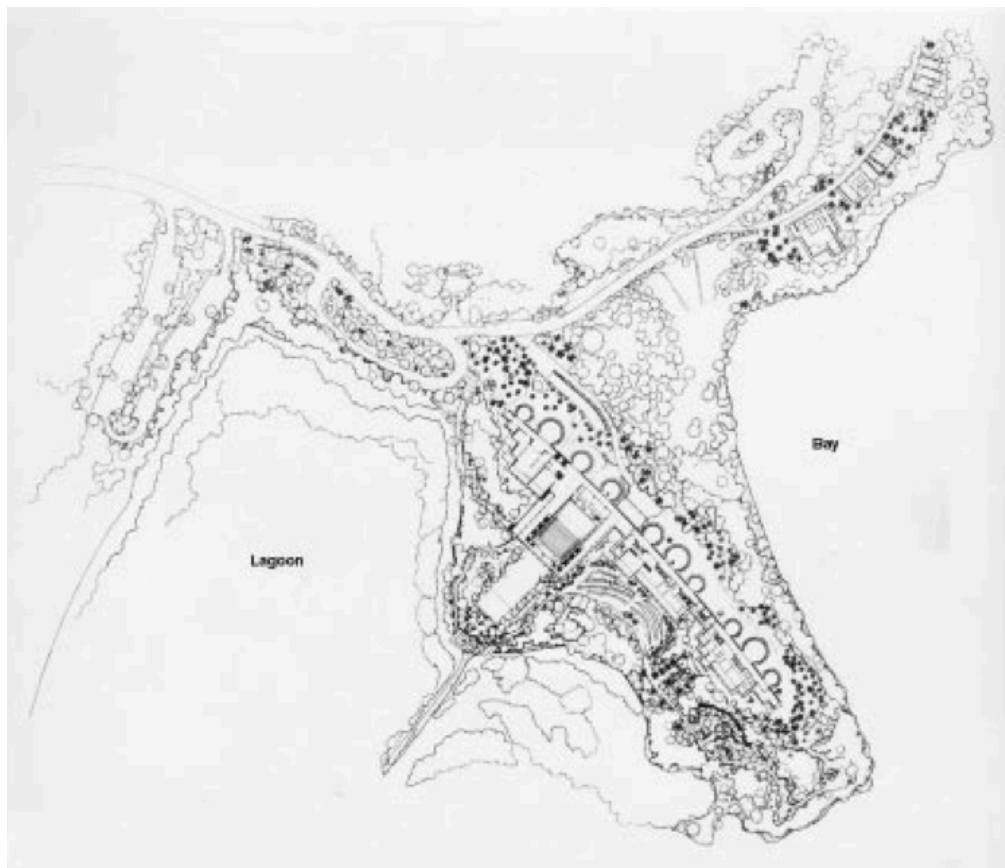


Figure 38 Site plan. Source: Buchanan, 2000:96.

The Cultural Centre TjIbaou [CCT] is built on a previously uninhabited peninsula on the coastline near the capital city of New Calidonia, Nauméa, it therefore has no real urban context to respond to but has an importance to the mainland as a gateway building before one enters the urban context of the city, further inland. In this regard the building is very iconic and almost peculiar, especially to visitors who view it for the first time. The centre is surrounded by protected lagoons and lush brush and has used nature as the basis for its architectural composition. The building is arranged along a central passage almost 350m long, running the length of the site. Along this spine the various exhibition spaces and auditoria are housed in four glass and steel pavilions facing inland, with the main educational facilities facing outward toward the ocean symbolising progress and an invitation to western ideas and influence. Because of the low elevation and the thickness of the forest it was important to create strong vertical elements that would both distinguish the building sensitively and also to create the idea of ascension. The various shield-like timber structures address the sea and offer a protective barrier from the prevailing ocean winds and symbolically form a protective barrier for the Kanak culture from the myriad influences from abroad that threaten to dilute the cultural identity of the people, as colonisation almost did.

### Response to Environmental Context

VENTILATION DUE TO WIND FORCES | pressure differential created by incoming force of wind

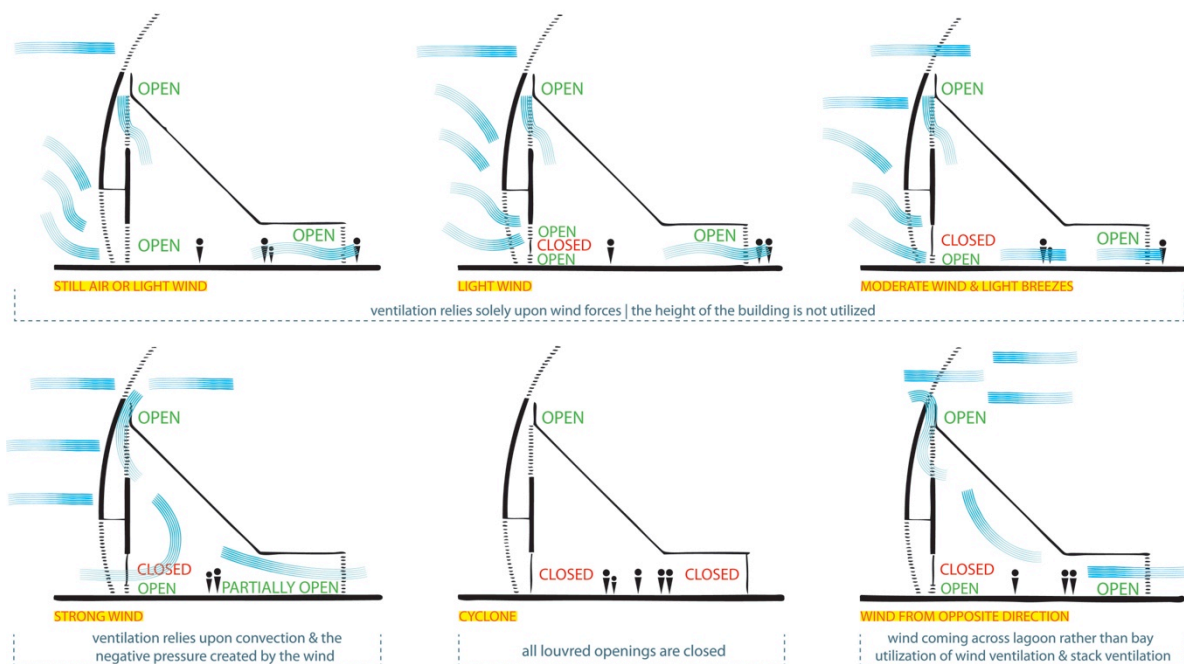


Figure 39 Opening configurations for wind-induced ventilation. Source: pzarch14.files.wordpress.com.

The climate in Nouméa is considered oceanic tropical, which means there are only moderate variations in temperature from winter's 22°C average to summer's 30 °C average. There is a relative humidity of 75% average. In such warm and humid conditions, good ventilation is essential to provide fresh, cool air to the occupants and for the building's cooling. The CCT was designed to utilise natural ventilation and throughout its development two main principles were used to achieve good ventilation: stack ventilation and ventilation due to wind forces.

Stack ventilation utilises the principle of convection where the warmer air of the interior rises and escapes the building from a higher outlet. The heavier, cooler air is replaced via a lower opening and this cycle maintains the continual cycle of cool air circulation (Bansal *et al*, 1986). In this building the entire roof is heated by the sun and because of its angle, the hot air rises towards the apex where there are vents for the hot air to escape through, this continually forces cooler air from the lagoon into the building.

In addition to this system the building also utilises the wind to cool the building. This strategy relies on the pressure differential experienced by the wind as it hits the surface of a building as must move around it. When wind strikes a building, a region of higher pressure is created across the side facing the wind, while the pressure on the opposite side is reduced. Air inside the building moves from openings of higher pressure to the openings of lower pressure (Bansal, 1986). The CCT has openings on the windward side and leeward side to allow for the air to circulate as desired by the occupant. The timber louvres also aid in shielding the building from direct sunlight and the heat it brings.

### **Aesthetic Expression**

The Building is undoubtedly iconic in its form and architectural expression. The Commission called for a striking aesthetic that would draw attention to itself and would represent the Kanak people as a whole to the rest of the world. The architect drew inspiration from the construction methods of the native Kanak people whose huts were built from Iroko wood and grass thatch. Because the design called for a modern and forward-looking model, the architect abstracted the essence of the traditional Kanak hut dwelling and used the Iroko timber- laminated- to construct the

tall frames of the timber shield-like screens that rise up above the canopy of trees around the building.



**Figure 40** A traditional Kanak hut whose construction was abstracted to inspire the new design. Source: [classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com](https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com).

The structure of the building is very modern and expensive, using complex geometries, timber laminate, expansive glass and large Iroko timber screens to form its facades. The height of the screens is up to 30m but they are not overwhelming in scale because their height is subdued by that of the trees. Because the design is an abstraction of the old, reinterpreted into a more futuristic form, it doesn't appear kitsch but rather the screens, which appear unfinished, seem to reach for the sky, elevating the entire structure from the forest. Architecturally speaking, the design is simple in concept but complex in detail execution.

The initial idea was to create a *village* with clusters of activities all joined along a strong spine that integrated all the spaces and provided a place for social interaction and shared learning. The spine would show artworks by the Kanak people and visitors would be encouraged to engage with the culture on a tangible level. The final design shows that the *village* clusters gave way to a more formal resolution that relates

almost every space directly to the corridor and therefore strengthens its meaning. The pavilions are of glass and steel construction reflecting the newness and modernity in the region with the older, more vernacular architecture as a backdrop.

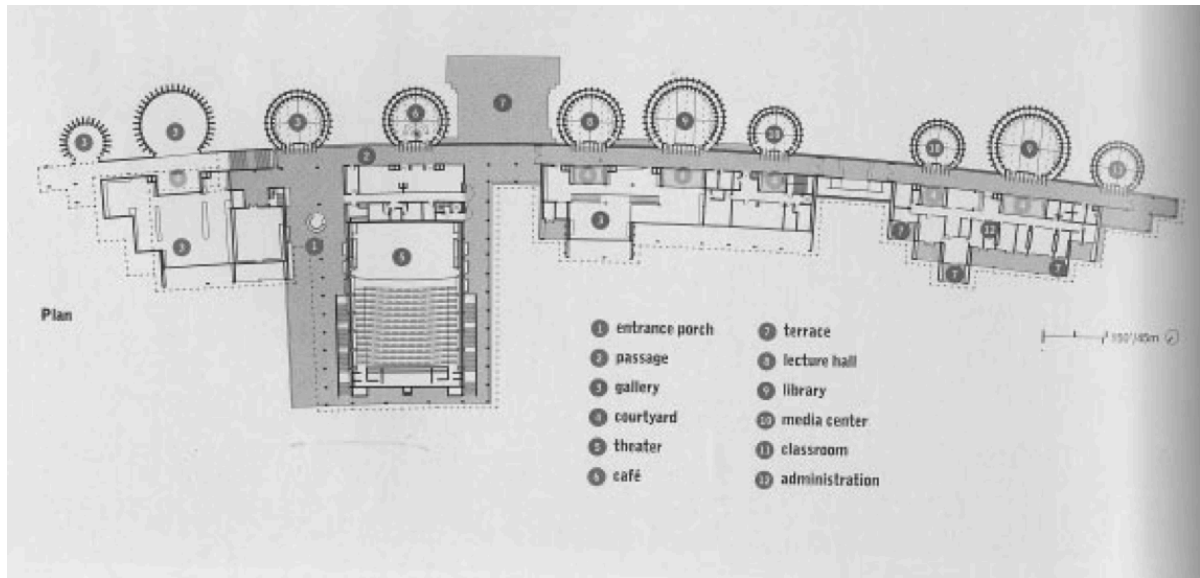


Figure 41 Plan of ground level showing links to central spine. Source: Buchanan, 2000: 91.

This provides two polar ways of interpreting this structure. Firstly you can, as a visitor who comes to the building from inland, see the screens soaring above the treetops in an interrupted rhythm and then arriving at a completely modern, lightweight structure, partially hidden by trees, disguising its true size; secondly you



Figure 42 Aerial view during construction shows contrast between cases cresting rise from sea in foreground and the flat-roofed pavilions on a slope to the lagoon. Source: Buchanan, 2000:92.

can view the building from the water and be faced by 30m tall timber screens, which seem imposing and overwhelming to some guests (Message, 2006). These structures represent the vernacular and the message is that the people the building represents somehow have a façade of ethnicity but have modernity within their culture's centre, which is incongruent with the reality. In reality those many Kanaks that choose life in the city seem to have a façade rather of modernity with their cultural identity at the centre. This is evidenced in the fact that all festivals and rituals are still carried out by the city and village dwellers alike (*ibid.*).

Aesthetically, the building is undoubtedly beautiful and the many awards given the architect and the praise and publicity given the building is proof of that. Perhaps, however, the building is *too* modern. It seems well loved by the international world but not so well appreciated by the native Kanak people. The reason is one of perception of the symbolism of the architecture, rather than the architecture itself (Message, 2006). The use of indigenous timber and plants throughout the building and landscape is also exemplary.

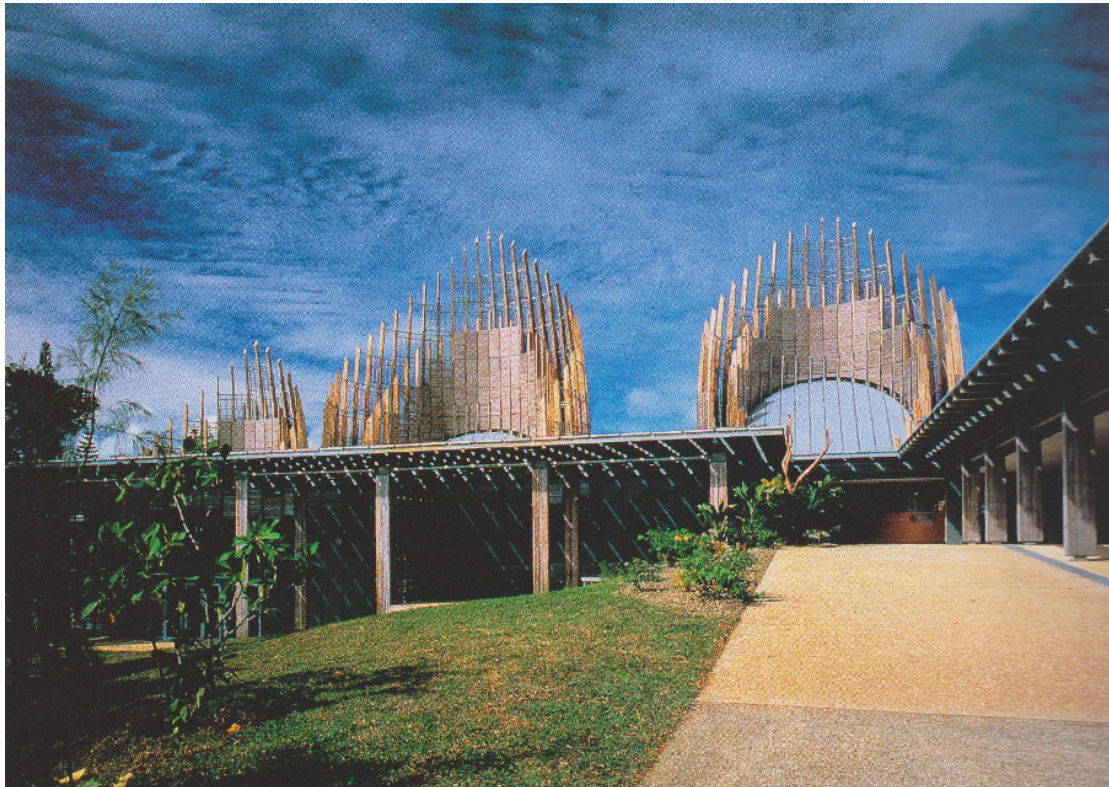
### **Public Interface**

This museum and cultural facility has the public interface at its very centre. The central spine linking the building together spatially is the focus of the scheme. Because of the fact that every space is directly linked and therefore related back to the



**Figure 43 Large sized case with display. Source: [fishbonesong.wordpress.com](http://fishbonesong.wordpress.com).**

central spine, there is a very organic flow between the semi-private exhibition rooms and the very public passageway. The passageway itself is used as an exhibition gallery for various forms of artwork and offers views into nature as one moves along it. Skylights also maintain a feeling of openness and transparency that contributes to the overall lightness of the structure.



**Figure 44** The approach to building past the sunken theatre and colonnade. Source: Buchanan, 2000:105.

As a museum and cultural centre, very few spaces are truly private or restricted, with most storage facilities below ground level. The intent was to symbolise the transparent and friendly nature of the Kanak people, especially to tourists and portray an abstract sense of hospitality as visitors are welcomed and introduced to immerse themselves in the Kanak culture on a deeper, participatorier level. Workshops and art training classes are held, with digital exhibits and cultural festivals being held on the site. The public can truly gain an understanding of what the culture of Kanak is all about, but not from the actual Kanak people themselves for the most part.

## **Abstract Symbolism**

This section will seek to unpack the underlying problem of perception which seems to be the only spot on what is portrayed as a perfect architectural representation of a culture in transition from colonization and marginalization, to one in ascension, reclaiming its identity and uniqueness. The seemingly unfinished effect of the round timber screens are symbolic of the Kanak culture in a transformative state, moving from a suppressed, constricted nature into a liberated future. The notion of liberation is central to that of modernist architecture and it runs parallel to the political intent the French commissioners had for the building. The holistic symbolism of the entire structure is to offer reconciliation between the coloniser and the colonised. This is the root of the building's dogmatic emphasis on representing the new and not focusing on the old.

What is interesting, and was alluded to under the previous headings, is that for all the millions of visitors that have passed through the steel and glass doors, so few have been actual native Kanak people, and even fewer have been return visitors. Apart from the people employed at the facility, there is almost a complete absence of native visitors. A customary chief of the Kanak people argues the entire necessity for the building. He believes that his people do not need such a structure to *help* them know their culture (Message, 2006). The building is seen by the Kanak as an insult, an expensive political gesture that brings international attention away from the damage caused by colonisation, shifting it to a façade of social integration that does not yet exist.

The way that the government has treated the Kanak people's outcry against the building is also controversial because the French government has control of all media releases relating to its public affairs so the Kanak people feel as though the more publicity the building receives, the more their opinions are suppressed. The country of New Caledonia is still under French colonial rule and this adds further confusion as to how the building is really symbolising freedom and liberation of culture, when the culture is not liberated as yet and has little hope of being so in the near future. The biggest problem facing the interpretation of the symbolism of this building is in its premise. Culturally, the Kanak people believe that visiting places where artefacts of the dead are housed and uncovered is taboo. The French commissioners were aware

of this fact but believed that a museum is what the people of Kanak needed and that their cultural thinking would change over time. Sadly, it seems their cultural thinking hasn't changed and this is the problem inherent in architecture of a political nature; the perception of the symbolism represented by the gesture of creating an architecture that makes a statement relies almost completely on the way that symbol is perceived.

### **Conclusion**

It appears then, that the CCT as an architectural gesture is pre-emptive and false in its symbolism. In focussing on the future not yet attained, it has ignored- intentionally or otherwise- that there is little hope of that future being achieved. Perhaps if the French government was taking steps to change the political situation in New Caledonia, the building would have a more successful image to the people it was build for. But on the other hand, as insinuated by Chief Nidoish Naisseline (cited in Message, 2006), the building may be a success. He seems to suspect that the building was never meant for the people of the place, but rather as a symbol of the French colony. The building is offered as reconciliation between the coloniser and the colonised but the thing the coloniser seeks reconciliation for is not highlighted in the building. He justifies these claims by pointing out that nothing has been done to attract locals to the building, while foreign guest keep being encouraged to visit (*ibid.*).

Political (and subsequently cultural) buildings have a deep social responsibility and in an effort to present and symbolise the people they must be careful to represent the people correctly and accurately so that the building does not alienate them from the building made for them.

### 3.4 Mpumalanga Provincial Government Complex

#### Introduction

The result of the first open design competition in post-apartheid South Africa, the Mpumalanga Provincial Government sought to consolidate its legislature and government offices into one big building in an effort to facilitate a more synthesized interdepartmental relationship to aid the province in increasing its efficiency. There was also a desire to create a truly African piece of architecture that reflected the post-apartheid Mpumalanga and all the ideals of hope and governmental transparency that went with it.



**Figure 45 The government complex in Mpumalanga with Nelspruit in the background and a river at the bottom of the site. Source: Malan and McInerny, 2001:101.**

The winning proposal was designed by a relatively small South African firm, Meyer Pienaar Tayob Schnepel, with jurors agreeing that the concept ‘answered the conditions of the brief in a most appropriate and cost efficient way, while creating a group of buildings which would be unique, of a character linked closely to the region, and of a significance in keeping with dignified and democratic government’ (Malan, McInerny, 2001). The building was a huge undertaking as the building is 85 000m<sup>2</sup> in total area. The site is outside the main town of Nelspruit built on an old farm

overlooking a ravine where two ancient streams meet. This building was to introduce the province and country to the new democratic power (*ibid.*).



**Figure 46 A locality map showing Nelspruit, where the building is, highlighted. Source: [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com)**

### **Response to Urban Context**

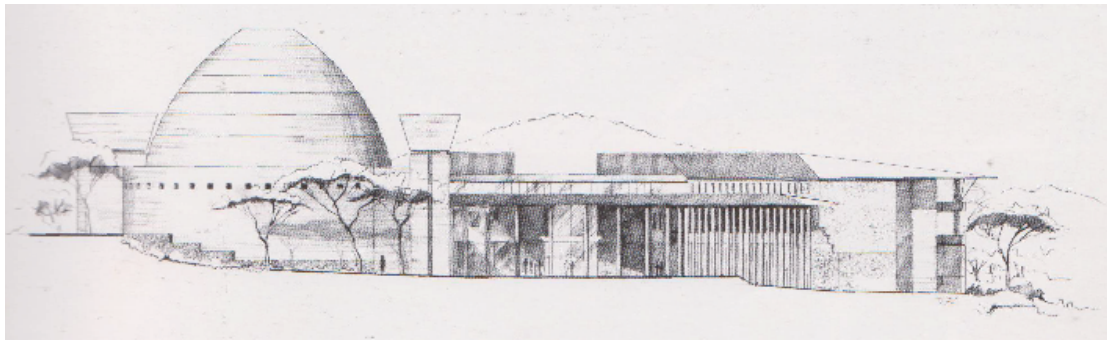
The site is situated on what was a fruit farm outside the main city of Nelspruit. The site is quite secluded from any other urban development so there is a lack on any urbanity to stitch into. As the first major building in the area however, the building can be seen as establishing the urban precedent for other buildings to follow. As a catalyst then, the building's sheer scale is an imposing site. As large as the building is, it is not overbearing because of the low roofs with large overhangs that give a strong verticality to the buildings. The main brick-clad steel dome is the strongest vertical element and reflects the barren mountaintops on the koppies around the site.

The building is sensitive to human scale and is very inviting, subdued colours that are almost earthy tones of brown, oranges and grey make the building, although new, seem as though it has occupied the site for decades. Because of the natural context, the building's landscapers chose to enhance the natural beauty with sensitive interventions, creating intimate gardens, small pools and planters all around the building- even the parking is landscaped to better integrate it with the building and the

natural context. The overall effect is that of very large building whose size is disguised by the sensitive responses to the human environment the designers wanted to create and the natural surroundings that seem to constrain the building.

### **Response to Environmental Context**

The Nelspruit climate is subtropical, due to its proximity to the warm Indian Ocean and its latitude. It receives average rainfall throughout summer with about 800mm total yearly rainfall while the winter months are usually very dry. The area where the Government Complex is located is in a very mountainous area because it is near two streams; it is a very naturally lush area with many different trees and diverse fauna and flora.



**Figure 47 West elevation showing small and shaded openings in response to harsh afternoon sun. Source: Malan and McInerney 2001: 37.**

The designers designed with the environment in mind. The building is of a concrete frame and brick infill system with large balconies and courtyards. The building is designed to take advantage of the magnificent views of the valley and the city further away. The balconies, covered walkways and large eaves overhangs shield the internal spaces from direct sunlight in the summer months but allow some morning sun into the building in winter, when it is significantly cooler. The natural environment is harnessed from the choice of locally extracted clay bricks, to the timber that supports the roofs and comprises the railings. The use of local materials and the correct orientation to the sun make for a building that is very well suited to the climate. The large thermal mass of the concrete in the structure absorbs heat during the day when it is hot and releases that heat back into the building at night, when it is colder.



**Figure 48 Integration of the building with pristine natural environment. Nature enhances the work environment. Source: Malan and McInerney 2001: 60.**

The many balconies make for a very engaging relationship with nature and allow for many informal meetings to be had outdoors, which is in keeping with the spirit of

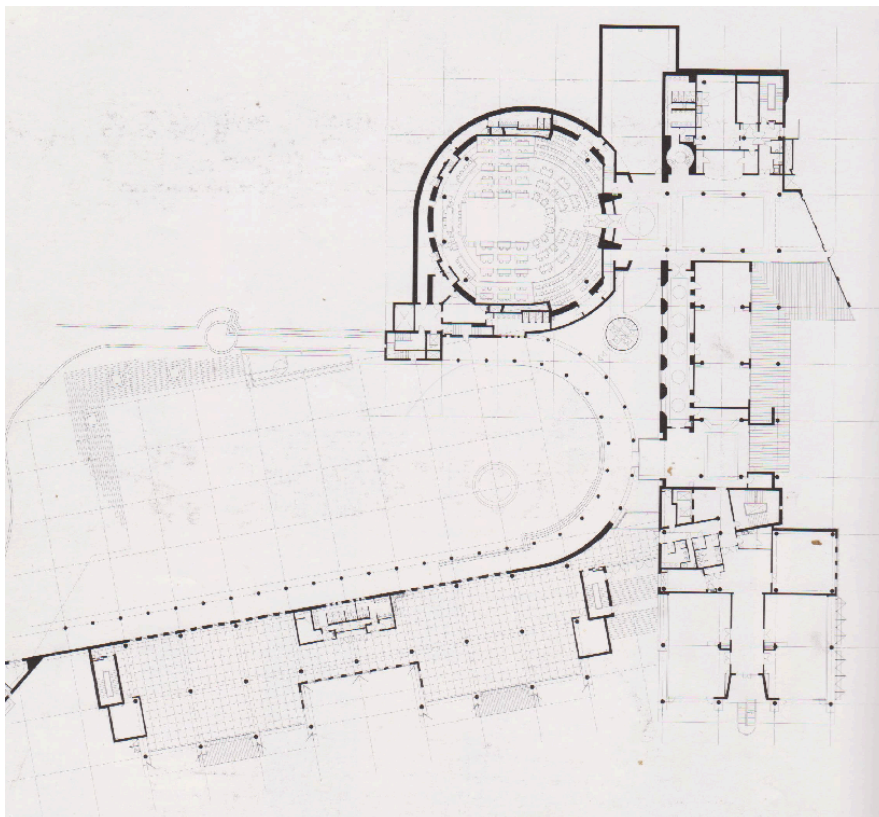


**Figure 49 Elements in the formal gardens scattered around the work environments contribute to a sense of well-being. Source: McInerney, 2001:62.**

South African people who enjoy spending time outdoors. The small gardens in various designs, scattered throughout the building, compliment the raw nature of the surrounds and are places where employees can relax. The comfort felt by employees and visitors because of the well-designed work environment has contributed to a very well integrated and efficient working environment that employees enjoy. This success highlights the positive impact that comfortable and varied work environments can have on the employees working in the building and how that can also positively effect their productivity and effectiveness.

### **Aesthetic Expression**

The panel reviewing the design competition entries looked at many different factors apart from just the aesthetic appearance of the building. This design's aesthetic was well-received by the judges because it symbolised the African vernacular rather than simply mimicking it. The symbolism in the building is not just of the vernacular architecture in the region from the natives and settlers, but also symbolic of the natural granite rocks and forests surrounding the site.



**Figure 50 Colonnaded public square on entrance level, showing circular council chamber. Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001: 36.**

The colonnades give a human scale to the taller parts of the structure; the repetition in the pavilions creates a gentle rhythm that culminates in the huge dome structure above the main council chamber. The concrete dome is clad in brick on the outside and decorated in an elaborate check design by local artists on the inside skin.



**Figure 51 As reference to the environment, finishes are themed as 'earth', 'grass' and 'reeds' Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001: 47.**

The walkways that are not of timber decking are decorated in detailed mosaic tiles in varying designs and these designs are further reflected in the design of the plate steel doors. Paintings of typically South scenes adorn the walls of the walkways and sculptures complement the manicured gardens. The most ornately decorated space is the council chamber with brightly coloured carpets designed to reflect the patterns on the vernacular houses and local tapestries.

The form of the building is subdued by the low roofs, which are to add horizontality to the tall structure, grounding it and creating a roofline that reflects the rolling

mountains in the background. The forms of the building are rigid and strong with the main council chamber and the public space addressing it, having the only softer circular form. The overall composition is softened by use of trees and most especially by the bulk of the building being out of site of the viewer on arrival as the site drops in elevation steadily from the entrance. The overall aesthetic expression seems to be a mixture of standard modern construction with accents of more culturally and artistically creative effects. The building is not to everyone's stylistic taste but there is undoubtedly merit in its inclusion of vernacular, modern and artistic elements to influence the design and when the building is viewed holistically in its natural surroundings it seems to sit very comfortably and is self-assured and stable.

The finishes are very detailed and significant. Materials are sourced locally where possible; local granite is cut from waste material at the local quarry, and bricks and timber sourced from the lowveld, and this is why the design was appreciated by the design reviewers, because of its dignified appearance.

### **Public Interface**

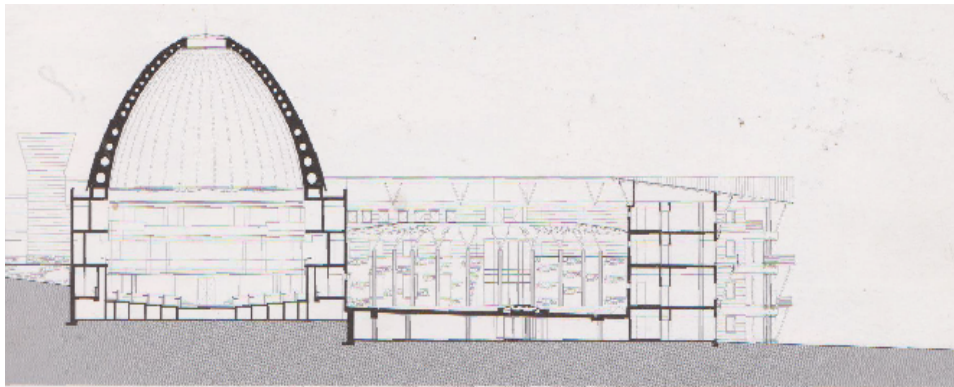


**Figure 52 Artwork portraying scenes and sculptures specific to Mpumalanga. Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001: 107.**

This building is a completely state related office block and therefore has little in the way of provision for the general public. The artworks throughout the building serve to remind the public servants of the people they represent and are responsible for. The

main council chamber is a semi-public building in that it does receive guests for public functions and celebrations. Most of these functions are held in the open courtyard surrounded by the pronounced colonnade and council facility. The square or isigcawu terminates the axis of the Government Boulevard; it splays open to welcome visitors into the square and forms a grand plaza. There is an apparent lack of real inclusion of the public, which seems peculiar because it is a building where legislation is planned and passed and other provinces in South Africa now have legislatures that are accessible by the public, where the legislative process can be observed in real-time.

### **Abstract Symbolism**



**Figure 53 The council chamber dome literally symbolic of the corbelled parabolic stone dome by the 19th century settlers in the Karoo. Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001: 37.**



**Figure 54 Corbelled parabolic stone dome by the 19th century settlers in the Karoo. Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001: 75.**

This is a building rich in literal symbolism of the architectural elements that make up its composition, from the columns representing trees to the roofs collectively creating a mountainside of rolling hills. The question of what its abstract symbolism is, requires more thought and investigation.

Most obviously, the finishes follow three themes: earth, grass and reed. The earth is characterised by the use of rock and clay, decorated in the local design; the grass is shown in woven fabrics and objects derived from weaving; and the reed are posts, angled and vertical that make up the edges of spaces e.g. walls, colonnades and panelling.



**Figure 55 The interior of the domed council chamber showing artwork and decorative carpet and desk design. Source: Malan and McInerney, 2001:39.**

Most of the symbolism in this building is not of a political nature as the building is not necessarily for public use and is often not seen by the general public. If there were more public facilities in the building such as a coffee shops and exhibitions, there may have been a need for a stronger politically symbolic architecture but this building seems specifically symbolic of nature and a culture, that reflects on the ethnicity of the people in power who represent the people at large. The fact that the building is not in the modernist architectural style but rather more vernacular, it follows that the symbolism is also more historically sensitive and promotional. The big statement being made in most political buildings is somewhat subdued, but it does represent quite clearly a break from the political symbolism found in apartheid buildings like the Union Buildings in Pretoria that symbolise power and absolute control over men and nature. The architects purposely wanted to avoid such a strong symbolism as they intended to present the government as a friendlier, less egotistical organisation with

leadership more concerned with the issues of the citizen than the issues of the power and prestige.

### **3.5 Conclusion to Precedent Studies**

It seems then, that public architecture can be used in many ways to send different messages to the public or occupants of a building. The political symbolism can often be identified first by identifying the commissioner of the work, and analysing the image they would like the architecture to portray of their organisation. Once identified this forms the main basis of abstract symbolism as it has been shown that buildings, especially publically funded ones, are used to narrate a certain agenda and the interpretation of that message is absolutely essential to the success of that building in the public's subconscious.

As the public who ultimately own these buildings, it is for the general public to visit, experience and understand what the buildings mean because these public buildings are usually a reflection of the state of what the state wants the future of that locality to be. From a detailed analysis of the three precedents it is also clear how varied the symbolism can be and the many different techniques that architects use to communicate that symbolism to users. The buildings are also received with varying degrees of acceptance by the public from the Chandigarh Complex that is loved, to the Cultural Centre Tjibaou, which is poorly received by locals but well loved by visitors to the area. The issue of time is also important to consider because it seems that it usually over many decades that the buildings political impact is socially understood, especially if the political statement is a complete break from the status quo.

All of the precedent studies respond positively to their physical surroundings and so could be seen as good examples of the concept of critical regionalism in practice. The Tjibaou Cultural Centre doesn't simply respond appropriately but also uses local materials in new and inventive ways to enhance the vernacular architecture of the area. This creates a richness and depth in the design and adds meaning to its appearance and structural composition that moves the standard of design forward. As an exponent of the concept of genius loci, the TCC fails because it doesn't capture the spirit of the place and its people. The symbolism of the building isn't in line with the

attitudes and feelings of the people and this mismatch proves to be the downfall of the building, causing the building to be hated and disregarded by the local people it was designed for. Spatially however, the building works well in that the ways the various spaces are organised add cumulatively to the overall intended experience of the building. For visitors unaware of the political issues associated with the building, the symbolism is very clear and they can learn, by their passage through the various spaces in the building and the exhibits housed within them, the Kanak culture holistically, which is the intent of the building.

The Capitol Complex in Chandigarh was very effective at capturing the essence of the culture of the Indian people and the political climate at the time of its inception. Although not many local materials or design principles were used in its design, there was a very sensitive reaction to the climate and the way the Indian people behaved which makes the building comfortable to be in and also makes it easy to identify with on a cultural level. The theory of spatial perception is exemplified well in this building where the spaces were used to change the perception people had of the typology of political buildings from one of stuffy, formal, rigid and brash monuments to more sensitive, welcoming, less imposing structures that used colour, shade, massing and artworks in creative ways to make the buildings themselves seem friendlier and local. This shows that critical regionalism was important to the designers who employed these subtle techniques to almost ground the building in India, where without them the building could have been from anywhere around the world.

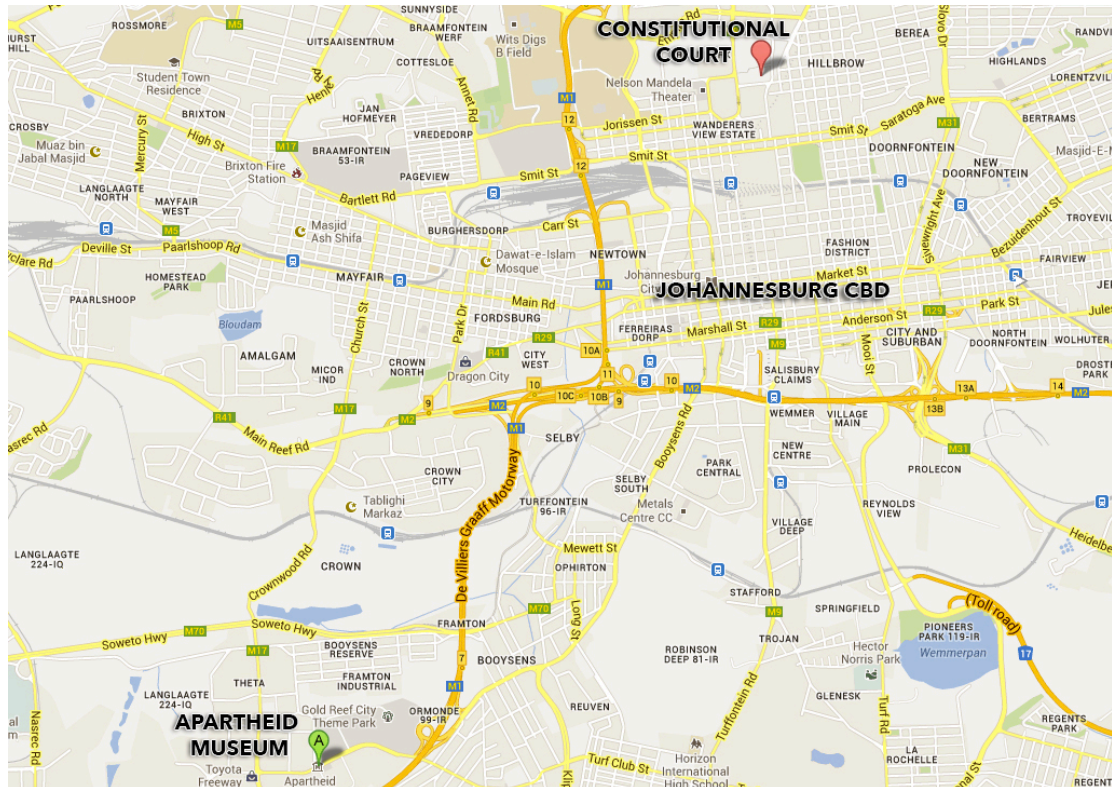
The Mpumalanga Provincial Government complex seems weak in terms of its conceptual underpinning. Its use of locally made materials and reinterprets the vernacular from surrounding areas but these seem cosmetic add-ons and the building itself is essentially a typical office building. Because of this, the Space Syntax theory of spatial perception is negatively affected because the building is so ordinary and typical in its spatial configuration that no real changes can be affected in one's idea of what such a building could mean. The concept of *genius loci* is more successfully handled because of the strategic use of local artwork and sculptures throughout the building culminating in large, vibrantly coloured tapestries in the domed council

chamber that really capture well the cultural richness and history of the prominent cultures in Nelspruit and Mpumalanga.

Including publically accessible areas in the building where they can meaningfully interact and participate is also very important because this participation adds meaning to the experience of the building and gives visitors a reason to keep coming back. It is essential to have large numbers of visitors to so that the impact of the message can reach as wide an audience as possible. These buildings are for the most part, effectors of social change because of the public interest invested in their design, construction and on-going use. In an effort to further understand abstract symbolism in use, case studies of contemporary buildings will be investigated and the findings documented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDIES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION AND SELECTION CRITERIA



**Figure 56 A locality map of Gauteng showing the locations of the Apartheid Museum and Constitutional Court in relation to the main city, Johannesburg. Source: maps.google.com**

Until this point the empirical sources pertaining to abstract symbolism in buildings have been documented. In this chapter, case studies will be used to understand the real efficacy of the techniques for representing symbolism and the level to which the user perceives that symbolism will also be gauged.

The specific case studies chosen are: the Apartheid Museum in Southdale and Constitutional Hill in Braamfontein. The Apartheid Museum was chosen because it is a contemporary heritage building that is symbolic of an abstract political agenda i.e. apartheid, and it communicates this historic ideology through a modern architectural expression. The Constitutional Hill is a conversion of a historic fort and prison into a contemporary government complex with museums, shops, a constitutional court and offices; it was chosen because it is political architecture symbolic of the future.

The areas of concern include the buildings' response to environmental and urban context, symbolism through architectural expression and how the building uses its public interface to communicate its symbolism. To clarify further plans, photographs and sketches will be included as part of the discussion.

## 4.2 APARTHEID MUSEUM

### Introduction

The Apartheid Museum is a very controversial building, not in its architectural character *per se* but in its symbolism i.e. what it represents. The building is a museum and conference facility, which is dedicated to the period of apartheid history and the journey to democracy. This building is not a political building in the traditional sense because it was not sanctioned and paid for by the government but rather because it is an architectural monument to the political system of apartheid and the segregation and discrimination associated with that regime.



Figure 57 Locality map of Apartheid Museum. Source: Author

It was designed by a team of leading South African architectural firms at a cost of R80 million and is constructed on a 7 hectare site; it houses 22 exhibitions, an auditorium, banqueting area, conference rooms, an outdoor amphitheatre, a museum shop, café and extensive landscaped veld. The building was designed as an educational tool to show what apartheid South Africa was like to international visitors and South African youth who were born after apartheid ended in 1995. This subchapter will briefly describe the context of the building and, in more detail, describe the abstract symbolism represented in the building's architectural expression.

### Response to Urban Context



**Figure 58 High walls screening the surrounding theme park and casino. Source: Author**

The building is set in the midst of the Gold Reef City casino and amusement complex in Ormonde, Gauteng. It is a very busy area throughout the year and has its busiest times during school, Christmas and Easter holidays. The urban environment surrounding the site is a theme park, small shopping centre and casino complex, which are rather unrelated to the museum. Because of this, the designers use screen walls (Figure 58), strategically placed viewing decks and have internalised the museum so as to exclude the context because it might detract from the intensity the building creates. The main ramp leads up to a large viewing deck that limits your

view to a panorama of Johannesburg in the distance while hiding the theme park and factories on either side of the site. Because one walks up the ramp and down stairs before reaching the main exhibition spaces, the building seems to be excavated from the site and this further integrates it into the physical site (Figure 59). A very, brutallist building in character, it contrasts with the surrounding buildings that are very ornamental and playful. It has a more sombre, serious character and this is appropriate because of the subject matter it houses being very serious and personal to the people of South Africa.

### **Response to Urban Context**

Environmentally speaking, the building is constructed mostly of brick walls on a reinforced concrete frame. This system of construction is both cost-effective and is



**Figure 59 The building appears submerged underground. Source: Author**

very appropriate to the mild climate of Gauteng. The climate is very seasonal and ranges from dry and warm summers with average humidity to wet, chilly winter months in July and August. In an effort to be climatically responsive, the building

uses reinforced concrete retaining walls, double skin clay brick cavity walls and concrete floor slabs. All of these materials are very good thermal insulators and maintain a comfortable temperature throughout the day when the museum is open.



**Figure 60 The café and museum shop enclosing a courtyard. The building is well integrated into the natural landscape. Source: Author**

There is also an effort to integrate the landscape into the building in a meaningful way, covering most of the concrete roof structure with indigenous planting does this. Pools and planted areas encourage birdlife and the building becomes a natural sanctuary amidst a very developed urban environment with little semblance of nature. The café and museum shop (Figure 60) enclose a small courtyard, which is shaded by trees and incorporates a water feature and natural brush and stone further enhance the relation the building has with nature.

### **Aesthetic Expression**

The building is designed in the brutallist style externally but adopts the modernist architectural style for the internal spaces. The two styles are complimentary and the transition between the two styles is unnoticeable by most visitors because the materials used are the same on the inside and outside. The materials used for the building elements are: clay facebrick walls, off shutter and in-situ concrete walls and

floors, polished screed floors, glass fenestrations and concrete flat roofs with planters and roof gardens. The materials are chosen to compliment the intent of the building to present a harsh and austere character that reflects the character of the exhibitions it houses.

### **Public Interface**

As has been discussed in this document, the element of public awareness is imperative for the correct interpretation of the architectural symbols. The symbols represented in political architecture are used to cause societal change but in order for this to take effect, the public must first be encouraged to visit and interact with the building in order for them to become influenced by the symbolism. The symbolism becomes further reinforced through revisits and discussions about the building with others who have visited it. This highlights the need for political buildings to attract as many local and international visitors as possible and because the museum attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year, it can be seen as successful in this regard.



**Figure 61 View of the museum from the parking lot. Concrete spires are 'pillars of the Constitution'. Source: [www.cbs.com](http://www.cbs.com)**

The Apartheid Museum can be viewed as highly successful in its inclusion of the public in the symbolism it represents because it immerses the visitor completely in what apartheid was by first extracting you from the normal environment and placing

into an introverted world where all the senses are stimulated strategically to symbolise the message being communicated. The design of the building discourages distractions from the outside world and allows the visitor to concentrate on the exhibits almost exclusively. Apart from subtle architectural techniques, bold and obvious symbols are also used to make the building's symbolism legible and perceivable to all visitors—regardless of their architectural awareness. This makes the experience of the building highly emotive and memorable for nearly all visitors and that represents successful perception of abstract architectural symbolism, when all visitors understand clearly what the building means.

### **Abstract Symbolism**

As the name of the building suggests, the museum's main function is to portray the era of institutionalised apartheid in South African history. It follows then that this is a very symbolically rich piece of architecture and that it has much public responsibility not just to tourists but also to citizens of South Africa who lived through apartheid and must therefore represent apartheid as accurately as possible. The symbolism will be explained through the planned tour route to understand clearly how the individual abstract symbols were intended to be perceived collectively.



**Figure 62** The separate entrances for different races. Source: Author



**Figure 63** The ramp housing the 'Journey to Johannesburg' exhibit. Source: Author

From the outside, the building seems rather small and hidden as it sits behind high facebrick walls (Figure 61). Even at the entrance one is struck by the starkness of the building, which makes it seem stripped-down bare and austere. This is the introduction through the steel gates of the entrance and the hard-surfaced concrete benches. The path towards the main entrance leads you through the 'pillars of the Constitution' which are concrete spires with the main aims of the constitution displayed in large steel type that rusts over time, representing the age of the constitution and its high moral vision.

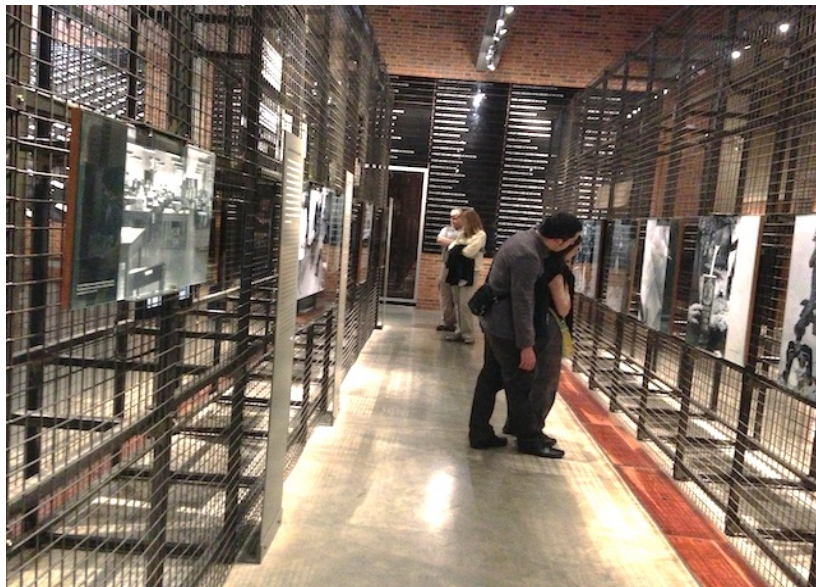
Next you reach the main entrance (Figure 62), which is designed literally as the old apartheid entranceways that separated the different races. From the ticketing office a visitor is given a ticket that denotes a race group, that race group determines which turn style in the entrance to use.

The next stage of the tour route leads up a ramp that runs the length of the site. On the ramp are mirror images of people and rock art enclosures portraying the ancient



**Figure 64 The viewing deck framing the panorama of Johannesburg.**  
**Source: Author**

history of Johannesburg until now. The mirror images ensure that a visitor is never alone on the journey and the fact that the mirrors are mounted on mirrors also represents how our images of ourselves are reflected in how we see other people. The ramp (Figure 63) also leads upward and that ascension is symbolic of how Johannesburg grew and developed. The ramp terminates at a balcony that frames a panoramic view of Johannesburg (Figure 64).



**Figure 65 Exhibit showing the implementation of apartheid.**  
**Source: Author**



**Figure 66 Exhibit showing ordinary life during apartheid. Source: Author**

From the bright, open viewing deck, the visitor descends the staircase to the main entrance of the museum, which is dimly lit and hard surfaces echo the sounds of the exhibitions and people's footsteps. This is representational of the downward moral turn the nation took as it descended into racial segregation and could be seen almost as a *dark age* in South African History.



**Figure 67 Illuminated exit, representational of political freedom and light. Source: Author**

After entering the museum, the visitor moves through various exhibits arranged chronologically to give a summation of the story of apartheid. It is important to note that each exhibit has its character and spatial configuration, which architect Stefano Vatteroni says was important to symbolise the political atmosphere at the time architecturally and also to represent the stage that apartheid was in at the time. Above (figure 64), the exhibits are mounted on a steel mesh grid that is symbolic of the fact that at that stage apartheid was still an idea and the framework was still being developed and legislated. By the time you reach the exhibits of life during apartheid (Figure 66) the materials used are off-shutter concrete and brick symbolising the permanence and strength of apartheid. The ceiling heights also denote the political climate at the specific time with the low ceilings being used in times of slow political change and greater volumes representing freedom of thought and changes in political climate.



**Figure 68** The celebration room, the final exhibit in the museum. Source: [jerrisimosa2010.blogspot.com](http://jerrisimosa2010.blogspot.com)

The serpentine form of the walls creates an organic flow through the many exhibits and ties the spaces together in a subtle way. The use of light as a guide is also important because people tend to move toward light and are so encouraged to move

along the exhibits; also the use of light wells and fenestrations introduces light to the exhibits that symbolise moments of hope or victory, with the darker-lit spaces representing tragedies and low-points in the history of apartheid. This is evident in figure 67 where the main exit is well lit and follows a dim exhibit of the Truth and Reconciliation meetings, which were incredibly emotional and painful for many South Africans. The new constitution of 1995 is introduced and celebrated in the Celebration room (Figure 68), which encircles the viewer in the abstract notions the new constitution strives to achieve and the light from the various openings is representational of apartheid finally breaking down by the human rights in the type.

After the exhibits the landscaped veld gardens frame the walkway towards the meeting spaces enclosed by the coffee shop and museum shop on either side. This is the terminal space where visitors can discuss and reflect on the experience of the museum and relax after what is a long and emotionally taxing experience. The incorporation of nature here adds to the relaxing and nurturing character of the space and acts as the intermediary between the museum- and apartheid- being left behind and the outside world being moved back into.

## **Conclusion**

As an architectural embodiment of abstract symbolism the Apartheid Museum is highly successful. From it, one can see practically how the theories of architectural symbolism can be applied and achieved successfully. Because architectural symbolism is abstract, it is incredibly difficult for laypeople to notice and therefore respond to but the Apartheid Museum has a very interesting mix of abstract and literal symbolisms that compliment each other and strengthen the clarity of the abstract notions the building represents. The fact that many people visit and the building is well publicized also adds to its success. This also gives the building a social identity and presence essential to the success of any architecture symbolising political regimes or objectives.

## 4.3 CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

### Introduction



Figure 69 A map of the Braamfontein area with the Court in Hillbrow overlooking the Braamfontein and Hillbrow CBD. Source: [www.sa-venues.com](http://www.sa-venues.com)

The final case study is arguably “the most important building of South Africa’s new democracy”(Law-Viljoen, 2006: i). Constitutional Court is the most significant political building in contemporary South African history and represents to the country a new political dispensation that cherishes human rights, transparency of government and creative expression. The building is the centrepiece of the urban rejuvenation project Constitution Hill in Braamfontein, Johannesburg where the Old Fort built in 1893 that housed the Number Four and Woman’s Goal prisons where many prominent political prisoners and criminals were held during apartheid. The structure on that specific site is an abstract and literal gesture in transformation of the old into the new. The fact that this building tries to capture a political ideal of the future not yet recognised also made its analysis important to this research; but the most important factors are that the building was to symbolise a legislative body i.e. the constitution of South Africa, and that it was to be the permanent home for the representatives of that system i.e. the justices. This is in line with the objective of the African Union to have a purpose-built permanent home for its many official members and a building that expresses the political intent of the organisation.

## Response to Urban Context

The site is called Old Fort Prison in the heart of Johannesburg's old CBD in Braamfontein, and has Hillbrow as its neighbour. The site was chosen by the eleven justices serving in 2004 because it was saturated in political South African history that dated back to the first British and Boer settlers on Braamfontein ridge and the site was of great strategic importance to the military because of its vantage point and that is why the fort was first built there.



**Figure 70** The inner-city context of the Constitutional Court. Source: Author

The urban context (Figure 70) around the building is a very densely populated area that has undergone some rejuvenation by the municipality but some of the buildings remain disused or poorly maintained. The area of Braamfontein North and Hillbrow have a notoriously bad reputation of being dangerous and dingy and this inspired the architects of omm design workshop and Urban Solutions to create a catalyst of positive change in the surrounding areas.



**Figure 71** The view of the Constitutional Court West facade from the public square. Source: Author



**Figure 72 The Union Buildings in Pretoria by Sir Herbert Baker. Source: [www.gauteng.net](http://www.gauteng.net)**

The site sits on a natural ridge and is visible to cities and towns in all directions and is close to major transportation nodes. Added to the densely populated area, the building had the opportunity of exposing many people to the public building that many of the city dwellers would otherwise never visit and placing the decision-makers in the midst of the people they were to protect, overlooking the biggest city in South Africa.

Because of its function as a court, many people would expect a very expressionless and monumental building that commanded authority with a use of over-scale elements and classical architectural elements but the architects chose to depart from the classical (Figure 72) in favour of a more contemporary, artistically free architectural monument (Figure 71). The building on site does not use its size to impose on the visitor but is relatively low-scale and sensitive to the human scale. This technique is a contrast to the buildings around it and certainly other political buildings like the Union Buildings in Pretoria (Figure 72) and presents a friendlier face to the justice system. The designers felt that it was important to make the entire justice system appear more accessible and welcoming so as to change the negative perception people had (Makin, 2006 cited in Law-Viljoen, 2006).



Figure 73 Main materials used are clay brick, steel and concrete in various finishes. Source: Author

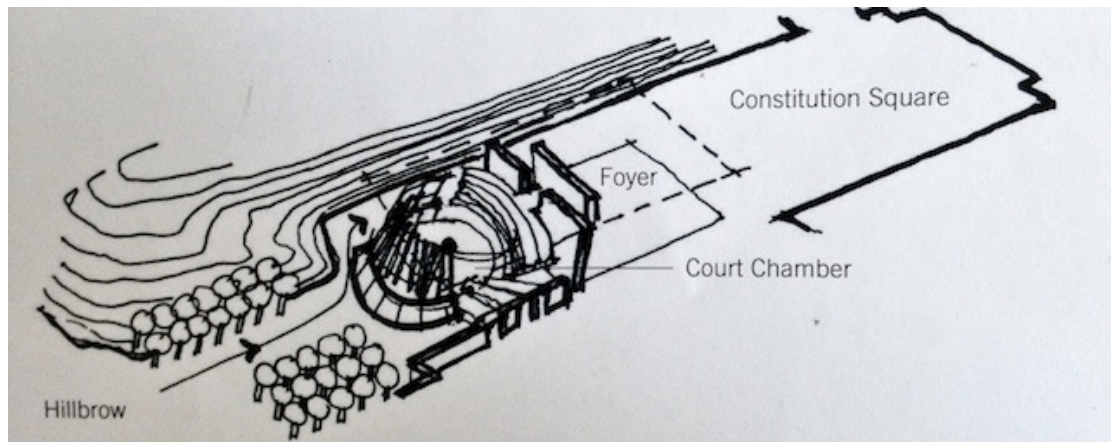
### Response to Environmental Context



Figure 74 North (left) and West (right) facades with the corner accentuated by tower. Source: Author

The materials used in the Constitutional Court's construction are mainly of clay brick infill walls on a reinforced concrete frame (Figure 73). Steel is also used to support the lighter-weight elements in the building like fenestrations and shading devices.

All the main façades are designed to respond to the climatic conditions in the area. Overall, the façades facing north and west have deep overhangs and various styles of shading devices from brise soleils and balconies (Figure 74 left and centre) to louvres and over fully glazed openings (Figure 74 right and centre).



**Figure 75 A sketch showing public access route to Constitution Square from Hillbrow. Source: Law-Viljoen, 2006: 39.**

The south façade has more openings and allows for more transparency between the outside and inside. Because of the orientation, the architects chose to make the main access into the public square from Hillbrow pass along the south façade as shown in figure 74 above.

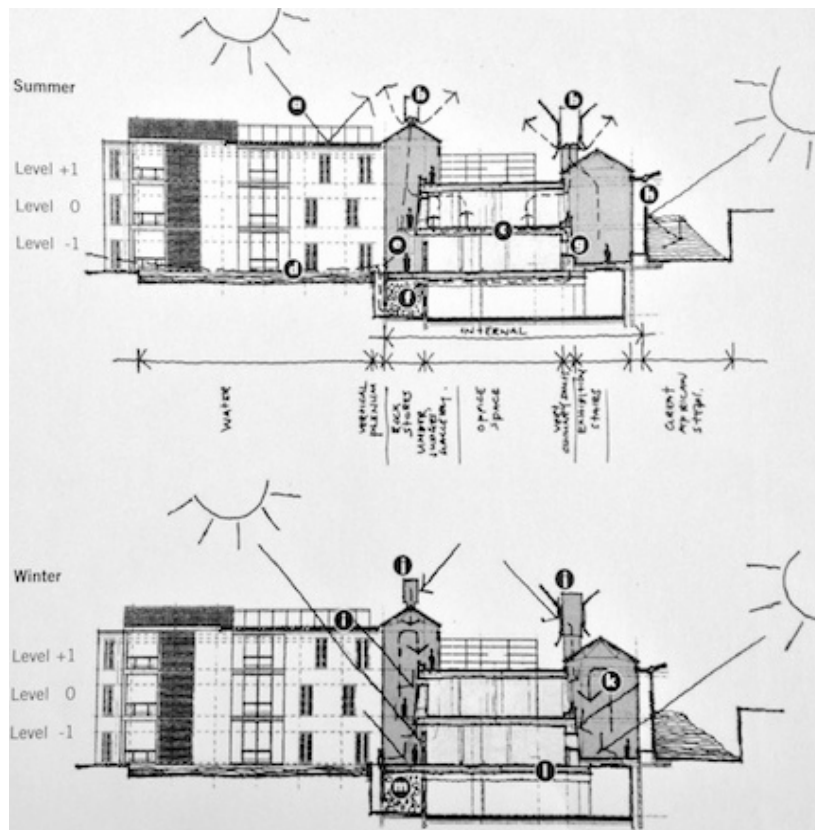


**Figure 76 The south facade with fully large curtain walls. Source: Author**



**Figure 77 The justices' offices overlooking the inner courtyard. Source: Law-Viljoen, 2006: 117.**

The orientation allowed for large openings that allow a view directly into the foyer and court chamber and creates a visual link between the two. On the western façade the same brise soleil used on the north façade (Figure 74 left) is again employed; it shields the long façade from the harsh morning sun, which would otherwise cause the internal library and storage spaces to be thermally uncomfortable.



**Figure 78 Diagram of the court's passive cooling and heating system. Source: Law-Viljoen, 2006: 140.**

As a whole, the building takes best advantage of the natural light and ventilation available to minimize its reliance on mechanical ventilation and artificial light. The building was intended to be exemplary to all other public buildings that will follow so the engineers felt it should use a passive cooling and heating system that uses rockstores (Figure 78) in the basement to store cool night-air and then recirculate that air using stack ventilation to all the spaces throughout the building. This technique ensures the inside temperature is kept at the low twenties even when the outside temperature rises past the thirty degree mark. The use of grey water collected from the roofs is used for cleaning, watering and flushing so the building is reliant only on municipal water for drinking and bathing.

The offices of the justices are bathed in light and overlook the inner courtyard that is intended to be a private sanctuary where the employees of the court can have access to gardens and water features (Figure 77). The conference rooms (Figure 79) also take good advantage of the courtyard space and large glass doors open up to it. The main concept of the design is *justice under a tree* and so it was always the intent to have the building relate to natural elements as much as possible.

### **Aesthetic Expression**

The building is designed in the modernist architectural style with a focus on critical regionalism. This is because the designers wanted the building to respond well with the existing buildings on the site. The choice of materials are very diverse (Figure 79) from: off-shutter and in-situ concrete to clay face brick in varying bonds; timber, concrete and aluminium shading devices; concrete, slate and screed floor finishes.



**Figure 79** The conference rooms open up to the private courtyard. Source: Law-Viljoen, 2006: 129.

The diversity of textures and colours and materiality used was intentional and used to reflect the diversity of people the Constitution represents.

### **Public Interface**

The Constitutional Court is awash with literal and abstract symbolism expressed through the structure, materials, artworks, and cultural and historical reference. As a vessel to carry all this symbolism the building itself had to be quite simple so as not to over stimulate the viewer. Inclusion of the public was at the fore of each design decision relating to the public areas (Law-Viljoen, 2006). The intent of the design was to change the perception most South Africans had of their justice department as a whole from a negative, overbearing system to a fairer, accessible one. The symbolism would be lost if the building didn't attract as many visitors as possible who could experience, engage and share their experience of the building with others.

There is an aspect of abstract symbolism that architect Andrew Makin (2005) identifies as the spoken word. This is the idea that if a building is rich enough in its message, one can experience it and then the story can be shared to others who haven't visited it themselves. This type of evangelism is essential to the success of political buildings as these buildings relate so much to society, and their relevance is also based so much in the public domain that that they must be careful of the image they reflect back to society. The constitutional court is incredibly popular all year round and more importantly is the wide demographic it attracts: lawyers and judges; primary school children and university students; artists and craftsmen; international tourists and foreign delegates; but most important of all is the fact that the building is often visited by the people who live in the surrounding areas. This focus on providing a world-class facility that is accessible to all and remains South African in its symbolic identity gives the building figurative rapport with the community it is in and the people that use it daily.

## Abstract Symbolism

The Constitutional Court is a building that is the symbol of the state to all the citizens of South Africa. Because it is the embodiment of justice and a national identity portrayed in the built form (Makin, 2005 cited in Law-Viljoen, 2006).



**Figure 80 Making Democracy Work, a linocut by Sandile Goje that inspired the theme of justice under a tree represented in the building's logo (Figure 71).  
Source: [www.davidkrutpublishing.com](http://www.davidkrutpublishing.com)**



**Figure 81 The Constitutional Court logo *justice under a tree*. Source:  
[www.hippocampus.co.za](http://www.hippocampus.co.za)**

Early in the conceptual design phase, the two architectural teams chose a concept that they felt embodied the process of law in the country and, more importantly, was something that was relevant to all South Africans historically. The concept is *justice under a tree* and was inspired by a linocut by artist Sandile Goje entitled *Making Democracy Work* (Figure 80) that shows a scene of a traditional African elders' meeting where the elders are holding a community meeting under the shade of a tree. This was symbolic of the constitutional court system where many justices discuss and decide cases under the shelter of the new constitution that is unbiased and upholds the human rights of *all* its citizens. The theme of justice under a tree is represented both literally- through artworks around the building and its logo (Figure 81), and figuratively- through the architectural composition of the building, but for the purposes of this study only the architectural symbolism in the publicly accessible areas of the building will be analysed.



**Figure 82 The great African steps leading to the entrance. On the left side are a wall of panels made by local artists and the right side the prison walls are left bare. Source: Author**

Beginning on the exterior of the building to the main entrance facing west, there are three main access routes: one along the western side of the building; one along the southern side from Hillbrow and one from public square directly in front of the entrance. All three of these have been treated differently and introduce you to the



**Figure 83 The south-facing side with a curved concrete wall with glass inserts in the foreground and the view towards Hospital street and Hillbrow in the background. Source: Author**

building in different way. On the western side ascends the Great African Steps (Figure 82), which are a series of steps and ramps built from the bricks reconstituted from the demolished awaiting trial block that made way for the court. These steps are the buffer between the old Number Four cellblock where black prisoners were kept and the new court. The stairs allow for a meandering and are representational of the walk up a hilltop to the peak as the court entrance. The two walls are also at odds because one wall is hard and solid while the other is permeable, has links to the interior and is decorated with artwork. The steps are also intended to encourage sitting down under the shade of the trees but this hardly occurs in reality perhaps because there are no benches and the space seems unprotected and secluded because the panels almost block the view into the building completely. The moving panels shuttering the west-facing windows have artworks by Donovan Dymond, Lewis Levin and Patrick Rorke and they provide an active interaction with the building and a view into African scenes, as one would view different scenes from the hilltop.



Figure 84 The south-facing facade mixing remnants of the old with the new. Source: Author



Figure 85 The glass tower over the foyer representing the highest point of the building over its most important communal space. Source: Author

The route from Hillbrow along the south-facing elevation (Figure 83 and 84) is also of particular symbolic interest. This route is important because it links the building to Hillbrow's office and apartment district, which represents the area's largest pedestrian density and the link with the public transport system also makes it the main route for people using public transport. The first object along this route is one of the towers from the old awaiting trial block and these remnants serve as markers along the south axis as the four of them create a link between the public square, the court building and the south-east corner of the site. The architects intended the view of the building from the street to appear as a collage where old and new combined as one.

“Textured surfaces of old, broken prison bricks peeling, graffitied prison walls, defending curved solid wall floating over strips of light, an impenetrable solid surface and transparent surfaces layered over one another, binding the past and present”  
(Law-Viljoen, 2006: 40)



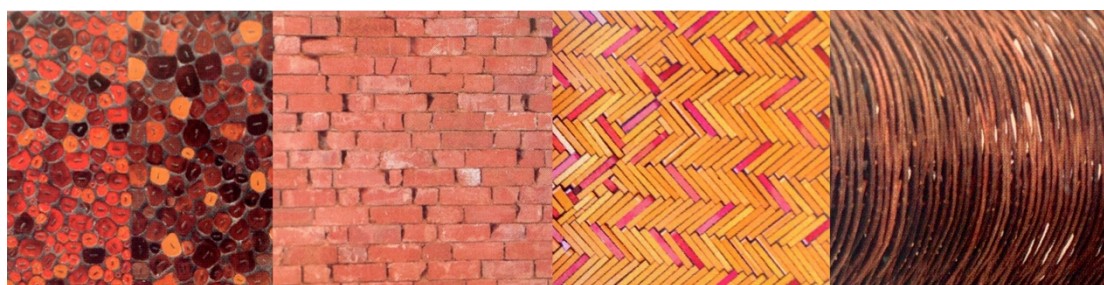
**Figure 86 The main entrance from the public square. The wooden entrance doors and mosaics by local artists, the entablature inscribed with 'human dignity, equality and freedom' and the name of the building in 11 official languages. Source: Author**



**Figure 87 The sunken foyer. Photograph taken facing south. Source: Author**

This elevation seems somewhat chaotic and is therefore a successful representation of South Africa's turbulent history and our more hopeful future, represented by the glass tower over the foyer, which is illuminated at night, shown in figure 85.

Lastly is the front entrance facing the main public square; this is the most decorative façade of the building as serves as the entrance to the foyer, which was seen by the architects and justices as the main public space. The tall wooden doors are carved from native timber and have the 25 pillars of the constitution carved in all the official languages including sign language. The colours of the mosaics symbolise the earth, sky and sun and the signage of the Constitutional Court is written in all official



**Figure 88 Details of mosaics, lampshades and brickwork lend warmth and texture to the foyer. Source: Law-Viljoen, 2006: 55**

languages to symbolise that the constitution is for every single South African and also represents the equality of each cultural group. It should be noted that the pediment above the door opening has inscribed the words *human dignity, equality and freedom* in all official languages again but also in the handwriting of the justices. The symbolism of this is that the judgements carried out by the justices serve to uphold the constitution as the pediment upholds the structure.

The use of the structure to present the symbolism is a departure from most contemporary architecture that has symbolism superimposed *onto* the structure and this further shows the intent of the designers to make the building itself the symbol. There is again a tangible quality to the symbols represented on the doors and walls that cause one to touch and feel the building, as one would read braille, and this adds another dimension to the messages symbolised. The most important space, symbolically, is the main foyer (Justice Sachs, cited in Law-Viljoen, 2006). This part of the building contains the most symbolic elements because it is the most public area and therefore the place where most people have free access to and contains most plainly the design concept *justice under a tree*. The most evident element in this space is the slanted columns (Figure 87), which represent a forest with the sunken foyer representing the meeting space. This is where events and informal audiences are held and is also where most social interaction takes place. The designers were expected to represent the highest aspirations of South Africa's constitution and to direct the gaze of society forward to a shared identity, with lessons learned from a fragmented past. The ceiling in figure 87 shows skylights symbolic of the shards of light piercing through clouds and the leaves of a tree. This is enforced by the natural slate floors that cover the varying levels. The columns are decorated in various mosaics (Figure 88) representing tree bark, flowers and grass and the bricks are again reconstituted from the demolished awaiting trial block, which forms the historic link.

The grand volume and quality of light in the space makes it the brightest space literally and figuratively the most hopeful. The light is also intended to make the user feel as though they are outside and that all the other functions of the building are separate buildings. This foyer is essentially the courtyard; a hollowed-out concrete block that breaks away from classical outer adornment with all associated political connotations, in favour of an internally rich modernist aesthetic that has some

references to all South African cultures that allows for each person to find some design element they can relate to.

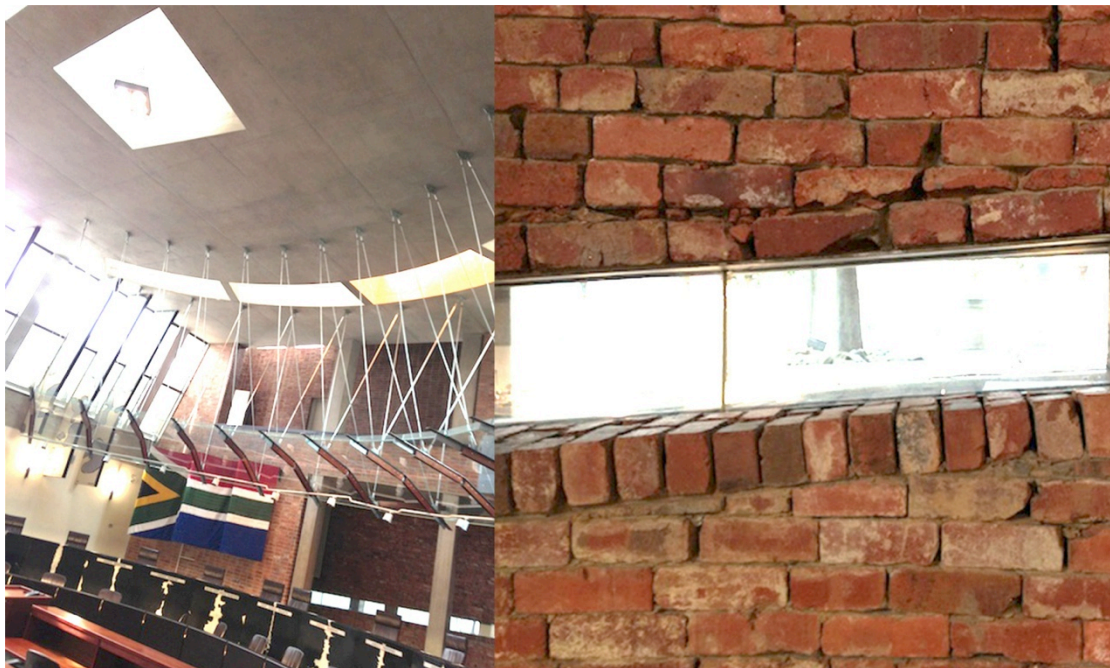
Off the foyer is a large copper double-door that gives public access to the main court chamber and the various media and translation balconies. The highly decorative doors are a reference to African textiles and symbolise the rich artistic history inherent in the traditional African cultures. Because of its texturally rich nature, many people run



**Figure 89 The copper doors to the court chamber mimicking African textiles. Source: Author**

their hands over the doors as they would part curtains and this process is symbolic of their entrance into the court chamber (Figure 89), which is a more sombre space. This is the most functionally important space and its planning is similar to most conventional courts. Aesthetically the court chamber extends dignity to its people by using familiar materials like brick and concrete. Again some of the bricks from the demolished awaiting trial block are reused with mortar gaps left empty to symbolise the crumbling of the old political regime. This is in contrast with the new brick laid in soldier bond, which represents the strength of the new constitution.

The court chamber itself is sunken, as the foyer is, and along the southern side of the chamber there is a long ribbon window at outside ground level. When the justices are seated, they are at eye level with this ribbon window and see out to the passers by. This is a reminder to them that they are only human, and are equal members of the society, as the pedestrians outside are. This also represents a transparency in the new constitution that allows all citizens equal access to justice. On the ceiling are large skylights, carrying on the concept of *justice under a tree*. The judges' bench is quite peculiar in that each seat is covered with the hide of an Nguni cow; this is a gesture to the traditional royal courts and the animal hides adorning monarchs, noblemen and elders in traditional South African cultures.



**Figure 90** Left, the court chamber facing the judges' bench. Right, a detail of the ribbon window that runs the length of the southern side of the chamber. Source: Author

It is an incredibly moving space to be in, similar to the feeling of entering a cathedral. The quality of light and volume is grandiose but the room itself seems accessible and comfortable. It has the ability to silence a loud group of school children but also invites them to step up to the judges' bench and look through the ribbon window into the outside world. Perhaps this is the building's most significant achievement; the ability to engage every person in the political process comfortably.

## Conclusion

The Constitutional Court's symbolism seems to be infinitely interpreted. The architects have an opinion on the symbolism and the justices have their own; the visitors also seem to have slightly different perceptions of what all the symbols in the building are specifically but that seems to be the main strength of the building. The court seems to be a figurative mirror, where people can see their own identity superimposed on the court and this is what makes abstract symbolism so powerful for achieving social change. Although every person perceives the building and its meanings differently, they all adopt it and when asked, most respondents referred to the court as *mine* or *ours*. The use of the possessive nouns proves that most people take ownership of the building and therefore the constitution it represents and see the Constitutional Court as the physical representation or symbol of the abstract constitution.

## 4.4 CONCLUSION TO CASE STUDIES

From the case studies of the Apartheid Museum and Constitutional court, a few important lessons can be learnt about architectural works with a political theme; these being in addition to those identified in the previous chapter of precedent studies.

Firstly it must be noted the significant impact that political architecture has on society. Because the buildings usually absorb large amounts of state funds in their design, construction and running, there is usually much public interest and scrutiny surrounding them. They support not only the construction industry but are also a platform for artists, craftsmen, photographers, writers, etc. who would otherwise not be involved in the process of a building being made.

These political buildings also introduce new technologies and move the construction industry's standard forward because the buildings must also be symbolic of progressiveness of the state or organisation they represent. They seem to be a *bridge* between an organisation's abstract ideology and the society the organisation wants to influence and this brings about the next important element specific to political architecture *inter alia* the fact that they need to belong to the people or at least the society they are placed in. This has huge impact on the effectiveness of their

symbolism because it is through the symbolism embodied in the building that the society interfaces with the organisation and *that* interface determines their adoption or rejection of the building. The symbolism becomes imperative because it is essential that the building be adopted into the social culture in order that the meaning the building carries can instigate a social debate, which is the real carrier of abstract symbolism, as that is how building comes to represent an abstract i.e. the Constitutional Court (the built form) came to represent the constitution (an abstract ideology).

The phenomenological aspects of the studies, as they relate to place and meaning are somewhat more complex. These aspects can be simply summarised as being the concrete setting for human activities and a the creation of a setting where the webs of peoples' cultures and expressions can occur within the context of the building or its periphery. In these terms the Constitutional Court and Apartheid Museum are hugely successful but in different ways. Because of its more complex symbolism, the Constitutional Court has a much richer diversity of public functions and spaces, and this allows for a more fulfilling experience specific to cultural expression through its architecture. Activity and movement are words linked with phenomenology and this is where the Apartheid Museum comes to the fore in its incredibly consistent use of architecture as a tool for communicating its political message, that of the harshness of apartheid. Because the Museum is symbolising only one aspect of South African history, the meaning seems more focussed, and the emotional response to the architecture more absorbing. It also relates to the surrounding area- a desolate old mine-dump and theme park- very well by isolating itself from them, all which lessens distractions and allows for the architecture to be experienced on a deeper level which contributes to the communication of its symbolism.

The issue of national culture and identity becomes very important at this point because culture and identity are particularly important in a South African context where there are so many different cultures, and the unfortunate history South Africa has of cultural disputes and clashes. Because political buildings represent an organisation, they must also represent all the people within that organisation's sphere of influence. A main reason for this is so that all people can feel properly represented and their cultural history or identity not excluded. This makes it easier for the person

to feel represented within the organisation and they can then identify with it on a meaningful level.

When all people are represented, it allows the building to foster and maintain a strong public image because the building is not just a literal building but is then also a symbol of something that every person in that society identifies with. The buildings that have been studied also have a deep historical foundation. From where the sites are, to what views are framed in the completed building. These historical aspects seem to add deeper symbolic meaning to the architecture itself and this educates visitors and users as they move through the building. This gives credence to the theory of the Space Syntax theory of spatial perception where movement through each space serves to inform the user cumulatively to an understanding of the entire building's meaning.

The case studies are both contemporary and are both designed in a modernist architectural style that uses local materials and building techniques to make both buildings more specific to their region. The critical regionalist concept is applied to both, as both respond to the prevailing climatic conditions passively to save power, control temperature and create more comfortable spaces for the users, while also creating a stronger relationship between the person in the building and nature as a consequence. The buildings are both more contextually sensitive as a result, which makes them even more culturally appropriate.

The Apartheid Museum and Constitutional Court are based in history but seem to orientate the user towards the future. This could be, in the case of the Constitutional Court, because South African history is so fragmented and disparate that contemporary political buildings try to undo the damage caused historically by presenting symbols of *unitedness* and social, integration. This could become problematic as some users may misinterpret this as a watering down of their own culture in favour of acceptance of this new hybrid culture where all cultures are merged into one and would therefore be offended. The correct perception of these symbolic gestures expressed architecturally is imperative because the perception is the carrier of symbolism. The Constitutional Court is a good example of how misinterpretation can be avoided through explanations of symbols using tours and the

large panels showing explanations of symbols that might otherwise be misconstrued. The need for explanations is a negative as well because symbolism should be perceivable by all users easily and almost subconsciously and this is also why the designers should communicate their intent on many levels. In the above studies they show obvious and quite subtle symbols that encourage the process of *revisitation* as the more subtle symbols cannot be immediately identified and understood. This depth of symbolism is also very important in the execution of the designs particularly because the more symbolic meaning exists; the more can be learnt from the process of experiencing the building over an extended period of time.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Based on the concepts and theories discussed in chapter one, it is clear that political architecture has the potential to influence the society it is placed in, but that achieving that potential is dependant on many different variables. The process of changing a society's view or attitudes is essentially an abstract process that can be aided by architecture that contains symbols that relate to the place, the people and their identities, which makes them able to relate emotionally and personally with the architecture itself. This relationship, however superficial or meaningful, influences the person's mental perception towards whatever the building is symbolising to some degree.

### **5.2. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS**

It is important to not only understand the experience of architecture through observation but also to investigate the opinions and attitudes of people using the buildings so that different perspectives can inform the eventual findings (Hillier, 2007). The use of interviews and questionnaires in this study serves to answer the main research question: what is the impact of political architecture on society? The findings from the 9 interviews and 70 questionnaires will be presented statistically and conclusions drawn based on the respondent's retorts.

#### **5.2.1 Interviews**

Firstly it is important to note that the interviews were conducted formally and informally dependent on the respondent's availability. Each interview followed the general pattern laid out in the interview template (see *Appendices*).

Stefano Vatteroni, as partner at GAPP Architects and Urban Designers, headed a team of in charge of designing the Apartheid Museum. He believes that the relationship a city's people and its public buildings has is a reciprocal one where each derive their identity from the existence of the other. The political buildings should be a physical

embodiment of what that society is like in character, size, power, culture, nationhood and unity. He stated that the intent for the design of the Apartheid Museum was to create a monument to the death of apartheid, which so damaged South Africa's social fabric. He believes that the building achieves this goal successfully and further stated that symbolism is key in buildings that have a political connotation because designers must be cautious not to offend people that may visit the building. He believes that symbolism is limited only by the imaginations and past experience of the people using the building. He believes that the more architecturally experienced a person is, the deeper their understanding of symbols is, especially abstract symbols that are usually subtle and implied. Stefano places much importance on the city centre, saying that these are the most appropriate locations for political buildings because political buildings should exist in the public's consciousness as much as possible and be easily accessible to them. He feels that all public buildings have political undertones because they are created to serve a people and influence what the people think of their governments. He likens political buildings to the car a politician arrives in, that is to say, the car should be expensive, well made and stately in character; it should present the politician as a powerful man but also it should make him seem reachable to the people he serves. If this analogy is disseminated, then Stefano believes that political architecture should represent the best qualities of a nation's identity and that all the nation's people should be able to find a little of their own identity in it so that they trust in the buildings symbolism.

Architect Ruben Reddy believes that Durban's inner city public buildings are outdated and that what they represent is a by-gone time. He has designed many political buildings throughout South Africa and finds this typology of building most interesting because these buildings exist in the public domain and receive criticism and praise from so many different people. In terms of political architecture, he believes that political buildings have always been the most important type of building and he argues that these buildings represent the city or country to the world. Political buildings should therefore be concerned with local context but also the international context they exist in. Mr Reddy believes that the Durban CBD is deteriorating and is in need of major architectural works that will refresh its identity and image and a large public building is ideal for achieving that goal.

Advocate Mfanelo Mbenenge was interviewed at the Constitutional Court and visits the building a few times a year for work-related duties. He is not concerned with the intricacy of architectural symbolism and believes that is for architects to understand. He does regard the Constitutional Court as one of the best buildings he has visited in South Africa and thinks that the attention to detail in the building's design is exemplary. He believes that it is important for organisations and political powers to propagate their own brand of architecture because it shows visitors what the organisation is all about, without them having to ask. Big buildings also make an impression on people and they remember that organisation the building represents. He feels that South Africa lacks enough new political buildings and further adds that the way the way colonial political buildings were planned is not conducive to the efficient running of the current political administration. He also seemed uncomfortable with the ruling party occupying old apartheid buildings and thinks it more appropriate to demolish the old and construct new structure that will mean a literal death of colonialism in South African culture.

Lerato, a tour guide at the Constitutional Court was asked about how tourists and locals felt when visiting the building for the first time and also whether the building's symbolism lost efficacy over repeated exposure to it. On tourists, she felt that they enjoyed the building and were usually surprised to find such a well-designed building in South Africa. "It certainly changes their perception of what South Africa is like and they learn about the different people of South Africa as a consequence." Many South Africans have seen the building on television and other media when prominent cases were decided there and this is often why they choose to visit the building in the first place. This shows that political buildings can serve to attract visitors as a consequence of their functions. As someone who has studied about the building and guides tours a few times a week, she understands the symbolism in the design very well. Lerato believes that it is still not boring to her and that she discovers some hidden symbolism from time to time, which keeps her interest. The exhibits also change occasionally which keeps the image and character of the building fresh and dynamic.

Ntokozi Xaba is a legal clerk working at the Constitutional Court and praises the building's comfort levels and how, although it is a very public building, there are many private areas where he and his colleagues can conduct their work undisturbed.

He felt that the building was incredibly vibrant, using interesting and peculiar architectural elements and bright colours and artwork to create a very rich environment. He is aware of the building's passive and active thermal and solar control systems and appreciates the building's sensitivity to the environment. He believes that the symbolism in the Constitutional Court is clearly understandable, even for people who don't know much about design or architecture because the designers have left obvious and more subtle symbols so that different people can understand what the building means and symbolises. He believes that the building has come to represent the justice system in South Africa and is a beacon of hope for the countrymen of South Africans.

Nosipho Hlongwe is a security guard working inside the Apartheid Museum where the exhibits are displayed. The reason she was selected was because she spends many hours watching the reactions of people moving through the exhibits and so she could offer insights into how people reacted. She said, during the interview, that most people find the experience of the Apartheid Museum quite jarring and emotional. She has seen many people cry and others enraged by the exhibits and that as they move through the dark halls and also commented that a lot of people get lost or miss parts of the exhibit unless they have a guide because the tour route is somewhat complicated. She wasn't aware of any abstract symbolism in the building and this shows that abstract symbolism is not something all people can intuitively perceive. To her it is more the exhibit rather than the architecture that moves people emotionally and leaves the impression that causes them to see South Africa and its history in a different way.

In-Sun Kim and Sharon Daniels were two tourists from South Korea who were on a tour of Johannesburg's major public buildings and historical sites. They were both shocked and cried during the guided tour because In-Sun explained that South Korea went through similar ethnic discrimination during Japan's occupation of Korea and Sharon was reminded of her Barbadian history of slavery. They both agreed that the building itself certainly made the exhibits more moving and that even without the exhibits, the sheer austerity of the architecture would leave a visitor in a sombre mood. They also both agreed that architecture can have an impact on how you feel and that all architecture could be abstracted and symbolism found within it. They are both Masters graduates and this shows that one's exposure to architecture and your

level of education can make perceiving architecture easier. The two middle-aged women felt that abstract symbols were much harder for the general public to understand because most people simply don't notice the symbols and so don't attempt to perceive them. They also felt that all public buildings could be seen as political buildings because it is the government that commissions the buildings and wants the building to reflect positively on their administration.

Lastly is Lindinhlanhla Mngadi, a young graduate of International Business at Rollins College in Florida, USA, working at a prominent technology company in Johannesburg. As a young staff member he often escorts international clients to the sights of Johannesburg and the Apartheid Museum forms part of his typical tour route. He is impressed at the architectural integrity of the Apartheid Museum and believes it to be a world-class facility. He remarks that from the buildings humble appearance, most people hardly notice it exists and sometimes overlook it completely. He is concerned about the location of the building, in the centre of an entertainment district next to a casino and theme park and he believes that its location is inappropriate for the serious subject matter it displays. In terms of abstract symbolism he feels that most of his clients understand the symbolism represented in the architecture quite well but says that women are more likely to not want to visit again because some of the exhibits can traumatise sensitive people. He feels that South Africa lacks its own real architectural identity but also adds that it is usually in prosperous countries where huge sums of money are spent on major public buildings. In South Africa, as it is now, he feels that such major public building projects are taken using public funds, the people of the country complain that it is a waste of public funds. This may be why most of South Africa's public buildings haven't been changed since the end of apartheid. He does also believe that if South Africa was to create new political buildings that there would be a huge positive boost to the nation as a whole and that such projects would increase esteem in the political system of South Africa, which he believes to be under relentless scrutiny.

From the collection of interviews it is clear that the way people perceive architectural symbolism is varied and based on culture, heritage, education, exposure to architectural or art theory, and levels of awareness. It stands to reason that in order for a wide and varying range of individuals to experience and perceive that they are

experiencing abstract symbolism through the way they experience the building, the building should incorporate varying degrees of symbolism i.e. literal and abstract. Abstract symbolism works only when the user perceives it so for the users who do not recognise what they are experiencing because it is abstract and therefore subtle, the meaning of that architectural gesture becomes lost.

### **5.2.2 Questionnaires**

The data collected from questionnaires will be stated below statistically according to the two case studies i.e. Constitutional Court and Apartheid Museum, and then an analysis of the findings will follow. The demographics were age, gender, race and education level. These demographics were specifically chosen because they were important to confirming the hypothesis and adding context to the respondent's attitudes and opinions on abstract symbolism, political architecture and how perception relates to both. From the demographics many relationships can be confirmed or nullified *viz.* the relationship between education level and perception of abstract symbolism in architecture, while also understanding, for example, how many black South Africans visit a building as compared to their coloured counterparts. The statistics for race and nationality will be compared with the statistics from *statssa.gov.za* to realise what trends arise.

### **5.2.3 Apartheid Museum**

A total of 30 people were given questionnaires to complete at the Apartheid Museum.

The age split was as follows:

- 6% aged under 16
- 15% aged 16 to 30
- 60% aged 31 to 50
- 19% aged over 50.

The gender split was:

- 53 % male
- 47% female.

The racial demographic was:

- 49% black
- 9% coloured
- 21% Indian/Asian
- 21% white.

The education level of the respondents was:

- 21% primary school graduate
- 33% high school graduate
- 46% tertiary institute graduate.

#### **5.2.4 Constitutional Court**

A total of 40 people were given questionnaires to complete at the Constitutional Court. The age split was as follows:

- 14% aged under 16
- 36% aged 16 to 30
- 40% aged 31 to 50
- 10% aged over 50.

The gender split was:

- 78 % male
- 22% female.

The racial demographic was:

- 58% black
- 4% coloured
- 14% Indian/Asian
- 24% white.

The education level of the respondents was:

- 30% primary school graduate
- 8% high school graduate
- 62% tertiary institute graduate.

### 5.2.5 Comparisons

With the above-mentioned statistical information, the demographics collected can be compared with those available in the most recent census. This will serve to see what types of people are currently attracted to political architecture and from this the design of political buildings can be changed to either attract other demographics or to respond more positively to the current demographic.

#### Age

According to *stats.gov.za*'s 2011 census results the age split for the South African population is as follows:

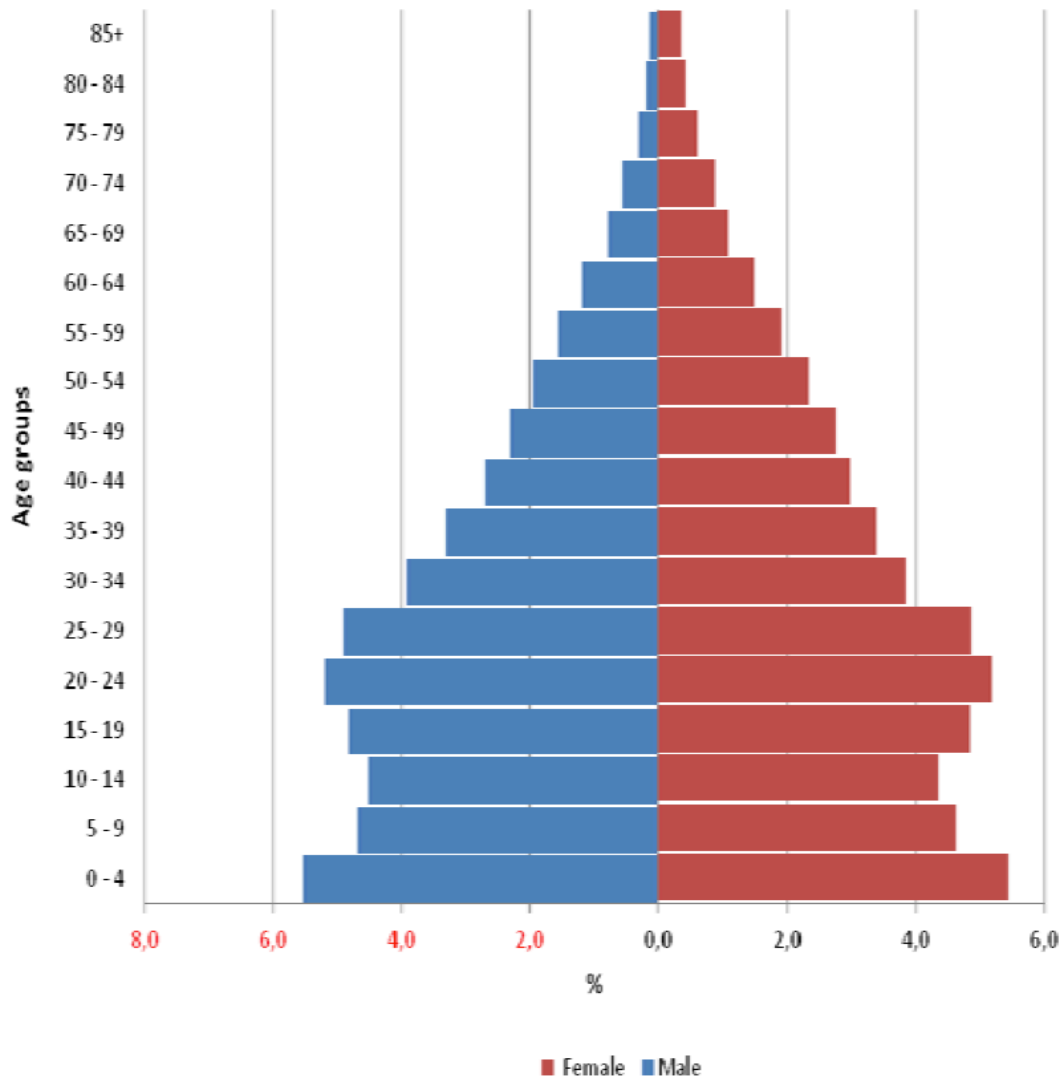


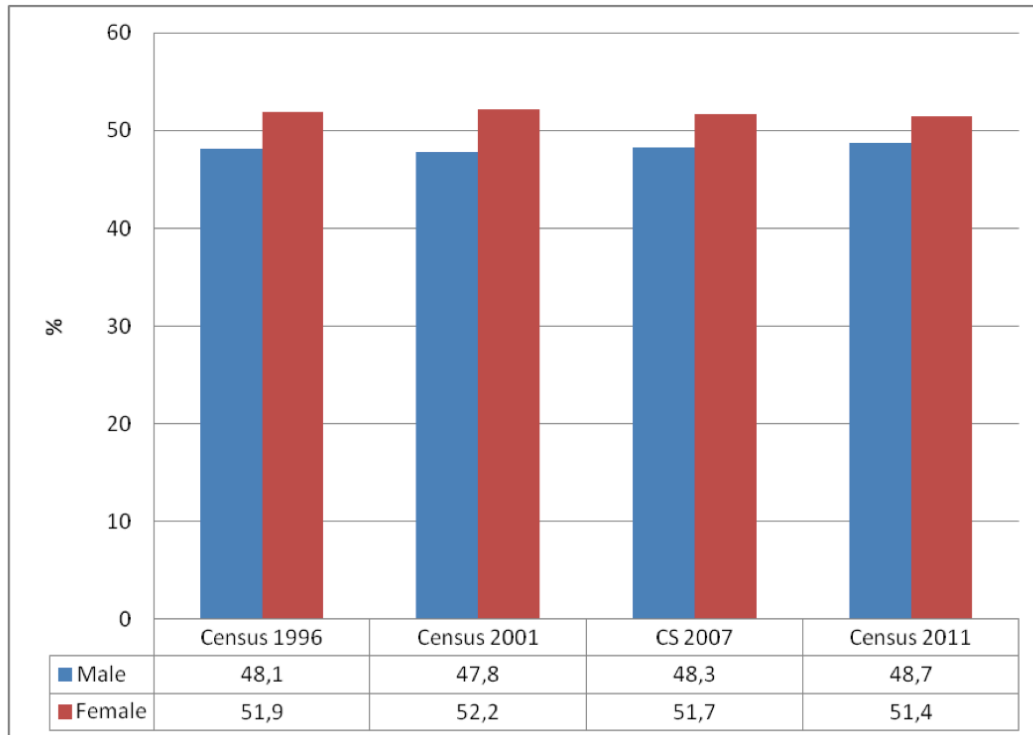
Figure 91 The statistical data showing the age split in South Africa. Male is blue and female is red. Source: [statssa.gov.za](http://statssa.gov.za)

From the information in figure 91 we see that the Apartheid Museum has a generally dissimilar age split where most (60%) of the users of the building are between the ages of 31 and 50, with the ages below 31 and above 50 taking up an equal 20% share. This result means that the building appeals more to the middle aged and holds less appeal to children, young adults and the elderly.

The Constitutional Court results show that half the visitors are below the age of 31 and 40% are in the age group 30 to 50. This shows that most users are children and young adults followed by the middle aged. This means that the building attracts a relative number of people consistent to the national averages (Figure 91). It follows then, that the Constitutional Court is a building that attracts people from all age groups in equal proportion.

### **Gender**

Below in figure 92, the statistics related to the gender split are represented. They show that the South African gender split is 51,4% female, 48,7% male.

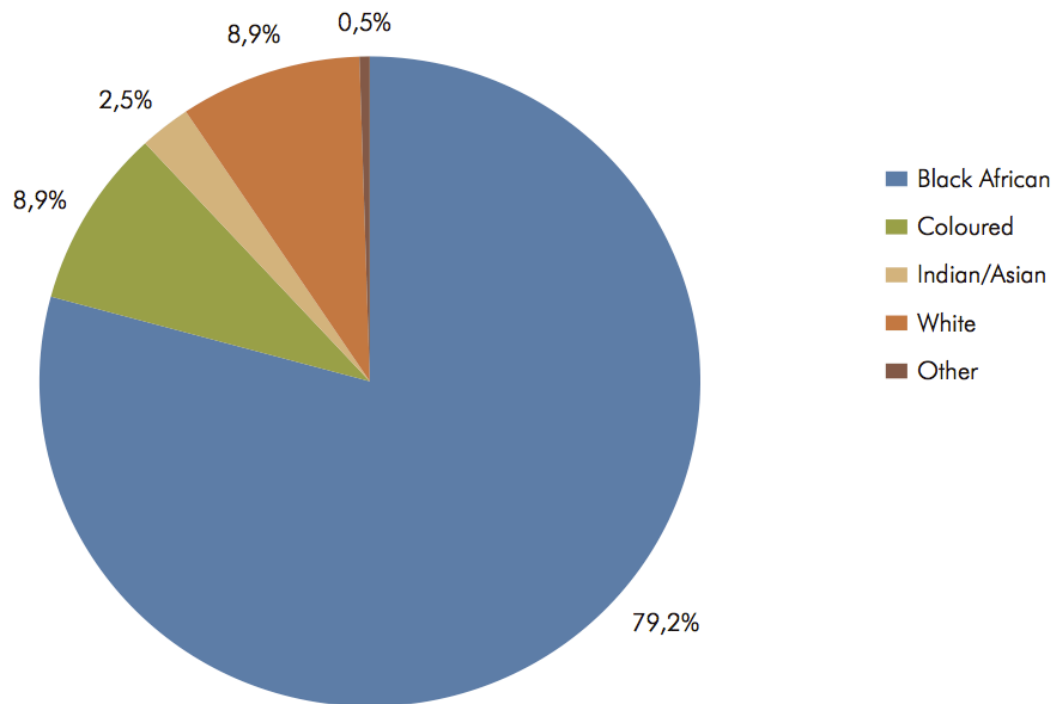


**Figure 92 The gender statistics showing more women than men in the South African population.**  
 Source: [statssa.gov.za](http://statssa.gov.za)

If the results from the questionnaires are compared, it is found that the Apartheid Museum is almost in line with the national average but that the Constitutional Court is hugely imbalanced, showing a 78% male constituency. These results are a combination of the legal profession's gender bias towards men and also that more specifically orientated political architecture is less appealing to women than men which is a misnomer because women make up more than half of society and so should also use political architecture in the same way.

### **Race**

In terms of the racial statistics, the results should follow national averages because that would mean that the political architecture appeals to all cultural and ethnic groups. Incongruities in this demographic would prove most damaging as it would mean that there are racial groups not properly represented in the make-up of the political architecture itself and that goes against the political goal of equality across the spectrum of all demographics. Figure 93 below shows the racial statistics of the South African population according to the *2011 Census* results.



**Figure 93 Diagram showing the make-up of the South African population according to race.**  
 Source: [statssa.gov.za](http://statssa.gov.za)

The results from the Apartheid Museum show 49% black African, 9% coloured, 21% Indian and Asian and 21% white. Results for the Constitutional Court are 58% black, 4% coloured, 14% Indian and Asian and 24% white. These results show that the black African population is underrepresented statistically in both cases with the coloured race being well represented only at the Apartheid Museum. Asian, Indian and white South Africans are hugely overrepresented, from about 110% for white people to about 500% in the case of Indian and Asian people. This shows that South African political architecture doesn't appeal well enough to black South Africans and coloured South Africans in the case of the Apartheid Museum, a more exhibition and educationally orientated facility.

### **Level of Education**

As discussed in other literature, and alluded to by some interviewees, education an important carrier of abstract symbolism but also that a person's educational level has an effect on how well they perceive the abstract symbols in the first place. This

demographic was used to try to understand the correlation between one's level of education and their perception of abstract architectural symbolism.

According to the questionnaires given out at both buildings, results showed consistently that the higher the respondent's level of education, the more aware they were of abstract symbolism in the built environment and were aware that it had an impact on the way they experienced buildings and the urban environment. These results serve to confirm the opinions of interviewees Stefano Vatteroni, In-Sun Kim and Sharon Daniels who all attributed their understanding of symbolism to education and exposure to architecture that comes with research and/or travel.

### **5.3 INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

Modernism as an architectural style is symbolic of freedom of mind and movement and liberates space that would otherwise be wasted. The theory of critical regionalism counters the negative symptoms of modernism such as *placelessness* and a lack of individuality, by rooting a building specifically to the area it is placed in, using local materials, site-specific design generators and environmental and climatic sensitivity in the design process to enrich the design and make it fit in more with the place it is in.

Genius loci and phenomenological concerns relating to place and meaning, as a concepts, contain similar views on issues of place but highlights the more spiritual aspects of a place's character as being of importance. Symbolism can be used to capture the spirit of a place, which is essentially the way that the people in that society prefer to express themselves and their cultures. Natural aspects also influence the spirit of a place and can be seen almost as a vehicle that the cultures are expressed through. The life that happens in and around a building becomes essential because the life is the spirit and so architecture must respond positively by creating platforms for these expressions of life to occur upon. The phenomenological aspects of a place give it its particular meaning to the user and in the context of an urban area this becomes important especially relating to the abstract nature of symbolism. Abstraction is a tool of perception and characteristics of a place inform our perception, emotions, reactions and interpretations. Therefore, making an architecture that correctly represents its geographical and socio-cultural location will create a more meaningful architecture.

The Space Syntax theory of spacial perception takes a more scientific approach to understanding how buildings communicate back to people. This theory is based on the premise that in order for people to understand a buildings meaning or symbolism, the building must be experienced room-by-room or space-by-space. Each separate space has its own function, characteristics and, therefore, meaning; the meanings are perceived cumulatively to form a complete picture of what the building means to person using it.

In reinterpreting the African Union's own ideals for what modern political buildings should be like, the literature review has explored the theoretical underpinnings of the modernist architectural movement and how that foundation led to critical regionalism as a compromise between the international style and regionalism. This compromise created an architecture that is more sensitive to its context and also more spatially liberated. There are also connotations of the future and progress that are implied by this style of architecture, which make it attractive for a building that is to represent an organisation aiming to bring about social change in the future.

With all the modern techniques of expressing abstract symbolism through architecture, it is important to note that not all of those techniques can be successfully used in every case. The main reason for that is the problem of perception because not all people can understand or comprehend all abstract symbols to the same degree. Because the people that are to experience a political building are very different, the representations used must also be so, so that as many people can understand the meaning in the architecture as clearly as possible. This calls for the use of a diversity of symbolism, from very literal symbols moving to progressively subtler ones. This ensures that whoever experiences the building can have some understanding of what the building symbolises.

An issue arising from the literature review was that of the public's inclusion in the process of government and how participation can be used as a carrier of symbolism that will cause the desired social change in that society. By allowing the public to participate in the political debate, they become more deeply immersed in the process and feel that they have an influence on it. This feeling of influence is essential to

making them feel more responsible for upholding the principles set out in the legislation and this is where architecture can have a real impact. It is by designing an architecture that can facilitate this interface that real social change can be created. The abstract symbolism contained in that architecture serves to marry the organisation that uses the building with the citizens that use it. With that arises the need for the building to have a strong public image and public functions that will attract as many people to the building as possible in order to affect as much change as possible.

The three precedent studies chosen were purposely diverse; all political buildings i.e. funded by the state, and all designed with a goal of changing public perception of the organisation or power they represented. The symbolism expressed in Le Corbusier's Chandigarh Capitol focuses greatly on representing the future to society and had a hidden agenda of trying to show India as modern as western countries. Of course, at the time, India wasn't but it is interesting to note how by using the international style, in principle and execution, the complex of buildings became a catalyst for the proliferation of more buildings in the same style. Because the symbolism expressed in the buildings' architectural expression was abstracted from India's vernacular style, the more people visited and used, the more they understood and accepted what it symbolised and in that case it is successful in bringing about a change in society's perception of the Indian government and is now considered by most Indians as their interpretation of the international style.

In stark contrast to the above example is Tjibaou Cultural Centre by architect Renzo Piano. This is a very contentious work of architecture not because of its appearance, which is undeniably attractive to most, but because of the symbolism of the building and the politics behind the project. As a work of architecture, the building is excellently suited to the climate, topography and even its modern interpretation of the vernacular Kanak huts is successful. Despite its apparent successfulness, the Kanak people it was designed and built to celebrate shun the building not because they don't like it, but rather, because they don't like what it represents. The French government commissioned it as a building that would reconcile the French colonial power with the native population of New Caledonia but the native population do not accept the colonial power's rule. The buildings symbolism is one of unity, freedom and future progress and prosperity that will be shared by the French colonisers and the native

population but that very symbolism is detestable to the Kanak because it dashes their hopes of ever being free from colonisation. From this it can be learnt that a major, iconic piece of architecture will inevitably be well-publicized and appear popular to tourists but that for a building to be successful and accepted by the society it is to represent, what it symbolises must be what that society wants and aspires to achieve. The building must capture the society's aspirations and hopes otherwise it will be seen as imposed and will be as hated as the organisation or political power it represents.

The Mpumalanga Provincial Government Complex is of major importance locally because it was the first major political building built after the end of apartheid and was therefore the first view the public had of how the new government would express itself architecturally. The building as a symbol is more associated with nature as a common foundation and expresses the various cultures in Mpumalanga through artworks and crafts spread throughout the building. As a seat of provincial power it was important that all the cultures and identities be equally promoted and because of its many references to nature, which is important to the Mpumalanga identity, the building seems inviting and comfortable. The building doesn't however really use architectural design gestures to make reference to the controversial past and this makes the building as a symbol not evocative and perhaps even shallow in its symbolism. It can be seen that it doesn't truly have a deep abstract symbolism because instead of portraying the history that brought about its inception, it chooses to ignore the political past completely. This means that symbolically there is a misrepresentation of South Africa's and Mpumalanga's past because it is important that references be made of the past in order for the necessity for a united future to be put into correct context. Aspects of public inclusion are also not encouraged in this building as it has no meaningful public functions that attract the public to visit and also to interface with the building and to be affected by its symbolism, and this limits the effect the building can have on society.

The intention behind the selection of the two case studies was to understand how a political issue could be symbolised successfully in a South African context. The Apartheid Museum is full of negative, controversial subject matter about South Africa's history but it uses the negative message as an opportunity to symbolise hope

to society, and to highlight the need for social change. In this way it can be understood that by embracing a negative past, the building can become a symbolic reaction to that negative history and choose to symbolise a future that is now being slowly attained. As a building its symbolism is very effective in supporting the museum exhibits and serves to give them credence. With the culmination of the exhibit being a celebration of the current constitution, the user is left with a positive perspective towards the future and feel a personal duty in bringing about that change. This is ultimately the success of this building's abstract symbolism: its ability to communicate the symbolism and to leave a lasting impression on the visitor that makes that building a symbol of a positive future not yet fully realised.

The Constitutional Court in Braamfontein is perhaps one of the most publicized political buildings in South Africa. It was chosen to identify what political architecture needed to be characterized by in order for it to become so popular. Popularity and public appeal was found to be important in the spreading of symbolism so that the symbolism could affect as many individuals as possible and bring about social changes in perception. The rich diversity of architectural expressions from which varieties of colours, materials, artworks, and crafts were displayed gives a very positive, hopeful image of the constitution the building symbolises. In its architectural expression the building uses local materials and recognisable form and volume to encapsulate its spaces and is designed in a modernist way so as to liberate spaces and make the building feel very accessible and open. The richness in its symbolism comes from the fact that it represents all of South Africa's major cultural groups and so any local visitors can identify parts of their own identity somewhere in the building's symbolic expression. The highly developed public aspect of this building reflects well on the Department of Justice that the building was commissioned by and certainly changes one's perception of the organisation from a negative, slow, corrupt system to one that is striving to bring about fairness and equality and safety to all South Africans. The building also embraces history and is built on an old prison and historical fort. By visiting these other buildings and exhibits, one is reminded of how bad things were and that puts how things are now, politically at least, into perspective and this is the triumph of this particular architectural work: that it has the ability to evoke such emotions as despair at the past, reassessment of the present and a hopefulness at the future. This is the whole goal of abstract symbolism, to make a

visitor reassess their present based on the past and to realign their mind-set to the same political objectives as the political power that building represents.

The findings from the interviews and questionnaires show the importance of political architecture appealing to people of all age groups, all racial groups, all educational levels and all genders in an equal way so that the symbolism can be perceived better by a larger spectrum of the population. These will all lead to a more equal society, which is the intent of the current political power.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The overall aim of this research was to formulate a framework to better inform the design of political architecture in South Africa through a better understanding of how people perceive abstract architectural symbols. The main objectives were to:

1. Identify and reinterpret the framework of the AU, relating it to the built form and possible barriers that may affect its implementation.
2. Evaluate critically how current political buildings compare against the African Union's framework for new African political architecture.
3. Explore political architecture and its relation to abstract symbolism.
4. Formulate recommendations as to how abstract symbolism can be better perceived by the general public specifically in African political architecture.

This section will revisit the research objectives above, summarise the findings and offer conclusions based on the findings obtained. The previous chapter *Case Studies* was large and requires summary, hence the summary in this chapter. The research questions will be answered based on the conclusions found and recommendations for future research will be discussed including the contribution this study has made to political architecture will be clarified. By this structure it is intended that the research work will be concluded so as to reflect on whether the above research aims and objectives were met. Finally, the hypothesis will be tested and either confirmed or invalidated.

### **6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

#### **Objective 1: Reinterpreting the AU's Framework and Barriers**

The objectives and aims the AU has for political buildings throughout Africa were identified as: to show transparency between people and governments; create a modern, neutral building, symbolising unity; use African art in a modern way to represent different cultures; create a green container of human activities; and creating a building that responds effectively to its urban context. The major limiting factor to

these objectives was found to be the problem of perception, where the symbolism is lost when the signs and implied messages the designer intends the building to express, are not clearly understood by the user. This causes the potency of the building's meaning to be diluted and leads to misinterpretation, which often causes real cultural, political or racial offense. A main aim of meaningful symbolism as it relates to the concepts of *genius loci* and critical regionalism, is to make the user able to identify their identity with that of the building so that the building- and its symbolism- becomes subconsciously symbolic of themselves and this is how the building can affect social change.

### **Objective 2: How Do Current Political Buildings Compare with the AU's Framework**

After identifying the main techniques used by designers to create abstract symbols in architecture, precedent and case studies were explored and analysed to find out how effective they were at communicating the symbols they represented to the users. It was found from interviews and questionnaires that buildings had to have very specific symbolism and diversity thereof because it was found that most laypeople find it difficult to perceive the full depth of abstract symbolism that is inherent in the buildings analysed. The most effective symbolism was found in buildings that had a diversity of symbolism ranging from basic, sometimes obvious symbolism to deeper, more implied symbolism. The depth of symbolism was effective at keeping the user interested as they moved through the building, investigating different spaces and also encouraged debate between users as to what exactly the meaning of the symbolism was. The theory of the Space Syntax Theory of Spatial Perception was proved to be effective in practice and served to cumulatively enforce the message in the architecture as users moved from one space to the next. The successful examples were also well publicized and had a public identity and this promotion by visitors and the media encouraged more visitors and this was also seen as imperative to the success of symbolic expression as it related to causing social and political change.

### **Objective 3: Political Architecture and its Relation to Abstract Symbolism**

It was found that political architecture is not a fixed typology but rather that any typology of architecture becomes *political* when it has either a political agenda behind its inception or if there is a politically significant event that takes place within it

which propels the building into the public's political consciousness. Political buildings were found to rely heavily on abstract symbolism as they are used as tools for political powers to communicate their ideologies or intent to the general public. This makes *how* they represent these ideas and notions imperative.

## 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Objective 4: Recommendations**

For a political building that aims to communicate clearly an abstract message to the general public, there are many recommendations to be made based on the literature reviewed and the buildings studied. The first is that the intent or symbolic message must be clearly identified by the patron government or organisation and understood by the designers who are to interpret it into the built form. Next is that the society the building will inhabit must be thoroughly analysed so that the designers have a good knowledge of the types of reactions the different people in that society might have to the symbolism in the building. There must be a complete sensitivity towards how people respond at present but there must also be a focus on how the symbolism can be used to reflect the future that that society can attain, if they were to integrate more meaningfully with each other socially and politically. There should be an overriding theme of unity, expressed literally through artworks and also expressed in the architecture itself. Successful political buildings seem also to contain educational public facilities like libraries, museums and auditoria where varying public and private events and conferences are held. The architecture has a strong division between its public functions and its private functions with the two poles meeting in a common shared space like a main foyer accessible to both; this seems to work well as these spaces offer the designer the opportunity an area where the symbolism can be fully expressed in a vibrant and busy space.

Contextually speaking, the character of the site is very important because the main vehicle for symbolic communication is the public actually experiencing it. It follows that the site should be easily accessible to the public using private cars and should ideally be near a public transport hub. It appears that political architecture becomes more significant in areas densely populated by the largest variety of people differing in age, sex, culture, ethnicity and economic standing. These all ensure that the

building will be bustling and able to attract and therefore affect as many different people as possible.

The building should also respond positively to the character of the urban environment it is placed in so that it can appear integrated with the urban fabric already in existence. The site should be within the city centre, near existing public buildings and also have a historical significance to the city it is in and the people who inhabit it. It should use that history as a tool throughout the design process to give the new building referenced to the past. The building must also be technologically advanced and use green technology and modern construction methods and materials so as to exemplify modernisation and progress.

The symbolism used cannot simply be abstract because some people find it hard to perceive abstract symbolism easily; it is advised that more literal means of symbolism like figures, pictures and representations be used as well so that even the young can gain some perception of the meaning in the buildings symbolism. The symbolism should also not be too literal as this makes the symbolism seem shallow and cosmetic, this can be offensive to some of the public. There must be a balance in favour of abstract symbolism but it essential to have both.

The building should be of a mixed-use i.e. functioning throughout the day, having bars or restaurants where African musicians and performers can be promoted to encourage the public to use the streets at night and to create a buzz that will keep the building's edges active with people for as long as possible, the added surveillance and pedestrian traffic will also help to make the area safer. These techniques will give the building a social identity greater than that of exclusively a parliamentary building, which people may be averse to initially visiting, and will also make the building a generator of public life, serving to reinvigorate the city.

The building itself must be iconic in form and scale so as to distinguish it from the buildings around it. The point of this is that iconic structures receive more interest from the media, tourists and the general public. Iconic structures are more easily remembered and therefore come to represent the city they are in, having the most potential as symbols of the people they represent

## **6.4 Research Questions and Hypothesis**

### **Main Question: What is the impact of political architecture on society?**

The literature reviewed points to political architecture having a central role to play in how the general population views their own political identity and how important that political identity is to their overall idea of what principles their nation stands for. It can be said then that political architecture that is successful in its symbolic representation captures the ‘spirit’ of the people they intend to serve. Architecture in the political arena should be the physical representations of a nation’s aspirations, the values of democracy and nationhood, and a reflection of the political ideologies.

From the case studies and precedent studies it can be understood that major political buildings affect social change, as they become the platforms for political events that continually change the state of the nation and, subsequently, its people. Political architecture, if improperly executed can alienate and offend the people it seeks to represent and this is why the message the building’s symbolism communicates is so essential.

### **Sub Question 1: How can a building represent the culture and identity of a multicultural nation?**

As a multicultural nation, with many religions, races, ethnicities, economic groups, and cultural groups, South African political buildings must represent all main groups in an equal way. As results from questionnaires and official statistics showed, there is a discrepancy in the way public architecture currently represents different groups according to race, gender, age and education level. This must be rectified so that the political buildings can appeal to, and attract, proportionally equal numbers of people spread across the various demographics. This will ensure that all major groups are fairly represented and that no group is side lined, which is in line with the current political values in South Africa.

### **Sub Question 2: How can a building communicate a political message or agenda?**

It has been proven that any building commissioned by the state would be designed to be in line with the state’s political values and public image. Buildings translate

abstract values and ideologies into physical representations that can be arranged in a way that can be perceived by people as they pass through a building. Conceptually the idea is well developed but it was found that much of a person's ability to perceive symbolism in an architectural way was based upon their previous exposure to such buildings and their level of education. This is because people become exposed to abstract thinking and deduction more, the higher they move up the educational ladder. Although the techniques discussed in the literature review are the ways buildings communicate abstract messages, it was found that more literal and diverse techniques pointing out the abstract political message should also be implemented. This will ensure that the political message will be clearly understood by, for example, a blind user, a teenager and a university professor. This will make the message clear and once understood, will allow for members of the society to internalise it and adopt it.

**Hypothesis: Political architecture will be more socially significant if people are able to perceive the symbolism expressed in the architecture clearly.**

The research has proved categorically that political architecture does cause social change; from the way people perceive their socio-political environment to how they perceive their own identity and the identities of their fellow countrymen. It stands to reason that if people were able to understand more clearly what was being communicated abstractly through the architecture itself, that the message would have a greater impact on their lives and would thus make it more socially significant.

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# APPENDICES

## Case Study: Apartheid Museum

**Apartheid Museum Questionnaire**

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**Part A | About You**

1 Age  under 16  16-30  31-50  over 50

2 Gender  male  female

3 Race  Black  White  Coloured  Indian/Asian

4 Graduate of  Primary School  Secondary School  Tertiary Institution

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**Part B | About Your Visit**

5 What is the purpose of your visit to the building?  
 tour  local visit  work  passing through

6 How often do you visit the building?  
 daily  every month  2-3 times per week  once a year

7 Do you believe that the building fits in well with its surroundings?  
 yes  no

8 Can you identify culturally with this building?  
 yes  no

9 How would you rate your understanding of what this building represents?  
 very good  good  fair  poor

---

10 What does this building symbolise to you, and do you believe it is accessible to people from all walks of life?  
 Comment below  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

11 Do you think this building represents apartheid history well?  
 yes  no

12 Have you heard about this building from media and other people?  
 yes  no

13 Do you believe this building has impacted your perception of South Africa and its people?  
 yes  no

14 Do you think what this building represents impacts on society?  
 yes  no

15 Does the way the building looks show what happens inside it?  
 yes  no

16 Do you feel that the representations in this building are successful?  
 yes  no

# Case Study: Constitutional Court

## Constitutional Court Questionnaire

### Part A | About You

- 1 Age  under 16  16-30  31-50  over 50
- 2 Gender  male  female
- 3 Race  Black  White  Coloured  Indian/Asian
- 4 Graduate of  Primary School  Secondary School  Tertiary Institution

### Part B | About Your Visit

- 5 What is the purpose of your visit to the building?  
tour  local visit  work  passing through
- 6 How often do you visit the building?  
daily  every month  2-3 times per week  once a year
- 7 Do you believe that the building fits in well with its surroundings?  
 yes  no
- 8 Can you identify culturally with this building?  
 yes  no
- 9 How would you rate your understanding of what this building represents?  
very good  good  fair  poor

- 10 What does this building symbolise to you, and do you believe it is accessible to people from all walks of life?  
Comment below  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 11 Do you think this building represents apartheid history well?  
 yes  no
- 12 Have you heard about this building from media and other people?  
 yes  no
- 13 Do you believe this building has impacted your perception of South Africa and its people?  
 yes  no
- 14 Do you think what this building represents impacts on society?  
 yes  no
- 15 Does the way the building looks show what happens inside it?  
 yes  no
- 16 Do you feel that the representations in this building are successful?  
 yes  no

# Typical Interview Questions

## Typical Interview Questions

### Part A | About You

1 What is your name, profession and what role did you play in the design of the building?

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### Part B | About Architecture

1 What do you think the relationship between people and the city's public buildings is like right now? How should it be, ideally.

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2 What were the design intentions you had in mind for the finished building in terms of what it would symbolize to the general public?

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3 How successfully were the above intentions realised?

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4 Do you believe that architecture can be symbolic of a political agenda or ideology? If so, to what extent?

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5 What architectural symbols do you think are important and relevant to South Africans in particular?

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6 What do you believe the limitations of symbolism to be?

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7 How important are public buildings to people's idea of the city at large?

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8 Do you think public buildings should effect society or vice versa? Why?

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9 Do you believe that architectural symbols can be read and understood easily by the general public? Explain

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