

Parliamentary Design, Democracy and Partisanship

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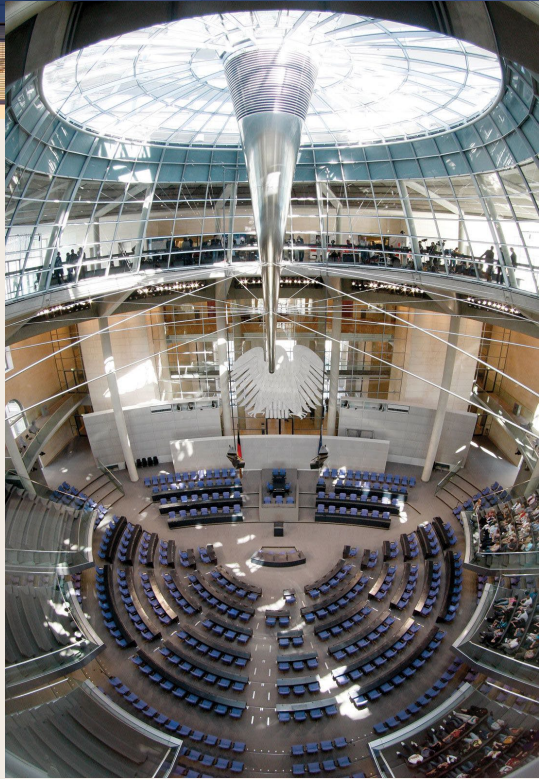
"We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us..."

The essence of good House of Commons speaking is the conversational style, the facility for quick, informal interruptions and interchanges. Harangues from a rostrum would be a bad substitute for the conversational style in which so much of our business is done.

But the conversational style requires a fairly small space, and there should be on great occasions a sense of crowd and urgency. There should be a sense of the importance of much that is said and a sense that great matters are being decided, there and then, by the House."

Winston Churchill (28 October 1943, House of Lords, Hansard vol 393 cc403-73)





Germany



France



Lesotho

Do parliaments as *physical* spaces still matter in liberal democracies?

THE WORLD TODAY →

Why do Australian politicians spend so little time in parliament?

Tue 19 Feb 2019 at 12:14pm

Roll call: here are the senators who missed the most Parliament in 2023



By [Justine Landis-Hanley](#)

Updated January 11 2024 - 6:46pm, first published January 10 2024 - 12:00pm

As the first 'remote' sitting starts in Canberra, virtual parliaments should be the new norm

By Sarah Moulds

Background

- Parliaments as guardians of responsible and accountable government
 - Some literature on effects of architecture, but
 - Piecemeal
 - Looks at discrete elements, not the whole building/architectural produce (largely the debating chamber)
 - Lacks democratic theory backbone
- > How does the architectural design of legislative buildings affect their function? How does it affect the broader democratic functioning of a political system?

The normative theory of partisanship

A theory of ideal democratic conduct for parliamentarians – with two dimensions

1) Collegiality

- Horizontal – How MPs work together
- Non-violence
- Civility
- Public justification

Maps onto parliamentary functions:

- Deliberation
- Making/breaking government
- Legislation and budget

2) Linkage

- Vertical – Between MPs and the citizenry
- Voice (responsiveness)
- Accountability

Maps onto parliamentary functions:

- Representation
- Scrutiny
- Electoral function

Our framework

- Identifies relevant design features
- Maps potential tendencies
- Research and evidence
- Identifies gaps

Design feature		Potential effect/tendency - Collegiality	Potential effect/tendency - Linkage	Example
Legislative chamber	Seating plan Opposing benches, horseshoe, semicircle	<i>Opposing benches</i> Discourage civility Encourage non-violence Discourage public justification		UK Parliament (Korolija 2010) Cf. Psarra and Gill (2023) - HOC vs HOL
		<i>Horseshoe/semicircle</i> Encourage civility, non-violence and public justification		European and German Parliaments (Sailer 2023)
	Visibility in the chamber	Encourage civility and public justification	Promotes accountability	UK Parliament (Psarra and Gill 2023)
	Size and distance	Mixed effects on civility (Closeness encourages interaction, discourages politeness and courtesy)	Promotes accountability (acoustics)	EU Parliament vs UK Parliament (Sailer 2023)

What architectural features can shape behaviour for democratic function?

The legislative chamber

- Shape and layout
- Size and distance
- Visibility



The wider building

- Permeability
- Proximity
- Visual transparency
- Informal spaces
- Accessibility (by the public and the media)



Location and surrounds

- Urban integration
- Protest space



Seating plans/shape

Australia – New Parliament House



UK - Westminster



Germany - Reichstag



Size and distance in the chamber

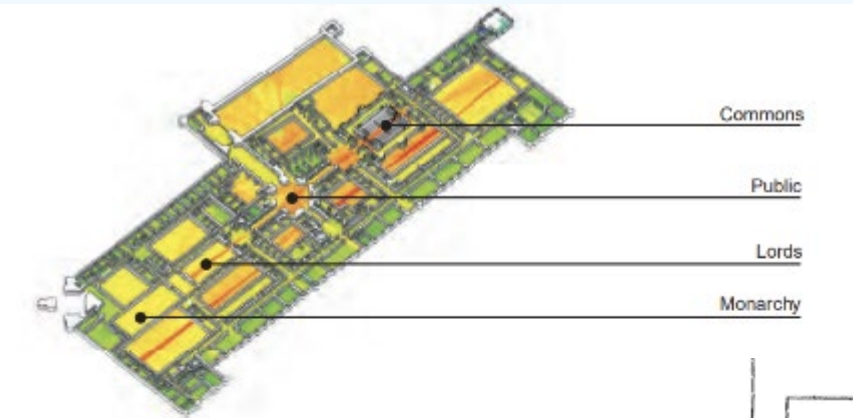


UK - Westminster



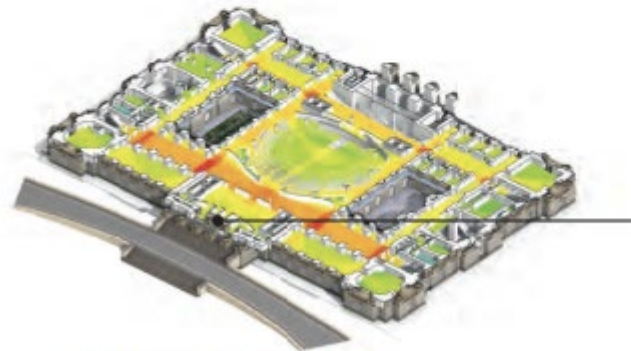
Australia – New Parliament House

The wider building – Permeability and proximity

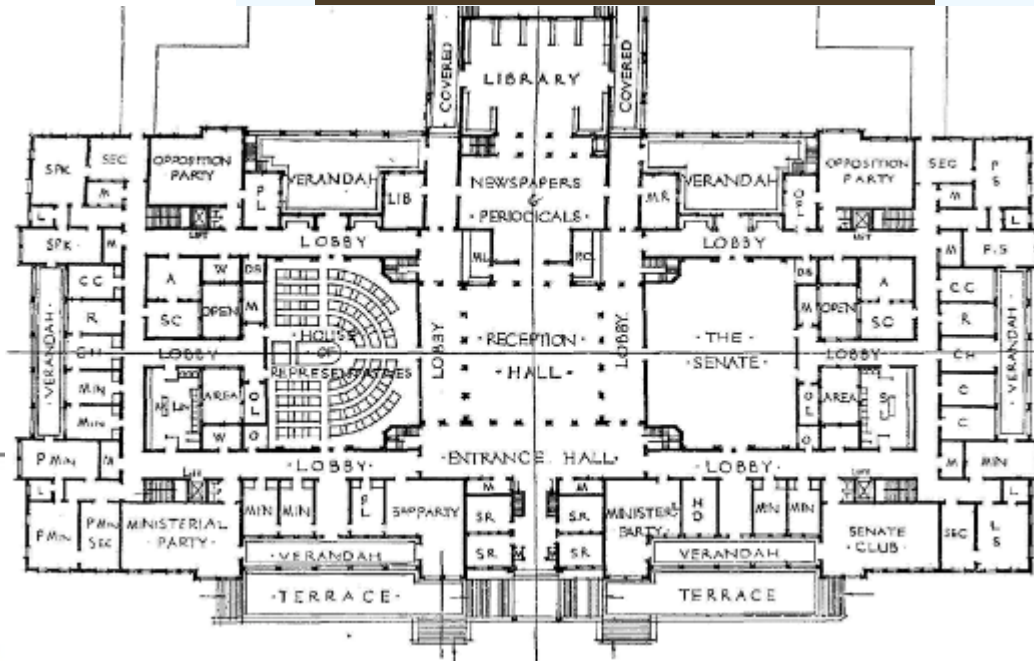


Segregated Integrated

UK ↑ and Germany ↓



Australia – Old Parliament House



Australia – New Parliament House

Figure 11.4 Permeability integration in the Palace of Westminster (top) and the Reichstag (bottom). © Sophia Psarra and Gustavo Maldonado Gil

The wider building – Informal spaces



UK – Westminster
Stranger's Bar



Australia – Commonwealth Parliament
Members' Hall and gift shop

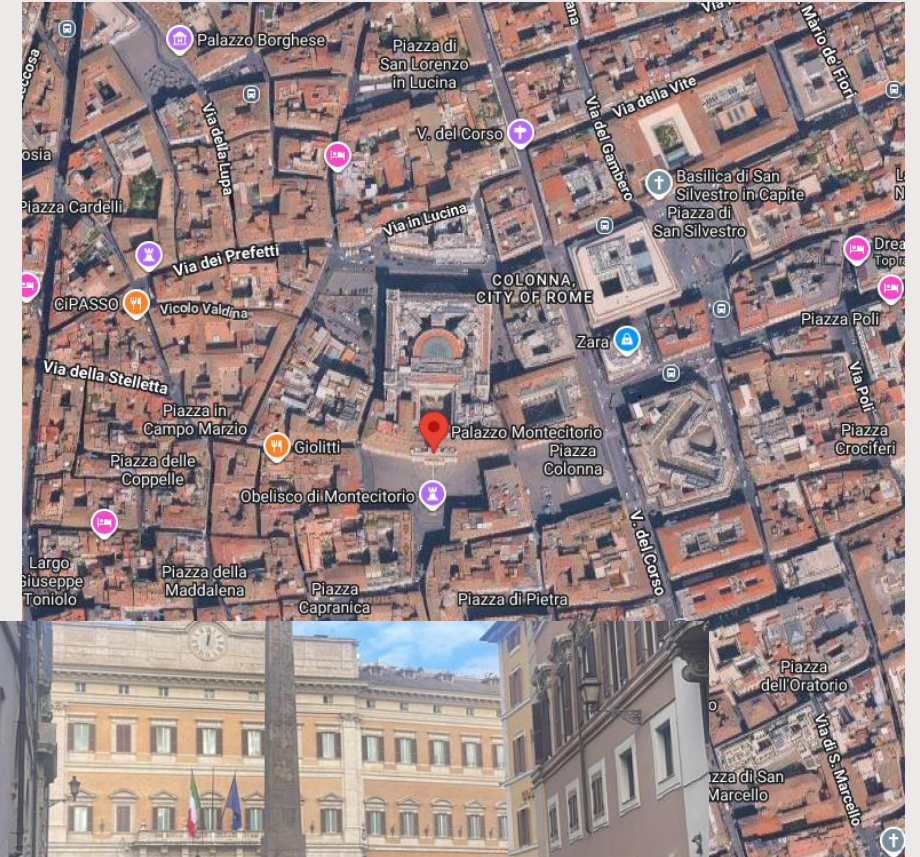


Location and surrounds – Urban integration

Australia – Commonwealth Parliament



Italy – Palazzo Montecitorio



Challenges and complications

Proving causality – from architecture to behaviour

- Methodological issues
- How can we go beyond mere speculation?

Mediating factors – in what circumstances is architecture causal/influential, and what factors can mediate its effects?

- Actual use
- Parliamentary procedure, rules, customs and ritual
- Use of technology (e.g. microphones, televised debate, remote work)
- Security measures and protocols
- ...?



Future research

New methods

- Ethnography and observation
- Practice-based methods
- Walking interviews
- Video walkthroughs
- Comparing parliaments



Brazil - Palácio do Congresso Nacional



Philippines – House of Representatives

New areas

- Legislatures in Asian, African, Pacific, South American countries are understudied
- State/sub-national legislatures
- Investigating mixed effects
- Interaction between features - cohesion
- Others who work within parliament – officers, advisors, lobbyists, etc?

Thank you



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