Conversation: **004**
With: **Elia Zenghelis**
By: **Richard Hall**
Location: **Zoom**
Date: **06.02.2022**

Collectivity

Richard Hall Before we start, there are two layers I'm especially interested in: first, the strong reciprocity between ideas, drawings, and projects; and the other—which I imagine begins with the four of you working together—is the collective, and sometimes ambiguous, authorship of certain drawings and projects. I have a suspicion that these things are connected.

Elia Zenghelis Behind me, here on the island, I have the quintessential example with all the above attributes: a poster of The City of the Captive Globe. This was a collective production, and one of the first drawings Zoe (Zenghelis) coloured: originally a rough sketch that Rem (Koolhaas) had sent us. I knew the narrative and its intention to be the image that exemplifies the theory of 'Manhattanism'; I turned it into a scaled drawing and Zoe applied the colours in acrylic. It is an 'image-manifesto', developed by three authors; it was also a technique we subsequently adopted for renderings.

[City of the Captive Globe, painting - OMA]

The notion of collective production originated in the relatively early stages of my teaching career, and it arose out of the following considerations:

It was evident that, we architects have an inbred tendency to view our work as a test of individual accomplishment. Or, simply put, as evidence of a divinely superior gift—commonly called talent—the holding of which confers an artistic license of personal expression which surpasses all other considerations. Such an exceptional privilege is indeed a temptation for every beginner. In the actual reality of practice, it is not uncommon; an occurrence which turns the exercise of architecture into an application of self-indulgence.

This condition characterises the current predicament of the discipline, in which it is turned from a uniquely public institution into a private preoccupation, with as many interpretations—of its vocabulary, its syntax, its role and its scope—as there are architects to practice it. This makes it indecipherable to, and alienates it from, a recalcitrant public.

In an effort to redress this quandary and reverse its course, I introduced into my teaching routine, the so-called 'Collective Project', as an introduction to, and predecessor of, the students' individual projects. In the course of this Project, a common set of principles and objectives, together with a commonly agreed strategy is established, thus ensuring that all individual projects adhere to, and contribute to, a collective contextual whole, whilst employing a commonly understood architectural syntax and language.

RH So, collectivity is deeply embedded—theoretically and practically. Is this what you were attempting, even in the beginning, collaborating on projects while in different locations?

EZ It was, and it provided our understanding of context. At the beginning, this was our working method: Rem and Madelon (Vriesendorp) in Rotterdam, Zoe and I in London.

Ending

RH Until when were you involved in OMA?

EZ My involvement ended shortly after the Parc de la Villette competition. I had taken charge of the project, after Rem left for the US approximately one month before the submission deadline. I developed the project to the final stage, after Rem and I had determined the concept of multiplying the 25-metre width of the canal that crossed the site, into a topography of strips, as exemplified by the Dutch landscape between Leiden and Delft (and according to Rem, also inspired by the section of the Downtown Athletic Club, where every floor imparted a different scenario).

I was responsible for completing and submitting the competition. On his return from America, Rem went to Rotterdam, where he was shown the completed project. He telephoned me in a rage and told me that I was humiliating him and OMA with such a shoddy project. Which was a lot of hooey: this is one of the best projects, with the best set of drawings, that we ever produced—jointly, and/or separately. He also accused me of running the project like a 'slavedriver'. Sometimes Rem could lose control of his anger and rant like an old spinster—a counterproductive and uselessly disparaging spin.

In closing, he defiantly declared that he would present the project to the jury by himself. To alleviate what I believed to be a temporary misunderstanding, I agreed, in retrospect recklessly: for reasons which I do not wish to penetrate into, he began to act as if he did not want to win.

We did one more competition for a park in Paris—the Parc Citroen Cevennes—to which it seemed we were invited on the initiative of Jack Lang, French Minister of Culture, who had strongly supported us in la Villette. Once more, I took charge of the competition, working together with my present partner, Eleni Tsigantes, and French landscape architect Claire Corajoud, who came to London to work with us. We completed the project in an intense three weeks and, once more, we did not win.

That was the last OMA project I worked on: it had followed hard on the heels of la Villette—the most important project of our 15-year collaboration—first with Rem turning hostile to it, and I then gratuitously losing it to Bernard Tschumi. It was one setback too many.

There is no doubt that we should have won the la Villette competition. The day after the jury, two of its members—Françoise Choay and Joseph Rykwert, the jury's president— asked me to meet them for dinner: a sad occasion at the Brasserie Lipp on the Boulevard St. Germain. At dinner, I was openly rebuked for staying out, and for not presenting the project to the jury myself, by both my table companions.

They further told me that (President François) Mitterrand had asked the jury to press the participating teams on the need to cut down on costs in every possible way, because of lack of funds. Bernard promised to do his best, but Rem, it seems, flatly refused, telling the jury, 'Take it or leave it'. Choay and Rykwert also informed me that the OMA project had been the jury's favourite but that—to their surprise—Rem torpedoed it, confirming my worst suspicions. After this, as they almost apologetically confirmed, the jury's only option, was to award Bernard with the prize: at which point I decided to leave OMA there and then.

In order to suit the action to the decision, I promptly accepted an invitation to a year's teaching at Princeton University, and within a few weeks I left for the United States.

Rem was shocked and angry. He could not believe the reality of the situation, or understand the consequences, and my action was the only way I could spell it out to him: I was leaving OMA.

He came over to the US and tried to convince me to change my mind. He tried hard and resolutely, and his anger had subsided. I was stirred, but I did not backpedal. I had become conscious of a menacingly growing tension, and of the explosive conflict that the incompatibility of our rapidly diverging interests could spark off—something that I was determined to elude. And I eluded it: by the time Rem came to Princeton it was over, I had left OMA.

This was as inevitable as it was irrevocable. It was the logical conclusion of a 15-year collaboration that had fulfilled its *raison d'être*, and was beginning to overspill its constraints, while enduring the stress of accumulated fatigue: OMA, as we knew it, was coming apart at the seams.

At any rate, I did not share the way Rem contemplated the future of the office: 'I want our office to be like a Hollywood studio'—he had announced—'with the money we make from B movies, we are going to make our A movies'. A self-fulfilling prophecy, as it turned out to be

for Rem, but it was a very unappealing view of the future for me. Neither of the prospects envisaged enchanted me, whether size of office, or variety of work.

For a while, I had considered keeping the name of the Greek office I was being left with as 'OMA Athens', but I soon realised that this was going to be an insane and vain effort at restoring an amputated and unwanted anachronism. The energy of a regeneration now rested in my partnership with Eleni Gigantes (Tsigantes, being its Greek original) which we called GZA, and with which we continued our practice.

The Architectural Association (AA)

RH Let's go back to the beginning. Could you please talk about how OMA originally came to be?

EZ It goes back to 1969 at the AA: that is when Rem came to my Unit as a student. He had already spent a year in the First Year, during which a broadly disseminated rumour circulated within the school about an unusually sophisticated, critical and exacting new student from Holland, for whom the AA had turned out to be a huge disillusion. He resented the discourse he found himself immersed in as mediocre and callow, and he combatively clashed with the school throughout his First Year. It turned out that, in reality, he was more conversant with architecture than the teachers who taught it. I remember seeing this tall, spirited, and angry-looking guy always in the members' room, always in the company of Sam Stevens—a very sociable historian—together bemoaning the state of the school.

The sixties were the UK's most profligate decade, spanning Galbraith's 'Affluent Society' and 'New Industrial State'; the decade of the Beatles and Mary Quant. The end of the sixties was the AA's post-Archigram period, when the influence of Archigram was still going strong, but drifting towards a fixation with inflatables together with an abdication of the whole shebang of architecture, lock, stock and barrel. It was accompanied by a polemic against drawing, together with a fetishist cult for a new-fangled discovery: the multi-disciplinary approach to architecture. This was considered a roadmap to its ultimate scientific fulfilment; an epistemological orgasm!

That was Tony Dugdale's scene. Tony Dugdale was First-Year master at the time. He shared the popular aspirations and the resulting drift mentioned above, and he promptly implemented its parameters. He took over First Year after I had been running it for three years as a mini-course in architecture—which was an objective Dugdale strongly opposed, for its lack of fun (!).

After 1969, I taught Unit 9 in the Middle and Diploma School, until it was taken over by Zaha Hadid, when I accepted a professorship at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, and moved to Germany, in 1988.

By 1969, I was getting troubled by the realisation that architecture, as a discipline, was becoming taboo. It wasn't even discussed as such. I had been a student of Peter Smithson and Cedric Price, critics who—while taking a radical approach to teaching—carried a tradition that saw the subject of modern architecture as a historically evolving, and unfinished chapter.

When Tony Dugdale took over the First Year, he espoused the consumerist euphoria that dominated the '60s in London and, in the process, substituted the public realm and more than five millennia-old culture of architecture, with a culture of cosy fun and self-indulgent whimsicality.

This was the First Year that Rem found himself in at the end of the '60s. It was not what he was looking for: he was astutely mindful of the principles and hierarchies of architecture and passionately involved in them. As a result, his entire First Year was spent in anguish. He claimed that every evening he walked home crying; and at his end-of-year-report, Dugdale had written 'If Rem wants to be an architect, he'd better pull his socks up…'

That was in 1969 or '70 and, in his Second Year, Rem joined my Unit. It was the year of the big AA uprising, in which Rem became unavoidably (and constructively) involved, when we fired the Principal and forced the Council to resign. The Students Revolutionary Committee

was set up, and it ran the school for two years. Among the hotly debated topics was the question: should we have another Principal, or should the school be run by the students? We had a referendum, and the vote cast was for a Chairman in charge of educational policy, but without the power that the Principal previously had: somebody primarily involved with educational policy, supported by an administrative assistant in charge of financial affairs. We decided it should be on a short-term—I think it was four years—and on a renewable basis.

In addition, we set up the School Community: the assembly of students and staff. By staff we also meant the cooks, the bar staff, the cleaners etc—the whole school. The creation of the School Community was the most sweeping and important breakthrough in the structure of the AA. It gave the school a new constitution, the power to hire and fire the Chairman, and gave it priority over the Council.

As I had campaigned for the Chairman option, I was appointed head of the Search Committee. It was at that point that—together with Rem—we approached Alvin Boyarsky, who had been a memorable Fourth Year master a few years back. We knew he coveted the job, and we believed he would be a good choice, so we asked him to apply. At the same time, we thought that a serious and committed academic, like Ken (Kenneth) Frampton would be an important contender: we contacted him, and he applied. Ergo, we were fostering our own choices.

After reviewing many applications, we produced a shortlist of two candidates, Alvin Boyarsky and Ken Frampton, who were asked to address the school with their vision of the role of the AA, as well as the role and responsibilities of the newly designated Chairman.

In his presentation, Alvin characterised the AA as a public forum within which contradictory and competing ideologies would be allowed to coexist in a continuous debate. This was a definition very much in character with the heterogeneous nature of the AA, as reflected in the variance between Peter Cook's and our work—and that of so many others besides.

Ken, on the other hand, produced a very detailed academic syllabus. Very linear: well-thought-out, rational, responsible, and impressively comprehensive. At the same time, it was potentially unyielding, thereby hindering the more dynamic possibility of its evolution, and the imagination required for its interpretation; minor shortcomings which Ken later admitted.

Alvin had grasped the AA's potential extremely well, and the school's vote was an overwhelming victory for him. He proved to be a great chairman who, in twenty years, completely transformed the AA—from 1972 until he died in 1992—to possibly the best Architecture School existing worldwide.

Unfortunately, there was a reluctance for public debates—which has to do with the British reluctance towards public commitment. They happened in private amongst those willing to debate, but not in public. It was one thing promised by Alvin that didn't materialise.

Alvin had been a loyal supporter of our work, and Rem was a tenacious champion of excellence and sworn enemy of mediocrity. He was a spirited collaborator who pushed me to realise the maximum of what was in my power. My ensuing career was the product of the motivating enthusiasm and confidence that he displayed at the time—a catalyst for my ego that radicalised my ambitions.

Exodus—the first joint project of our 15-year collaboration—had drastically transformed my outlook, initiating new accelerated necessities. Based on Rem's inspiring study of the Berlin Wall, in which he articulated the multiple interpretations of the wall as a primary element of architecture: front, limit, frame, obstacle, firebrand and especially its power to elicit the imagination of its other side.

After Exodus—before completing his Fifth Year at the AA—Rem left for the United States in 1972, to work with Oswald Matthias Ungers at Cornell University.

Beginnings

RH Let's skip forward a little. When you began working together, you alternated between being in London and New York in various combinations. How were you operating together at that point?

EZ To start with, we were working in each other's houses in London. Loyal assistants—mostly ex-students—helped us at intervals. We owe a special tribute to Ron Steiner and Stefano de Martino, who turned our drawings into masterpieces of draughtsmanship. Madelon Vriesendorp produced masterpieces in watercolour and with Zoe we opted for acrylic. The City of the Captive Globe, mentioned at the beginning of these interviews, was a follow-up and natural by-product of Exodus.

Certain projects were produced in New York, such as the Roosevelt Island housing competition. We worked in Rem's and Madelon's terrific apartment in a brownstone on West 70th Street. We produced our most enjoyable and gratifying competitions in New York. But often projects were worked on in two or even three places simultaneously.

Back in London, Rem and Madelon had a large apartment in Hampstead, with enough rooms to also have an office. When we returned from America, we worked there.

The Parliament Extension in the Hague was produced there. This brought Zaha Hadid—who had been our student—into our partnership. We were enthralled by Zaha's talent and her imagination, which was surging like water out of an open hydrant. In an instant of swift initiative, Rem whispered 'Shall we invite Zaha to join?'—adding, after a fleeting hesitation—'Only, we must tell her that she will have to adhere to our customs and practice'. Having overheard this, Zaha promptly countered with, 'Listen you guys, if you want to work with me, YOU will have to adhere to MY customs and practice—and not the other way round'! We laughed and held our tongues.

Both Zaha and Rem could easily burst into fierce anger, even as they were very close. The Hague project was a very tough test on everyone's nervous system. At the end of it Zaha announced, 'From now on, I'm on my own'.

The next OMA project was the Taoiseach's House (Irish Prime Minister's Residence) competition in Dublin (Zaha took part on her own). Our projects were very different. It is worth comparing them: ours was embedded into the contours of, and participated in the choreography of, Phoenix Park; while Zaha's was an 'Explosion of Architectural Shrapnel'.

We remained very close ever since, but we could not continue working together because we were conscious that we would (inevitably) generate an atmosphere calamitously tense for our respective psychologies. This was recognised by everyone—although I could have enjoyed what would have been a cliffhanging, two-faced adventure…

Athens

RH And you established an Athens branch too?

EZ Yes. We started an office with an ex-student of ours, Elias Veneris. He ran the Athens office with impeccable efficiency and sense of responsibility. We worked amazingly well together.

Meanwhile, our la Villette project had acquired a critical reputation, when Anthony Tritsis—Greek Minister of the Environment at the time, and a US-educated architect—saw it published in an architectural magazine. He called me to his office and told me that he would like me to design a similar park for Argostoli—his constituency, hometown, and capital of Cephalonia.

Cephalonia is the largest of the Ionian islands. It is a distinct historic seven-island archipelago that dates back to centuries-old Venetian rule, which preserved it from Muslim conquests for the Ottoman Empire and created a distinct cultural identity with many Italian influences. But Venice was doomed by Napoleon's hatred for its hubris. After announcing, 'I shall be an Attila to the state of Venice', he proceeded with the dismemberment and final

dissolution of the Republic in 1797. Conquered by the French in 1812 and taken over by the British after Waterloo, the Ionian Islands became part of the modern Greek state in 1864.

I brought Tritsis' attention to the fact that Argostoli is a small island town of some 9,000 inhabitants in the Mediterranean, and that a gigantic gesture like that of Parc de la Villette would be out of context. We had to search for inspiration within the internal circumstances that portray the character and conditions of the site: we found them, in the location's pollution.

Argostoli is situated in an idyllic bay-within-a-bay named Koutavos. It is beautiful but wickedly polluted—or so it was at the time—and in a major way. In fact, it was so polluted that the bay stank. A beautiful stone bridge, built by Napoleon to link Koutavos' northern shore to Argostoli greatly contributed to the pollution as it closed the bay, hindering the natural flow of its currents; a causeway had been built linking the shore to a little island in the bay, completely stopping these currents. And to compound the situation, two additional actors were exacerbating it: an army camp and a cheese factory, encamped along the waterfront, both discharging sewerage and industrial waste into the bay.

[Koutavos Bay, overview plan - OMA]

The project had to be the bay itself: a 'liquid park' in which the activities would happen on and around the water surface, oxygenating the bay and detoxifying it, while offering the possibility of multiple leisure activities that would exploit the features of the topography, and add to the enjoyment of the landscape.

Altogether, Tritsis commissioned us with three exceptionally interesting projects: Koutavos, Omala, Platys Gialos and Skala.

The Omala commission required the development of the Vale of Saint Gerasimos, the patron saint of the island. The monastery of Saint Gerasimos is situated on a high-level plateau, called Omala, which attracts thousands of pilgrims on the Saint's Day, every year. On this day a beautiful valley has to, all at once, become a parking area for the pilgrims' plus/minus 2,000 cars. The almost impossible question was how to accommodate and organise (including arriving and leaving) this aggressive invasion, without harming the serene and sacred landscape.

The brief for Platys Gialos and Skala, was to equip two superb and unspoiled beaches of the finest quality of sand, with changing rooms, showers, refreshment services and other modern recreation facilities.

The above were the best projects that the Athens office had, but—as usually happens with Greek politics—whenever there are elections, and the opposition takes over, the right-wing government that followed, shelved all three projects.

RH Is there a moment when all three offices—London, Athens and Rotterdam—are overlapping?

EZ Yes, there is: when we moved the office to Clarendon Cross in W11—50 metres from our London home—Rem opened an office in Rotterdam, and Elias Veneris was supervising work under construction in Greece. Rem flew back every Friday. The weekend was precious for him because it was the only break he had to spend time at home. So, on Friday he would come for a quick jury of the work done in the week, in any of the above locations, and he would spend perhaps an hour at the office on Friday evening. But this was a weak remnant of the original partnership—the gradual dismantling of which had been underway since la Villette.

Drawings

RH Could you talk about the role of drawing—and image-making in general—in the practice?

EZ Yes. We became accustomed to the fact that the 'material evidence' of a project—of the thought expended—was in the drawings. We always placed a huge importance on the quality of the drawings: they had to

convey both the intention and the quality of the design; and they had to stand for, and be the substitute for, the project realised. This persistence and, in our case, necessity, was, I think, what gave these drawings their supposedly legendary reputation.

Contributing to this reputation was, I believe, my surreptitious and persistent manipulation of John Hejduk's drawing technique—particularly the isometric, consisting of a flat façade with thirty-degree sides. At the same time, my concern with the emblematic and narrative properties of the image grew to become a theory and belief.

Rem

I want to conclude this part of the interview with an observation about Rem: he always had his own angle of reviewing or criticising, the lucidity, reasonableness, objectivity and productiveness of which simultaneously carried a very personal interpretation. That personal angle was singularly motivating and revelatory. It directed you to an unforeseen, new perception that offered horizons beyond the landscapes you had established. It led into a world of unexpected and surprising fertility.

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By: **Richard Hall**
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Roosevelt Island

Richard Hall Shall we talk about some projects? Let's start with Roosevelt Island.

[Roosevelt Island, overview axonometric - OMA]
Elia Zenghelis Roosevelt Island is a long, thin island in the East River—a small Manhattan replica. The brief called for a detailed number and mix of housing units plus commercial facilities. It runs parallel with Manhattan, and our first step was to project the Manhattan streets it faced onto the site.

We reinterpreted (and reprocessed) the typology of the Manhattan urban block, with monumental 'gable houses' completing it (in diachronic reverence to New Amsterdam), with a mid-block tower and traditional brownstones in between. They were all faced in glazed tile and glazed brick: typical Manhattan materials.

72nd Street is extended onto the island and is provided with two piers projecting into the East River. Anchored onto it is the Floating pool: remember Rem's (Koolhaas) captivating fantasy, in which the Russian Constructivists arrive in New York while swimming in the direction of the Kremlin? I wonder how many egghead architects have reflected on the subsequent derivatives of Rem's thinking, instead of laughing at the clever joke (!)

[Roosevelt Island, 72nd Street pencil perspective – OMA]

This is a detail of the street and mid-block towers, with the 'brownstones' in bas-relief against a slab that runs the length of the street.

This 'home run' pencil perspective of our 72nd Street extension by Madelon Vriesendorp was produced in less than ten minutes!

OMA's New York Projects 1972–1982

[Ideological Landscape, painting – OMA]

This is a very big drawing, rendered by Zoe (Zenghelis); now property of MoMA. It is a recapitulation of all our New York projects, produced before returning to Europe. In order to bring the Sphinx Hotel into the frame of the picture, we drove a wedge into the plan of Manhattan, and to give it scale we included the RCA building. I was blamed for proposing a ridiculously high tower and for some incomprehensible reason we were not welcomed in New York at the time; in response, I produced a façade showing that the Sphinx was lower than the RCA—itself not one of New York's tallest buildings.

Opposite the United Nations, Rem's 'New United Nations' is an island on the East River, and further up, the Floating

Pool and the Raft of the Medusa. The pool is on its way to crashing with the raft. The raft was reproduced from Gericault's legendary painting of a tragic early 19th century episode: after the frigate Medusa sank in the Atlantic in 1816, survivors on the raft—floating in the ocean for many days—started dying from lack of food and water, and the remaining survivors turned to cannibalism. For us, the Raft of the Medusa became an allegory of New York's seventies' architects, as 'the last resort of a sinking ideology's survivors'—and for reasons that were also personal.

OMA's Ideological Landscape painting incorporates Rem's Welfare Palace Hotel, and my Sphinx Hotel. Both projects were produced simultaneously in New York; projected as ideal housing. They were inspired by New York's existing welfare hotels, where the homeless, or the callously called 'bums', were housed. New Yorkers claimed to be appalled by the bums' tendency to urinate in the corridors, to which our answer was, 'Give the bums a Hilton, and they will not urinate in the corridors'. The primary objective of our design for the Sphinx and Welfare Palace hotels was to respect the dignity of the occupants and to draw their respect in return, by radically overhauling the accommodation, programme, budget, and the entire concept of the Institution of Welfare Hotels.

Further north on the island is the little canal with the model of Norman Bel Geddes' streamlined liner. Next to that is a (Kazimir) Malevich Tektonik, which I had proposed as a source of inspiration for high-rise buildings to my students at Columbia University.
[Roosevelt Island Bridge, Painting – OMA]

Lastly, the bridge building. It was never really designed, but it was an idea of reinforcing this bridge with a monumental social condenser, or what I called a 'public condenser' after launching the Principles of the Modern Project at Iowa State University in 2018.

On New Year's Day 1975, while celebrating a year of collaboration in a French/Japanese New York restaurant, we decided to name our partnership the Office for Metropolitan Architecture.

RH How does the Roosevelt Island competition relate to this image?

EZ It doesn't, except that it marks the beginning and end of a period. Roosevelt Island was the first project we did after arriving in America, and the Ideological Landscape painting, New York Projects 1972–1982, was the last before returning to Europe.

RH And all of the projects included in this painting were done independently and then brought together, right?

EZ That's right: they are brought together in one commemorative epilogue.

Dutch Parliament Extension

So, the Tweede Kamer as it was called—the twin chambers—in The Hague was our return to Europe. America had been tempting, as so enthusiastically and infectiously incarnate in *Delirious New York*. But I believe that, ultimately, we both were—in different ways and with different motivations—committed to Europe.

The Dutch parliament is an assembly of buildings, which are quite heterogeneous but, nevertheless, together they make a compact whole. It is around a neo-gothic Knight's Hall, which is in the middle of the enclave, surrounded by buildings which range from Medieval to the Renaissance, neo-classical, Victorian and eclectic. The competition brief asked for a new deputy's chamber and a new public gallery, together with a large new public concourse, entirely given over to the public for lectures, conferences, general information and similar events, and for general and open public use.

It was clear to us that what the competition brief was primarily asking for was the critical missing element: a 20th-century component, to complete the assignment. And that was our entry.

[Dutch Parliament Extension, figure-ground isometric – OMA]

This drawing is an axonometric of all the interior public spaces. Not the deputies' chamber, but the public gallery; the escalator that leads to it; and the ground floor of the new public concourse.

[Dutch Parliament Extension, 'Final Push' isometric painting – OMA]

This is a watercolour of the project by Madelon (Vriesendorp). Two parallel slabs: on the left, the public concourse; on the right, the administration offices; with the deputies' chamber bridging over the street and piercing the administration slab.

[Dutch Parliament Extension, 'Accommodation for Orgies of Speech' cutaway isometric – OMA]

This is one of my drawings (including colour rendering) of the public concourse interior, with the escalators to the gallery above the chamber. All the facilities illustrated are used by the public—some can even be rented out.

[Dutch Parliament Extension, 'The Ambulatory and its Connections – OMA/Zaha Hadid]

This beautiful drawing is by Zaha (Hadid)—and it bears her stamp. It shows all the facilities for the deputies: gallery, chambers, office accommodation, and façade.

RH How did you decide the split between the three of you?

EZ Through improvisation, intuition, and common sense, as we worked. There was no conflict—there were fights; Zaha lost her temper and Rem his patience—but the work itself kept us in tune. Rem was a rational collaborator; his exacting attitude was challenging but sustained a motivating climate—at least for those who shared the pressure. Zaha was loveable, fun, and enormously talented, but she was not easy to work with: equally self-involved, obstinate, and occasionally disdainful. She was not someone with whom you shared all of the design delights!

The Dutch Parliament Extension is probably our best joint project, with Zaha's accession being a significant constituent of this. What was very satisfying was the way we managed to slip the 20th-century component into the site's seven centuries of historic evolution.

Taoiseach's Residence (The Irish Prime Minister's Residence)

[Taoiseach's Residence, cutaway isometric painting – OMA]

The Irish Prime Minister's—or Taoiseach's—Residence competition, in Dublin's Phoenix Park almost immediately followed the Dutch Parliament. After that experience, Zaha was determined to go it alone (she had not yet met Patrick (Schumacher). It is a pity that we do not have Zaha's project here, to compare the two—primarily because of their marked differences. While ours espouses and adapts itself to the contours and curvilinear pathways of Phoenix Park, Zaha's is an explosion on impact, and a virtuoso reassembly of architectural shrapnel.

[Taoiseach's Residence, overview isometric line drawing – OMA]

The project consisted of two intercepting parts: the Taoiseach's private residence and the reception and entertainment section (also private)—'the two bananas' as Zaha called them. Giving nicknames to favourite objects and favourite people was one of Zaha's favourite eccentricities. Rem was 'Woodstock', I was 'Eliaki'—an affectionate Greek diminutive—Alvin Boyarsky was 'Alvino', and there were her students: 'Abba' (an extremely handsome and cheerless American couple), 'Hawaii' (a dour Korean student), 'E.T.' (a shy and recessive African American student), and many more…

The rectangle at the bottom was already a vegetable garden. It was already a private enclosure within the park, and we turned that into the guest house garden. The original layout of the vegetable garden was kept, as such, but as the guest house garden.

[Taoiseach's Residence, landscape watercolour – OMA]

This shows the landscape as it receives the project: you see the vegetable garden at the back, which becomes a flower garden and the guest house; the 'two bananas'; and the curvilinear approach road in the gentle landscape of Phoenix Park.

[Taoiseach's Residence, approach road watercolour – OMA]

This is the approach road. It goes under one of the bananas.

RH Is it true that with both of these projects you worked 'separately together', using the technique of *cadavre exquis*? You did parts independently and then put them together into a project.

EZ Yes, it was true, but it was also a more controlled process than the ideal *cadavre exquis*. The exquisite corpse was a deliberately chance exercise—a reference to Dadaism and Surrealism. We tried it as an experiment, which was fun for a while, but it was time-consuming, and it delayed things. It did produce surprises; nevertheless, these did not reveal significant discoveries.

IBA (International Building Exhibition)

[Checkpoint Charlie, painted perspective – OMA]

The image illustrated here is a painting of the Checkpoint Charlie building I designed, set in a conjectural context: it is not representative of the urban context.

Checkpoint Charlie was a location for which Rem had acquired a strong attachment: while still a student, he had researched the Berlin Wall in-situ. He produced the most comprehensive and eloquent documentation of this singular and tragic historical episode—and unique architectural catalyst.

Accordingly, it was one of his ambitions to be the architect of the projected complex at the Checkpoint Charlie site. With this objective in mind, we decided to separately submit two projects to Berlin's 'Internationale Bauausstellung' (or IBA—translated as International Building Exhibition) for approval and construction. Rem applied for the Allies' Post and Housing at Checkpoint Charlie—chief crossing point between West and East Berlin—and I participated in the Lützowstrasse Housing Competition—a public intervention for an important artery in Berlin's South Tiergarten quarter.

Rem's project was a complex and dense 'mat' covering the entire area of the competition site. It consisted of two-storey courtyard houses with an occasional third storey extra room. Believing that the Wall would not come down—at least not in the foreseeable future—Rem refused to let the project go higher than the Wall, to prevent the occupants from witnessing the frequent horrors of runaway East Berliners being shot by border guards or mutilated by guard dogs.

[Koch-Friedrichstrasse, isometric – OMA]

To prove his point, he produced a consciously premeditated and strongly compelling colour axonometric of the project he was designing, which—as argument and storyteller—was a paragon of design eloquence.

Lützowstrasse

[Lützowstrasse, overview isometric painting – OMA]

In the meantime, I went ahead with the competition assigned to me: the Lützowstrasse Housing.

The 1980 IBA Housing Competition for Lützowstrasse had projected public assisted housing for a narrow triangular site in the South Tiergarten quarter. The site was bounded on the south by Lützowstrasse, one of Berlin's traditional but war damaged streets; to the north by Lützowufer, a tree-lined thoroughfare bordering the idyllic Landwehr Canal (beyond which, views to the Tiergarten could be obtained); to the east it bordered on a 19th century pumping station; and to the west it converged towards a small triangular park, facing Lützowplatz.

The site's single challenge was that in the middle it contained five rows of 3½-storey private dwellings (euphemistically called Stadthäuser, or 'townhouses') running at right angles to Lützowstrasse itself, along their own private 'streets' which had yet to be built—and the detailed design of which was not disclosed. Apart from leaving a very narrow site, they existed without context, as the periphery bounded by the existing streets had been reserved for the competition. It remained therefore the task of the competitors to provide the townhouses with a context that would mediate between them and the street, as well as establish the new project's own integrity and relation to the vicinity.

As the underlying (and explicitly stated) wishes of IBA were founded on the concept of the Restoration of Berlin, the programme was so presented as to imply that the interpretation of this aim should mean the restoration of the original perimeter block. To achieve this, one would have had to either provide an unrealistically thin development or build to half the height of the existing street scale, or design for twice the maximum permissible density and plot ratio. Furthermore, it required a certain short-sightedness towards West Berlin's reality: it not only had a decreasing population but, since the devastation of the war, it had evolved a vernacular which in part consisted of constructing within the transformed interior of the blocks (both in fact and in meaning), as exemplified in this site by the townhouses and a new pumping station by O.M. Ungers—then under construction. While on the one hand, this reality was making the retrospective superimposition of the perimeter block absurdly inefficient, it did on the other hand intimate the evolution of a new urban typology, that was suggestive of a more appropriate strategy towards the conditions of our shrinking cities than any of the promoted theories on urbanism could provide.

Instead, I developed a tactic for placing eight-story slabs at the entry of each of the private streets: angled so that they face and protect the gardens of the townhouses, while opening up the access and aspect of their private streets from Lützowstrasse.

In summary, the concept's main principles were:

1. To reinstate the existing scale of plus/minus 23 metres in the rest of the street.
2. To establish a quality of transparency—typical of Berlin's transformed street architecture—which enabled significant structures set in the interior of the blocks to be visible from the street.
3. To relate to the urban design principles of the townhouses behind.
4. To obtain a greater depth of building within the constraints of this narrow site.
5. To make the architecture of the whole respond to local influences of the urban conditions at the extremities of the site, and lastly, the canal and Tiergarten beyond.

After establishing the eight-storey angled slab as the basic type, it was then modified to respond to the contextual conditions as follows:

- A four-storey row of dwellings continues the line of the townhouses, terminating at the Lützowstrasse building line to punctuate the existing street front so that—seen from the street's oblique perspective—it collapses into a 'wall'.
- Part of the West slab is curved towards the small triangular park, to provide a combined new frontage addressing the high-rise developments across Lützow Platz.
- At the same time, it bridges over the first private access street to the townhouses, to stand directly inside the small park and provide a gate to both housing developments.
- Part of the East block is tilted to terminate the site layout and link its architecture to the pumping station, in order to provide a gate to the project whilst allowing the principle of transparency to enable the new and old buildings in the interior to relate to the street.

RH What is this linear thing that crashes through, between the long building and the first of the short ones?

[Lützowstrasse, abstract painting of school – OMA]

EZ It is part of the school. A schematic detail.

[Lützowstrasse, perspective streetview vignettes – OMA]

These are little vignettes. I favoured glazed tiles or glazed bricks at the time.

RH Was there a reason that each pair was a different colour?

EZ No, only to emphasise them as pairs. No other reason. They could have been all the same colour.

The results of these two submissions were astonishing: Rem's Checkpoint Charlie was rejected outright by IBA's Director, Joseph Kleihues, and my Lützowstrasse received a joint prize with Vittorio Gregotti's submission.

Checkpoint Charlie

But the Checkpoint Charlie saga doesn't end there:
I had started negotiating with Gregotti the changes required to accommodate both our designs (that had to be revised for the purpose). We had come to a good way of dividing the site, and I was happy that this was reinforcing my project. It was exciting that, at last, a large commission was going to be realised. I was about to give Checkpoint Charlie a miss and go ahead with Lützowstrasse. But Rem was insisting on not losing Checkpoint Charlie.

Meanwhile, Kleihues—who did not want to lose Rem as an architect—was deeply immersed in his 'critical reconstruction' hobby horse. This required the rehabilitation of the typical Berlin block, with a plus/minus 22-metre perimeter height, which precluded Rem's two-storey development. Kleihues tried to convince Rem to revise his design, but Rem refused.

Rem knew that I considered his obstinacy excessive and that I agreed with much of Kleihues' argument about the scale that the new building ought to have. Kleihues had said, 'It has to be a minimum of seven storeys, otherwise you're not doing it', and Rem had replied 'I'm not doing it'. Then, one day, in a sudden change of attitude, he turned the project over to me and simply said, 'OK, you do it then'.

[Checkpoint Charlie, model photo (street side) – OMA]

In order to protect the apartments from exposure to events on the other side of the Wall, I set the building 7 metres back from the building line (an important detail that escaped Kleihues' attention), with the street side reserved for the access corridors: all apartments faced the interior of the block, a communal garden.

The Checkpoint Charlie facility itself, occupied the entire ground floor of the building, except for the housing entrance and common parts (residents' elevator and stairwell shaft). It was a garage for the exclusive use of the Allies. It contained restrooms, a dormitory, conference rooms, a lecture room, a customs hall and parking.

To the left is the entrance hall for the apartments, the elevators, and common parts.

[Checkpoint Charlie, 'checkpoint iconography' isometric – OMA]

This is a key drawing, because it incorporates all the iconography of this poignant location: the Wall, the pavilions, the checkpoint itself, the watchtower and even the roof of our building, which, from the street below, appears like the wing of an aircraft. This detail symbolises the thwarting response to Josef Stalin's 1948 blockade of West Berlin. Within the restricted space of the Western zone, aircraft departing from Tempelhof would soon be crossing into the airspace of East Berlin. Before being allowed to do so, they were required to reach a specified minimum altitude to gain permission, and it was exactly over this very point, that they had to make an abrupt turn and spiral upwards in order to reach this altitude and proceed. Throughout the duration of the blockade, aircraft were landing and taking off every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This was the only way available for

West Berlin to be supplied and sustained—hence, the symbolism of the roof cantilevering over the street.

The project combined a functional brief with the iconographic condition prevailing in the Checkpoint area, into a synthesis that contrasted historic Friedrichstrasse with the reality of the Wall—and the need to reconcile the traditional idea of the street with the overwhelming impact that the Cold War had on it.

The starting point for the project was to separate domestic from Checkpoint facilities by establishing the former on 'elevated ground' suspended above the activities of the street (i.e. border control) which penetrated across the entire site.

The housing comprises three layers of accommodation—each different in size and type—superimposed on top of each other, and a row of duplex terrace houses with front yards directly accessible from the podium. The street in the air provides collective access to the three stories above. Finally, a deck gives access to the penthouse flats.

From Friedrichstrasse the semi-permanent pavilions which sheltered under the podium of the complex hinted at the border character of the building. Ultimately, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—when the pavilions were no longer needed, and the ground floor was converted into a supermarket—the cantilever of the roof projecting over Friedrichstrasse remained as a memory of the Wall.

Since then, this hovering plane marks the historic division line between East and West, one of the world's most dramatic transitions within an urban environment.

[Checkpoint Charlie, 'sandwich' isometric – OMA]

This image shows the correspondence—and importance—in the design of both the ground floor pattern (the car circulation arrows) and the respective lighting pattern on the ceiling.

The vertical element that we see on the left is the entrance, and stairway shaft to the residential accommodation. Inside the main garage space is the customs hall: a necessary requirement, as this was the crossing between the Soviet and Capitalist worlds.

You can also see the lecture hall, meeting room and at—the end, against the outside wall—the restroom, where military personnel can sleep.

[Checkpoint Charlie, model photo (garden side) – OMA]

The courtyard at the bottom is also accessible by taking the lift to the ground floor and out to ground level; the staircases are principally fire escapes. The courtyard is public, but the ones on the roof of the garage are little private gardens for the maisonettes.

RH I guess preserving this firewall relates to the idea of embracing the 'as found' Berlin landscape?

EZ Yes, it is an architectural leitmotif for post-war Berlin. After the war's bombing devastation, free-standing building fragments with blank sides defied the perimeter's opacity condition, while revealing newer structures that had been constructed in the interior. This was creating a new, limitless urban tissue: very interesting, even beautiful if viewed as a contemporary Berlin icon, with a strong historical symbolism. But it was not what the Berliners wanted: what the Berliners wanted was the ability to erase 40 years of history that refused to be erased.

RH I find it shocking how uncommon this understanding of history is: that it carries on, that it is constantly being produced. It requires both a greater engagement with history and a greater sense of responsibility than deciding that there is a single correct History; a stable past. Surely, that's ahistorical by definition?

EZ Talking of accountability to history: we had suggested that the ring previously occupied by the wall, should be turned into a linear leisure park—a ring of peace and repose (which I would have loved to design)—in

recognition of Berlin's 40 years as a divided city. But this was passionately rejected by my friend Hans Kollhoff, on behalf of the 'Rehabilitation of the Past' fixation, and, in denial of these 40 years.

[IBA Berlin, urban context isometric – OMA]

This is the Friedrichstrasse storyline; it shows all the Berlin projects produced for the area, including projects that had not been realised, such as Mies van der Rohe's glass skyscraper and Ludwig Hilberseimer's housing projects.

Our project for the Kochstrasse-Friedrichstrasse Housing, was located at the centre of the former Friedrichstadt: an area characterized by architectural remains of both the pre- and post-war period, as well as the Wall and Checkpoint Charlie. In the debate on the reconstruction of the European City—and of Berlin in particular—we had decided that the project should set out to highlight the contradictory characteristics of the site, in order to invest in a redefinition of modernity rather than become a mere restoration or reinterpretation of the 18th century block.

RH So, this drawing maps out an intellectual context?

EZ It's an illustration of Berlin's historic tradition as a leading locus in the development of 20th-century Modern Architecture. A critical reference for architects.

Context

RH In the projects you described today, one can see a lineage from the New York projects to the Berlin projects. There is a very clear idea about buildings as precise responses to a particular urban condition. They are—in my opinion—extremely contextualist, but without the imagery or associated tropes of 'contextualism', as such. They work on latent qualities that you've identified in a situation.

EZ Latent qualities are often more revealing than manifest appearances. They make up the intelligence of the site: once you identify them, you have a much sharper definition of context.

Conversation: **006**
With: **Elia Zenghelis**
By: **Richard Hall**
Location: **Zoom**
Date: **20.02.2022**

Richard Hall Let's start with Antiparos today.

Elia Zenghelis Antiparos is, for me, a watershed. It was the instrument that made me look away from what—in the wake of my collaboration with Rem and time spent in New York—had been until then, my exclusive preoccupation: the Metropolis, object of the office's name and *raison d'être*.

For the first time, I was not only asked to deal with the landscape as the setting for architecture, but I was being commissioned for a project: our first OMA commission!

It was 1981. The client was a close friend—Ion Siotis—who owned and wished to develop a prime site, called Soros on Antiparos Island, along a fine sandy beach, to the maximum permissible advantage. His idea was to build and sell the maximum number of holiday bungalows for which he could get planning permission.

Nowadays, a very popular tourist resort in the Cyclades, in 1981 Antiparos was an out-of-the-way little island of the Aegean Sea.

As I have said each time that I had to present this project, the absence of an urban context meant no context to me. As a context was indispensable for the formulation of a design concept I had to find, inherent in the topography that confronted me, those elements or features that would motivate me, and enable me, to formulate a concept that would prompt the design for the location.

Starting from the shore, a stone wall went all the way up to the top of the site, where it terminated in a small stone structure: the only intervention feature that acted as

inspiration and was suggestive of a manmade starting point.

[Antiparos, empty 'pork chop' model (top view) – OMA]

With this in mind, I made a model of the site. I felt that doing this—and being able to hold the shape of the site in my hands—would offset any contextual shortcomings, by inspiring a vision that issued from the intelligence of the site and that, therefore, the model would somehow echo the location's nature, quality, and singularity. But, once completed, the model reminded me of a pork chop: a figure that, for a while, I had great difficulty freeing myself from.

[Antiparos, 'confetti' composition painting – OMA]

Lacking any inherent inspiration issuing from the model, I decided to treat it as a palette for a painting, or rather, as a matter of composition—anathema to the modernist rationalists, but—a challenge that lay at the very core of my own priorities: points, lines, and surfaces, and the pleasure I derive from their choreography, or 'orchestration'. I have never believed in the limited and crude naiveté-as-maxim 'form follows function' as a recipe for good architecture. Form follows the ideas, principles, priorities, and expertise of visionary and experienced architects. I started this geometrical composition first with lines existing on site, such as roads and paths; I then incorporated a way down from the top to the sea; to these, I added walls, and used both as a way of breaking down the site into the maximum number of permissible plots. I got twenty-one plots and, hence, twenty-one bungalows. I also ended up with a composition which, with Zoe (Zenghelis), we painted in acrylic.

Then came the planting of trees—mostly fruit trees—always protected from the prevailing wind, therefore behind protecting walls.

[Antiparos, model with composition (top view) – OMA]

That's how this composition became the actual project. At this point, I was beginning to be satisfied with myself. I had suddenly become involved with the earth and with the landscape in ways that I never thought I would, could, or wanted to.

It was unknown territory for me, and in a way, this experience not only led to the next project—the Parc de la Villette competition which immediately followed it—but also an introduction to themes in my more recent work, including designing with organic materials, such as plants. In competitions that I later worked on—with my friends and colleagues Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara of DOGMA—this became a new and special interest: a counterpart to what metropolitan architecture had been, a novel form of enjoyment.

[Antiparos, model with composition (perspective view) – OMA]

Here is a view of the completed model. I put a lot of care into the design of the plots and the structures within. The one at the top of the hill was an existing structure which Ion, my client, chose for himself. We added an extension, and, all of the other bungalows followed, as if born from this original mother.

[Antiparos, detail model of main house – OMA]

The L-shaped part of this was already existing. Ion wanted to have a bigger room from where he had a panoramic view of the site below.

Even the colours were very important: everything became subordinated to the painting. It was at this point that Ion started meddling with my work. He insisted that I was overindulging, and he started selling off plots. Ignoring my site plan, he managed to get sixteen plots whereas I had managed to get twenty-one. In the end, the interference was silly and personal. The project was a failure for no reason—and a great disappointment.

But looking back, one of the benefits of doing it is that the design of the Parc de la Villette that followed, would never

have been the way it was if it hadn't been preceded by Antiparos.

[Antiparos, model with composition (close up of bungalows) – OMA]

This is a close-up of the bungalows: they become structures that inhabit our next project, the competition for the Parc de la Villette.

Parc de la Villette

For Rem (Koolhaas), the Antiparos project was unexpected, and his pleasure was displayed in the new word 'confetti', that he brought into the OMA repertoire. This term was even more emphatically employed for the Parc de la Villette competition: the last, and most important project in our 15-year collaboration. Introducing the ingredients of la Villette, Rem wrote: 'a terrain vague between the historical city—itself raped by the greedy needs of the 20th century—and the plankton of the banlieue; on it, two pieces of history marooned like spaceships'. After highlighting the paradox in architecture's claims to permanence and the city's instability, he articulated the challenge inherent in the 1982 la Villette project as 'one of those "nothingnesses" of still infinite potential that in this case could be preserved since its program could not be expressed in form, a program that insisted on its own stability'.

[Parc de la Villette, concept layers diagram – OMA]

This is the concept outline for the Parc de la Villette project. The top left-hand diagram is the area of the programme. La Villette was a totally programmatic brief. Every part of it was described in the brief. In analysing the brief, we organised the programme into these three columns that make up the categories. The darker column shows buildings with an interior. The next column is also constructions, but open-air, without roofs. Then, the big area is open-air spaces, all with a distinct programme, however.

The programme by the city of Paris required an overabundance of activities too large for the site—seemingly leaving no space for a park. In fact, the proposed project was not so much a project for a park, but rather for a method that—combining programmatic instability with architectural specificity—would eventually generate a park.

The Parc de la Villette competition was the only large-scale project conceived as the structured juxtaposition of layers. It comprises five layers:

1. The major programmatic components are distributed in horizontal bands across the site, each band creating a unique experience in its length while, when intersected at right angles, offering a rapid change in experience.
2. A considerable number of point facilities—kiosks, playgrounds, exercise areas, refreshments points, barbecue spots—are distributed mathematically according to different point grids.
3. The addition of large-scale vegetal volumes—such as a round forest—as architectural elements, to complement the two existing large structures on the site.
4. Two circulation systems crossing the site at right angles to the bands.
5. Superimposition of large-scale elements, new and existing, that did not fit the rules outlined above.

In order to apply the brief's complex programme over the site's huge area, we needed to find some in-situ feature that we could use as a structuring strategy. An obvious one was the twenty-five-metre-wide canal that crosses the site. As a result, we divided the site into a series of twenty-five-metre-wide strips, with which we accommodated the programme of the brief.

These strips covered the entire site. They even went through—at least conceptually—the existing buildings. We used the space surrounding the Science Museum as areas where it could expand outwards for the museum's outdoor exhibits.

In summary, the first diagram is the programme, the next one is the strips. The third is the parts which could not be organised as surfaces or as strips. For each point, we had the total area of the park and an area per object. The way we calculated how to distribute them was by taking the area of the entire site, minus the area of the particular facility, divided by the number of objects we had to place—the kiosks—and the square root of that gave us the formula for the grids.

[Parc de la Villette, 'confetti' diagram – OMA]

A custom-made grid was worked out for each point facility. We laid out each grid on the overall plan, and the starting point for all grids was from the broad pedestrian avenue that ran North-South, across the site. The juxtaposition of all the grids determined the 'confetti' layout.

RH So, at this point where the avenue and the canal meet, that's the locus for the whole project, isn't it?

EZ Yes, in a sense the avenue is the vertical counterpart of the canal. They're the two coordinating elements: the canal coordinates the strips, and the avenue coordinates the grids of the various point facilities.

Although I primarily work with intuition—and as I showed in the Antiparos project, I started with a painting—here we were insinuating the exercise of 'scientific' method: a formula we adopted for la Villette.

Throughout the course of the competition, we were rumoured to be the favourite—and had even received the support of Jack Lang, France's Minister of Culture. For the second stage of the competition, a number of other architects were invited, amongst them Bernard Tschumi. Both Bernard and I were teaching Diploma Units at the AA. I had my drawing board and was working on la Villette at the AA studio—and in particular on the 'confetti' component, which was the exception-from-the-rule component. Hence the familiarity between the two projects: we worked in adjacent rooms.

[Parc de la Villette, 'frequency' diagram – OMA]

Oh, well this diagram: I don't know if you can guess where it was taken from? This frequency?

RH One of the Constructivists…I'm not sure which.

EZ Yes, it was taken from the Green City project by Moisei Ginzburg and Mikhail Barsch, where the wavelength gives you the frequency of its occurrence.

[Parc de la Villette, plantation plan – OMA]

This next drawing is a plan of the plantations, with the tree names. We did an equally beautiful drawing for another park in Greece, where the trees were numbered—a composition of numbers.

[Koutavos Bay, planting diagram – OMA]

RH The one you're describing has always reminded me of—I suppose it was a reference—the Archizoom typewriter drawings.

EZ Archizoom drawings are always referenced, where applicable.

[Parc de la Villette, forest elevation – OMA]

RH This is also very beautiful.

EZ Yes, façades of trees. A particularly good explanation of the linear forests.

[Parc de la Villette, 'The Pleasures of Architecture' poster – OMA]

RH I believe Alex Wall drew this one.

EZ Yes, that is the cartoon-style that Alex drew, and Rem loved.

[Parc de la Villette, model photographs – OMA]

These are nice photographs of the model.

As I was saying before: there was a second stage and Rem decided to take that over. He said, 'I'm taking it over and I'm going to do a model'. Nobody knew how to do it, and I had to go to Rotterdam several times to explain the project so they could make the model (which, incidentally, was not allowed).

[Parc de la Villette, overview paintings (whole scheme and confetti only) – OMA]

These are paintings by Zoe. The second one was to show the confetti.

[Parc de la Villette, general arrangement plan – OMA]

The OMA plan for the Parc de la Villette competition is the best project I worked on in my 15-year partnership with Rem Koolhaas. This was a presentation drawing in which the point facilities (the confetti) were coloured: the kiosks, the playgrounds, the buvettes etc—each had its own colour. In the last four weeks, working in London, I produced the agreed final plan.

This was one of the projects I enjoyed the most during that period. Even though la Villette was the last-but-one project we did together, I was thankful for everything I owed Rem: his critical mind, knowledge, and enthusiasm. Exodus had been a watershed for me; our collaboration had been a relearning of architecture; and we had become close friends—at least to the extent that his patience (or lack of) could sustain.

Parc Citroen Cevennes

There was still one more project to do before leaving OMA (a step I considered had already become necessary) and this was another park competition which the City of Paris was inviting us to take part in, as a consolation prize for losing la Villette. This was the Parc Citroen Cevennes.

I was beginning to work with Eleni Tsigantes—who had joined the London OMA office after graduating from the AA, and who is now my wife and partner in architecture—I was impressed by her talent, the like of which I had not seen since having Zaha as a student. Eleni and I produced the last OMA project I worked on, and our first collaboration: the year was 1985.

[Parc Citroen Cevennes, overview painting – OMA]

Following the bitter disappointment and cynical circumstances of losing la Villette, the primary ambitions that inspired the Parc Citroen Cevennes were to design a landscape free of nostalgia, through the development of a series of formal relationships with the existing architecture that was defining the built perimeter of the park. We tried to develop a vegetal aesthetic that could equal the powerful—but so far controversial—beauty of the late 20th-century landscape; to respond to the programmatic potential of the surroundings; the quartier on three sides; and the Seine on the fourth. Around the central 'metropolitan green', a perimeter zone was proposed as a dense 'forest' out of which different rooms were scooped—each with its own direct connection with the neighbouring architecture.

In the meantime—and, alongside the London and Rotterdam branches—OMA's Athens Office, which we ran together with Elias Veneris in the eighties, produced some of the best OMA projects. These included the Cephalonia park; Koutavos Bay's Liquid Park; the beaches of Platys Gialos and Skala; and the Aghios Gerasimos Plateau.

Synthetic

RH Could I offer a small observation about the relationship between these projects and the earlier projects?

EZ Yes please.

RH You were mentioning that there's kind of a transition that happens around Antiparos, when you move from city to landscape. But it seems to me that maybe it's not such a big move, it's more of an inversion of the same idea.

EZ This is an ingenious observation. Initially we were reluctant to use the vegetable component as architectural material; but that's essentially what I did. Also, I think there is a link between la Villette and the competition we did for the Hellenikon Park with DOGMA, which was turning the old International Airport of Hellenikon into a public park—something that would have made it the biggest public park in Europe.

[Hellenikon Metropolitan Park, collage – DOGMA with Elia Zenghelis]

In essence, Antiparos, la Villette and Hellenikon are bonded by a strong conceptual and prototypical link.

RH I also think there's a link between la Villette and the earlier projects. For example, in New York and Berlin, your projects expose and contribute to an existing—partially latent— *parti* of the city. In these later projects, you invent a *parti* to give structure to—i.e. to urbanise—the landscape, starting from a couple of existing physical anchors. Which one can also relate to the development of Manhattan, of course. And, in all contexts, there is an extreme love of the synthetic.

EZ Totally: it is a pervading trust in the superiority of the synthetic over the natural as the fundamental condition for, and of, Art. This is clearly and explicitly articulated by Marcel Proust in *Time Regained,* when he discovers that, after all, he can write.

Elia Zenghelis *(Athens, 1937) founded OMA in 1975 together with Zoe Zenghelis, Rem Koolhaas and Madelon Vriesendorp. In 1987 he co-founded Gigantes Zenghelis Architects (GZA) with Eleni Gigantes, and has subsequently collaborated with DOGMA. He has taught at numerous prestigious institutions around the world, including the Architectural Association in London, the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, the Berlage Institute in The Netherlands, EPFL in Lausanne, ETH Zürich, Accademia d'Architettura Mendrisio and Yale School of Architecture in the U.S. In 2000 he received the Annie Spink Award for Excellence in Education from the Royal Institute of British Architects.*