

Conversation: 016
With: Georges Heintz
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Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)

Richard Hall Through which years did you work at OMA?

Georges Heintz I started in '85. After a certain point, I only came when Rem (Koolhaas) called me, but in general we say until '91. I also did two projects with Rem in the last ten years.

RH Really?

GH Of course, they're not part of the ones you are interested in, but yeah. Anyway, I was at OMA full-time for, let's say, five years, and then—even in '92 I think—I would come for a few weeks or so, now and again.

As you know, the office was organised with Elia Zenghelis in London—at the beginning, before they split—and that was the place for 'seminars'. I don't know if my friends told you that, but the Rotterdam office was very 'executive'—not only, of course—but in London we did some intensive work. It was like a kind of cloister for us, a quiet place. So, for some competitions, when you have three or four big competitions in one year or so, then you needed to be extracted from the busy Rotterdam office.

Sometimes it could happen that Rem would call me—I was not with OMA anymore as a regular worker—and I just came to give a push or a hand, to think about the programme, how not to copy OMA! It was the apprehension of Rem, to do new projects, not repeating things. So, I came back many times, but it was mainly from '85 to '91 or '92.

RH How did you come to join the office? What attracted you to OMA in the first place?

GH It's a bit of a long story, but to do it short: in France—and not only in France—in the '80s, architecture was a

kind of desert. Very big offices doing regular work, no interest. But there were some great Italian intellectuals like Aldo Rossi, Giancarlo de Carlo or Gaetano Pesce—who was one my important teachers—who were coming back to the city and so on. There was also the emergence of Ticino with Mario Botta.

When I was at university, I knew him. I went a lot to Ticino because one of my most significant professors was Diego Peverelli, who had been at Ulm—which was a sort of legacy of the Bauhaus in the '60s—and became editor of *Werk* and *Archithese* for a while. Diego was from Ticino, so he knew everyone—Livio Vacchini, Mario Botta, Luigi Snozzi, Aurelio Galfetti, all of them—and so I did some exhibitions for these people here in Strasbourg and travelled a lot with the university. We had a very good feeling about Mario Botta at the university. I recently organised a presentation of Botta's last book—a conversation with Danièle Pauly, a great professor of history of architecture—at the Academy of Architecture in Paris.

The plan was that he would come for my diploma, but suddenly I discovered an *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* publication about OMA. I discovered the project of the Parliament of Den Haag and the Irish Prime Ministers Residence—and wow! It was just incredible. The representation, the images. It was really completely new. Completely different. Very free, very clever, very clear. Really, it was like a new territory for liberty. For me, that's what it was. I said, 'Wow! That's great!'

It was planned that I would have a job in Lugano at Mario Botta's office. I was very young at the time, but I had two children. I was only 23 years old and Swiss jobs come with very good money of course! I had absolutely no money. It was a disaster. I was working everywhere at the same time as studying—and I was even studying history of art too, because I thought that learning the history of architecture in French school of architecture was not enough. I wanted to know more, so I did history of art at the university until doctorate. But anyway, when I discovered these drawings I said, 'Shit! Ticino is great, and comfortable, but it's not the future'.

Then, I tried to find Rem Koolhaas' phone number. OMA had just moved location and at that time, of course, I had to wait for the new phone book in France to be published by the Central Post Office. I had no contacts in Holland, so I just had to wait at least four or five months. Then, I phoned all the Koolhaases in Amsterdam and Rotterdam—because I didn't even know which city he was in—maybe 70 numbers! 'Hello, are you the architect?', 'No'. It took weeks and then suddenly, 'Yes, I am'. 'No, come on. Are you Rem Koolhaas?', 'Yes, what's the matter?'. I said, 'Hey, I'm a student in Strasbourg and I would like you to come to my diploma'. He said, 'Well, maybe it's better if you come here to Rotterdam and we meet'. So, I went, and we made contact.

It was really nice because when I called Mario Botta back, he said, 'Georges, I'm sorry. You know I'm doing the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco; I have no time. I decided that now, for a few years, I do no conferences or diplomas. I said, 'Well Mario, Rem Koolhaas could come, but only if you come'. He said, 'What do you mean?', 'Yeah, the idea is to have a little duellito. We have two screens, each of you have a Kodak with 40 slides. After my diploma, you have this duel'. 'Ah, come on. What's that?! I'll come'. Then, I called Rem back and I said, 'Hey, Mario Botta wants you and him to have a little duellito'. 'Oh, come on. What's that?!'. Really, that's how it happened. I was a liar and it worked! It was the only way for me to fix my future...

That day, Mario turned up, 'Oh, I'm sorry I don't have the right carousel. It's only some design, my lamps and furniture etc'. So, there was no duellito... Well, it was not in stereo. It was first Mario and then Rem—and it was really exceptional. It was really a great moment of architecture for all of us. The amphitheatre was more than full...

When it was finished in the evening, both came to see me and said, 'Hey, it was a nice time. You can come to work at the office when you want'. Then I was really like, 'Shit! What do I do?'. At that time, Botta was really the king of architecture in the world. Travelling all over the world. Incredible big projects. I knew there I could have 5000

Swiss Francs a month! At that time, it was, 'Wow!'. OMA was still a paper architect. It had competitions but no jobs, no nothing.

Finally, I decided to go to Rotterdam! Because, you know, did I want to do the same details all year? In this pink and grey stacking? It's great. At that time, it was really great, but my real interest in architecture, of course, was in the OMA adventure. It was really a revolution at that time. You are too young to know it, but if you imagine a desert and suddenly you see a beautiful mirage. That was how OMA appeared to me—and finally, it came true.

Then I went there and that's it. Oh, and then I met Elia. Who is really a great guy! I love him.

Office

RH How was the Rotterdam office organised at that time? Actually, since you were around until the early-90s, how did the organisation change while you were there?

GH Well, we were 13 when I came, plus students going through. There was a kind of tour with a lot of Americans coming via Japan. They had two months with Arata Isozaki or whatever, and then came to Europe. In general, at that time, it was Renzo Piano, Gregotti or Rossi; then coming up, going to Jean Nouvel or OMA; and then Norman Foster or Richard Rogers; and then back to America and so on. It was their kind of *voyage en Italie*...

RH A grand tour...

GH Yes. People were having one year off and they were doing this kind of tour. So, there were a lot of students going through. Now the academies call it hyphenation year.

Mostly, I would say that Kees Christiaanse was a kind of manager, organising the office. Rem was flying everywhere—doing acrobatics, doing everything, walking on his hands—and this was very exciting. Then there was Jeroen Thomas, he was organising the technical part, but had nothing to do at that time, because we were not

building. There was Maria, she was the secretary. Then, there was mainly Xaveer de Geyter, Mike Guyer, Alex Wall, Frank Roodbeen and Ron Steiner. We were doing the sketches of the projects around the impulses of Rem. But he was so openminded. You could come with a completely different idea and, if it was interesting, he would jump on it. And all the others too!

It was really freedom. It was really great. The people organised naturally in a way. But mainly it was the schedule of the competitions. When you're on one project, you're working on at least three or four other projects, but with different intensity. At a certain point we say, 'Okay, we need a rendering in three weeks, I need someone next week'. Each day, any leader of a project could say, 'Hey guys, I need you. Look, what do you think of this?', 'It's great', 'No it's shitty', or 'We did it before'. It was very much like a basketball match, you know? The opportunity and the situation made inspirations.

I really think the great idea of OMA's first decade was the open mind. The idea that modern architecture was a kind of atlas of architectonics and elements to work with in complete freedom. The conscience of programme and context—it was a really strong impact.

Then, for me, it was absolutely a situationist—not methodology—approach. You could say it's pragmatic, but no. It could look a bit chaotic, but in fact, no. The determination was strong, the intentions, the quality of each participant—it was exceptional. Rem was giving directions, and many questions etc., but always open to even the reverse idea, you know? 'Let's do it white', and then half an hour later it was all black, because the opportunity was there to do it another way. Always open to surprises. There were no 'pre-fab' intentions. It was really a process: the situation—the site—collapsing together with the programme. All of us were working on this with enthusiasm and intensity.

But these people were also very open-minded and we had all the same modern background, but with a strong cultural field. You know, if you speak with Mike, Xaveer, Alex, we are all teaching in big universities around the

world. This is because of our interest in the past and in technology. But not only modernism of course, we all love the Renaissance, the Gothic, Le Corbusier, and so on. It was really not singular thinking. It was just, 'Look at that, it's just great, what do you think?', 'Let's try that', 'I don't know...let's do it'. That was really a fantastic adventure. I have a great tenderness for these friends of thought and adventure.

Still, all these people are doing incredible projects and have beautiful careers. So, I think it was a bit magic, that time. I really think it's because all backgrounds had a very academic education in architecture. In France you had the 'morpho-typologist' or the 'Hausmannist'. So, it was two schools struggling and it was so boring—and producing bullshit, really. I said, 'I don't want to do such shit. I want architecture to be like being in a rock band, you know?'

RH In what way?

GH You have a great lyricist and singer called Rem Koolhaas. Then you have fantastic musicians who had all gone to the academic conservatory, but they are also interested in jazz, blues and pop. At school, they play Chopin, Debussy, or whatever. Then, in the evening they play jazz, and very late in the night they do pogo at a rock concert. No, really, I think this was the quality of the office. We were interested in music—architecture in our case—and we all had good talents in this instrument, or in drawing this way or that way or thinking and doing models or doing collage. Finally becoming great projects...

So, it was invested with all the modernity. Even the old, you know, the cinema; the Nouvelle Vague; Brigitte Bardot, Wim Wenders; Siouxsie and the Banshees, whatever! I think this was the real quality of the office and we had no limit. Just interest and the pleasure that at the end of process, when you finish the competition and you are all around when the panels come back printed and the definitive model is there, and you say, 'Wow! Incredible! We did this?', 'It's quite strange, you like?'. Surprised by the result...and this is still I think what Rem is doing now. If you look at his projects—of course now he has thousands of people around him and fantastic associates

and partners and so on—but each time the new OMA project comes out: again, ‘wow!’. You are surprised. Even if it’s the same vocabulary etc., it’s always clever. It’s always inventive. But also, familiar because it’s really reflecting the modern society. And it never looks old. That’s an incredible quality. Where else do you find this? A few cars, a few objects, a few personalities?

Well, your question was why I went to OMA! I was waiting for this, and I had the feeling that it was there. That I could find it because it was the beginning, it was under construction. So, I preferred to go into this adventure rather than have a rich, comfortable future in Ticino. That was the main reason.

I was very enthusiastic—and I’m still very enthusiastic about that—but it was very risky. Ticino: it’s nice weather, good money, chocolate! Rotterdam: it’s really tough, cold, windy! The things they eat! Jesus Christ! For me, it was a disaster. You know, they thought I was the Mediterranean one...I’m Alsatian! Can you believe this? I felt like I was a stranded Brazilian. But it must have been worse for Elia and Zoe (Zenghelis) when they came over. They were still together then—an incredible couple.

Media

RH Let’s talk about drawings. Could you say something about the role of drawings and models—or images more broadly—in the office’s process?

GH We were all still drawing by hand. None of us really knew how to draw I think, and some of us kind of ended up drawing in a similar way. So, we made very, very bad quality drawings but very spontaneous, very efficient and essential. So, actually kind of clever. This was Willem-Jan Neutelings, Xaveer de Geyter, Mike Guyer, Alex Wall and me. Sometimes there are drawings where I cannot say whether it is Xaveer or I, or whoever, did it. They have a very naïve expression, like comics. But it was not the intention. It might have become an intention, but it wasn’t really.

Willem-Jan and Xaveer are Belgian and I’m French. We have this strong tradition of cartoons. For us, it was just a natural way to express, with more freedom than with the set square. We could draw very fast. When you’re making cartoons, you draw like you write. When the objective is clear and the ideas take form, then really drawing like this is like words coming out of your mouth. It helps to express the concept. This is also good because my English is approximated. So, when words become too complicated or subtle, when my vocabulary is limited, my hands help me explain. Drawings, sketches and diagrams were our archaic language vehicle so we could construct with each other.

You know the model of the TGB (Très Grand Bibliothèque)? We made this inverse model, because when we tried to explain it, nobody understood. Then, suddenly, I don’t remember who said, ‘It’s like a box of ice cream, when you scoop out a ball’, and we made a model inverted where voids are full. Suddenly, everyone understood it.

Another very exciting part—because of course there was no Photoshop—was making collages. We did a lot of collages. For me, this was great because I was very influenced by the avant-garde of the twenties, from studying art history. Thinking about Cubism, Constructivism and also other artists from the fifties and New Realism. So, I was interested in collage like the others. It’s very easy, just to cut things up and stick them together. But it takes a long time to find images in magazines. So sometimes, using what is available creates collisions and mind shortcuts.

I remember, with Alex, we went a few times to the market on the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam in order to buy all the reviews—like *Time* and *Life* magazine—and spent hours organising the contents for competition collages. Think of the Milano ones you sent to me. For that, we did like a hundred collages to illustrate the video. That I would like to see again! Hans Werlemann organised it. We did many collages to explain the story of the Mies van der Rohe pavilion when it was destructed. What happened in ‘29, you know? The exhibition was finished, and the pavilion was taken down and was lost... The one built today is a reconstruction. When we began planning for the triennial

pavilion in Milan they were working on the reconstruction of the original on site in Barcelona.

We thought, 'What the fuck are they doing?' A mausoleum for nostalgia? So, we decided to invent a story. At that time, OMA was considered to be only a paper architect, and very dry and puritan. Anyway, in answer to this, the idea was to develop a scenario using Mies van der Rohe as a very particular minimalist, with regular, strong posture, but great emotion, to show that we are part of this situation. And that modern architecture could be fun. There are texts from Rem and Elia on how modernity can bring fun and fantasy by responding opportunistically to the contradictions and complexities of our modern age—that is fundamentals to me. Think of *Our new Sobriety* (1980) or *Drawings as techniques and architecture* (1981).

[Casa Palestra, plan diagram – OMA]

So, we used the pavilion to express our intent. I did this plan. We made a history of the pavilion after the exhibition. There was the Republican war, which brings Franco, and then the pavilion came back to Berlin and was used for Nazi propaganda. The pavilion had been reconstructed in the part that became East Berlin and was used as a bar for Russian officers. Then a centre for the East German sports girls etc. So, we used collages. There was a big TV suspended on chains on which a film was projected where all the history was illustrated with these collages, and you had Alex Wall's mouth telling the story, superimposed on the images.

[Casa Palestra, collages – OMA]

This was a really fucking big work! We spent weeks doing these collages, with Alex Wall, Mike Guyer, Dirk Hendricks and some more. I don't know where they are now.

There was another expression that was very interesting. It was the beginning of computers. Actually, it was quite funny because we did most of them in ink, but there was this illusion that we were working with computers. It was handmade, but very fast. When we really started with the

computer, first it was external—and we used it for the models especially. We did a lot of computer-looking drawings, but it was really the start of this technology. The programmes were very primitive. So, we used it for certain expressions, but it was very schematic. Schematic images to help us rationalise our thoughts and reassure the client and so on. It was about presenting 'professional data', like we do today, but then it was done with a Xerox machine and glue! But it was really professional at that time. It was possible to make this illusion because all the programmes that you have now on your computer, they didn't exist. Drawing with no colours and ornament ('a crime') became computer illusion.

And about expression: Stefano de Martino is a very great drawer. We all had our own qualities, but Stefano was my favourite, with Alex. Now, it's really difficult to remember who did one drawing because we were doing this all together, it was mixed and we were going very fast, I would say. I'm still impressed now!

RH Shall we talk about some projects?

Patio Villa

[Patio Villa, exploded isometric – OMA]

GH Yeah, all the Patio Villa drawings I did myself, like this one. I was interested in extracting the project from the context and to mix the scale. That is why you see the detail of the wall as big as the house. We were insistently saying that we knew how to build it! Of course, it's not that I had no idea, but it's full of incorrect details. At the time, we were eager to show that we could do it.

So, this drawing was abstracted from the context, because on the back side there's a canal, on the front a street, and then you have a windmill and cows everywhere... and boats! This was a way to abstract it completely and to explain that there are two walls in solid brick and the others are glass with a patio in the middle. And there's a front side and a back side—like if it was not in the countryside but in the city. By the way, it was looking like a computer drawing that could select architectonics. That

wasn't usual at that time. There is another funny frontal perspective from above with a transparent roof, quite inventive for a little project.

That was the street facade and the court facade. I was very influenced by the beautiful drawings of the Berlin project (Koch-Friedrichstrasse), where you have a series of patio houses and each architectonic element is part of the building construction game. So, you have the wall, you have the windows, you have the doors, you have the chimney and the floors—and this is enough to express the concept. The entrance, the patio, the staircases. The idea was not to be minimal, but to have a few concentrated elements and have this floating place in the middle. It reminds me now of the great title of the book of Anatole Kopp, *Quand le Moderne n'était pas un style mais une cause*.

Hans Werlemann did a beautiful photo from outside, where you have this kind of reflections of the patio which has an almost symmetrical relationship to the drawing. I don't know if the drawing influenced him or if it was just the situation, with the sun and reflections at that hour, but they read together very well because the silk curtains of Petra Blaisse create this atmosphere.

Casa Palestra

[Casa Palestra, collages – OMA]

Of course, the Milano collages, I love them. You know many of the bits came from a book by Berthold Lubetkin—which I still have here. He did a bar in Paris, *Le Club du Trapeze Volant*, where he transformed a garage warehouse into a nightclub. The president of the republic and his wife, René Coty, but also Jean Cocteau or Max Jacob, were going often to that bar to get drunk and so on. The barkeeper was an acrobat and movie actor. So, Lubetkin did this tiny bar in Paris and there is a photo where you see the acrobatic cords. I made a Xerox of that photo for one of the collages. You see it here. The upper part is coming from that bar in Paris. The decoration was inspired by surrealism and Kandinsky, and influenced us I suppose...

So, there were lots of these beautiful collages. But, again, if I speak like a historian, it's exactly the same as the collages of Mies van der Rohe. Emptiness, some elements, very few materials, maybe one colour. Our office at the time, on the river at Boompjes, was very influential on these. When you were on the terrace or looking outside, you could see the rivers Maas and the Rhine and all the black boats with Veronese, light blue and flashy orange colours against the grey-brown water. They became typical of OMA. These three colours could be seen out of the window. It's anecdotal, but it's real. A way of exaggerating reality and its context, typical of the approach of this period—especially sublime in the paintings of Zoe and Maddy (Madelon Vriesendorp), particularly in the Lutzowstrasse project for Berlin, I find.

Très Grande Bibliothèque (TGB)

[TGB, façade sketch from *S,M,L,XL* – OMA]

Of course, I like very much the drawing that Rem selected for *S,M,L,XL* about TGB. This is a real key. If you look at the book, it's the only drawing in all the book—of more than 1000 illustrations—where you have the name of the author (p. 644). Even *San Rocco* magazine, chose it when they had the 'Rabelaisian' table at the Venice Biennale. They chose this drawing for the 100 pieces of architecture of the century. There was this—I am ashamed to say—between a Mies van der Rohe and an Oscar Niemeyer project. In between, there was my drawing and Rem's comment, 'altruist machine', that he did as a beautiful dedication for me. I'm very proud of this.

I was telling you before that everybody can have these ideas, and this came because I was alone against all the office for weeks. I wanted to win this competition because if we won, we would open an office in Paris. I wanted to be in Paris so my children could have a French education, not Dutch. To eat real fruits and vegetables! So, I really wanted us to win this project. I knew that the president, Francois Mitterrand, wanted something elegant because, for him, this project was to give a legacy with his name to the capital. It was to be this symbolic treasure of literature, images, and history of the nation.

So, that's why we lost! This project is not elegant but genius. There were really long discussions with Rem about this. I said, 'No, they don't want a cube 100 meters high by 85 by 90 meters. It's a disaster in the skyline of Paris.

Look, put the Eiffel Tower next to it...it's a disaster. It's too big, it's too heavy, it's fat!'. So, I developed another project for weeks, a horizontal project. But, of course, it was too big, and in the end it didn't work. Then three weeks before the rendering, Rem said, 'Georges, come on. Stop it. It's clever. It doesn't work'. 'No, no, we're going to win'. 'Come on, stop. It doesn't work'. And so, I was alone on this fucking project.

The others were developing a compact one, but it was looking like nothing. Then I think that the success of this drawing is that I came with a very open mind. The others had been working on it for weeks, you know. So, when you have the nose in the screen, you don't see any more. I came very fresh—even if I did another concept before—I was really free. For me, the revelation in the project is about the free plan and free section: so, this is a free façade. The consequence of completely free forms in the structure on the image of the façade.

It was not the only drawing, of course. There were some others. But when Rem saw this, he was really, 'Wow!'. At the same time, we were doing ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie), which is an accumulation of different programs. A kind of hamburger of programmatic situations. TGB was totally different. We accepted that the building was full of books and records—storage—and then, sculpted spaces out of it. These projects led to the idea of *Bigness*, and later the question of *Junkspace*. No established hierarchy, but not so much anarchy.

So, I'm very, happy that Rem picked this drawing out to show it. But it could have been some others. There are many other drawings of the project from all of us that are really beautiful. I made some on this very small Chinese coloured paper—gold, orange or silver—that are burnt in the memory of the elders. The paper was the same proportions as the building and then I just made some interventions in it for structure and forms. That was clever too because, in the end, you look at the plans, they look

like sections, the sections like elevations, and the elevations like plans. A kaleidoscope of fractal consequences.

RH This drawing also has the kind of naivety you were alluding to earlier.

GH Yes, but it's absolute anything but naive. That's the interesting thing too. It looks naive, but it's very sophisticated. In fact, the project is very sophisticated. But this is not, because I was in a hurry! I joined the group of the vertical project in the last month. So, I did this fast. At that time, the façade concept was not in place. This is not a drawing done for a plan. That's why it's maybe more experimental or free.

Morgan Bank

[Morgan Bank, façade collage – OMA]

The Morgan Bank was exciting too. This a *real* collage. I mean, you have a background, then you build up three or four layers of tracing paper. It's quite big if I remember correctly. We had an exhibition, and I prepared this document for the box to be sent to the Royal Museum of Denmark. When the exhibition came back, I opened the box and there were two drawings missing. One of Stefano de Martino's and this one. I went to see Rem—and was kind of worried because I signed off the receipt for the delivery—'Hey Rem, we have to call back the delivery people and the insurers because two have been stolen'. 'Stolen!?', 'Yeah!'. He started smiling and said, 'No, I sold them'. I was half a metre from him and he stopped for 15 seconds and said, 'That's great, no?'.

Have you seen the book from Holger Schurk *Project Without Form (OMA; Rem Koolhaas, and the Laboratory of 1989)*? There are many drawings in there, that I look at and think, 'Did we do this!?', 'Nice drawing...oh there's my name on it! It's incredible. 'Did I do this? Not sure...'. I completely forgot about them. It's crazy... especially when you've spent hours on it.

But this one, I did myself. It was quite difficult and it's quite big. I did marble on the Xerox machine and then reduced it and reprinted on adhesive paper. It looks nice but it's really shitty.

[Morgan Bank, entrance collage – OMA]

There's a very nice one from the entrance by Xaveer de Geyter. Yes, this one. This is really beautiful. We reproduce the marble ourselves. If you look on the left, it's exactly the same marble from the Triennale collages. They're beautiful things.

RH I think the Morgan Bank project is totally underrated. It's not really discussed, but I think it's a very beautiful project.

GH I agree. In the beginning, I thought it was stupid, this open corner. But when we discussed making it an angle, it became like Cerda's plan for Barcelona, and I realised the open blind corner wasn't so bad! It's monumental and expressive, but not expressionist. This big block project with patio has a link with Gordon Bunshaft somehow, and the vanity mutism of banks.

Parc Citroen Cevennes

[Parc Citroen Cevennes, overview painting – OMA]

On the Citroen Parc, we did many of the drawings with Xaveer and Alex, but it was Maddy and Zoe who did the colour. This was the second possibility to open an office in Paris! It was a collective work, but we each had our own parts: the cross, the gardens etc. If you see on the left, there are red and yellow colours. This was the (Serge) Poliakov field. Maybe it's clearer in the other perspective.

[Parc Citroen Cevennes, aerial perspective – OMA]

Yeah, I did this. I love it. If you zoom, then you have a big landscape, like the paintings of Serge Poliakov, in these colours.

I did a beautiful collage on the other side. There's a cemetery, next to that we did the 'Lover's Park'. It was in *Architecture Design*, N°7-8, Vol. 58.1988. Do you know it? It's quite funny.

RH This project was with Elia, right?

GH Yeah. This was with Elia, probably the last collaboration between Elia and Rem. We did it completely in London. Maddy and Zoe did the colours. The City of Paris gave us the 3D. It was one of the first projects with the whole city mapped in 3D. So, we were able to take these views from the computer and then work on top. We liked very much the confrontation of the line drawing and the naive greenery.

We were only three or four to work on the whole project and it was really tough. It's a good souvenir. Elia was so incredible, too. Really a great man.

I remember Xaveer took the project in the last plane for Paris before the schedule. At that time, I was living next to Portobello. There was this kind of popular market where they sold tablecloths. So, we printed the whole thing on one piece of white tablecloth. Very thick and glossy. A big roll, 2.50 meters wide. Then Xaveer arriving at Heathrow with this fucking tube, just tied with string! He wanted to get on the plane and the guy said, 'Are you crazy?'. Xaveer convinced the pilot to let him take it on the plane, on the floor next to his seat. Crazy. Xaveer was very convincing.

But all these drawings! Yeah, I love all of them.

Naivety

RH These are really great.

[ZKM, collage section – OMA]

GH Yeah, Ron Steiner. Doing the sections like collage. This was brilliant. It's beautiful. I think this was an idea of Xaveer. He did this for the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI). I didn't do the NAI competition, but I helped a bit. It was always like that: 'Hey guys, we need

some hands now', or 'Can you all come here to brainstorm?'. But yeah, it was the architecture museum, the triangle. Xaveer had this idea just to layer the drawing from the inside. First a drawing, then tissue, paper and perspex and so on. It was working perfectly. Then, other projects started to use it. But it wouldn't have happened if he hadn't have just experimented with an open mind. I mean, we had no obsession with this kind of aesthetic, but it was aesthetic. I think that's the strong quality, when you have a team that is well-connected. You can really do the job together and invent things because you're comfortable to bring ideas out. You don't start with an aesthetic result in mind. Same for architecture projects.

So, images like this are also very naive. But for these competitions, 60-70% of the jury are not architects. Suddenly, they discover something about the materiality. Its surprisingly familiar when other drawings are very abstract. What we talked about before, with comics, is the same thing. It speaks to everybody, it's popular. These are also popular projects of course. It changes each decade, but if you asked architects in the world the top ten projects, you'd find at least three OMA projects in the top ten. They're very direct, very spontaneous. Again, a naivety, but actually, when you look at it now, it could be planned by a high-level communications agency. But it was not, it was just what we had to say.

You know, on ZKM and TGB (Très Grande Bibliothèque), we were a few leaders on the projects. This is because of what I told you before about the opportunity. I was talking about basketball matches, but it's playing basketball for weeks and weeks. So, it's more a marathon. It's a kind of basketball marathon. Because it's very fast, you need to set up the idea in such a way that others can join in and score three points. That's the idea of these projects. On the other hand, it goes on for a long time—and in basketball you cannot play for more than 3-5 minutes. So, you have to be ready to help others. In fact, I played ice hockey for 15 years, like Alex Wall. I don't know why I speak about basketball? With time I become too educational...

This is also why we were always working with these very primary ideas, very primary organisations. But they come together to make situations that are just magic. It's not high-tech. At the time, our enemies were Foster and Rogers. They were taking over from Botta and Rossi as the big people in the scene. They were working in a very high-tech way. We were working in a very archaic way—and it was beautiful. You do something, and then someone else joins in, 'Let's try it'. And on and on. By trying things out, playing with the programme, the situation, finally you produce fantasy and surprise. It's a question of rhythm: dancing with ideas and inspirations.

Then when you have to draw a facade. Why?—lazy, you know—it is a facade! Why do you need to design a facade? Just to protect from wind, cold, sun and rain. This is how it was. We achieved beautiful things, eh?

Distance

ZKM, Karlsruhe is 80km from Strasbourg, where I had my children—where I was going every weekend. This is something I had in common with Rem. Of the other 13 guys in the office, we each had two children. So, on Friday afternoon, he left for London to see his children, and I was going to see mine. Very similar ages, only one- or two-years difference between Rem's children and mine.

We were coming back on Monday midday. So that was three days from the projects. In these three days, the others were working so fast. I can tell you; it was really difficult coming back on Monday afternoon. You had to have ideas and be brilliant, but these guys had been working all weekend non-stop. It was really high athletics! Rem and I would go home, after the storm, to our families, but with our heads still in the project. You come back and have some good ideas, but they say, 'No man, we're much further than that now'. It was a crazy adventure. A very nice adventure.

Authorship

I was really the first working on Euralille sketches. There are some drawings of that. The first schemes were very

exciting to me. The drawings of the towers, where Christian de Portzamparc did the 'ski shoe'. That was the shape I designed. In fact, when Mitterrand did the opening of the site—which was very impressive, it was the biggest site in Europe—Rem gave one of my sketches as a gift. It was printed, number-dated, and offered to the 400 most important invitees. I didn't even get one! I discovered it in a frame on the wall of a Lille architect.

My daughter is a costume designer for the theatre in Paris. Now she's doing *Carmen* at the Opera Comique. Some years ago, she sent me an image she put on Facebook, 'I recognised my father's writing on a drawing in the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou in Beaubourg'. OMA had sold it! It's a drawing about Euralille.

RH Off the back of that, how was authorship addressed in the office?

GH It was for OMA, it's OMA's. You know, I was never shocked about this. But then, the drawings I did were little drawings. The ones of Stefano de Martino for the Panopticon in Arnhem, or Alex Wall for the poster of La Villette are really pieces of art. When I saw these. Wow! The OMA concept is so clever and Bernard Tschumi's one so stupid, it was part of my decision to go to OMA.

But authorship. There was no authorship as I know. That's why I was so surprised when *S,M,L,XL* came out and the sketch had my name on it. You know, you're not an artist commissioned to make a drawing. You're an architect, you work for the company, and you do a project. That's it. And Rem is so brilliant, he transforms something that you have done spontaneously into an artistic achievement. This is his part. You know, in a sports team, someone scores the goal but the person who sets the shot up is also playing their part. It's teamwork. I see it like this. I think this was the originality of OMA at that time: collaborative open-minded factory.

Value

RH What do you think is the value of OMA's work from this period. What can younger generations learn from it?

GH It's not easy. Big value. There are many, many things regarding the question of representation; the question of concept; the question of context; the question of programmes; the question of scale. I think, for me, it was a lesson in freedom. I remember being at a conference—I think it was Peter Eisenman talking about the section. He was saying, 'Architecture is the section' for 2 hours. About thickness and so on. Which is right... Then, Rem came for the next lecture and started, as Raymond Hood said: 'the plan is of primary importance, because on the floor are performed all the activities of the human occupants...'. You know, there's a great lesson. Of course, he said that in contradiction, but also because you cannot choose, you have to be open. Architecture is section as much as it is plan. These slogans are opportunities to explain that you just have to manage the complexity in your own way, with your legitimate goals as a cultured architect. It's just up to you!

So, what was the value? The legacy is the freedom to invent and interpret. Freedom to think about organisation. Because you organise the building like this, a situation was set up where a great guy and great woman meet and finally have three children. Are you responsible? Maybe? So, the real legacy of this architecture is freedom to think outside of a system of methodological thinking. This was the opposite of the rational French academic learning.

Recently, I was with Mario Botta and we were talking about this. He said to me, 'I wanted to do my studies in Venezia not in Zurich. I'm Italian-Swiss, I'm not Swiss-Italian. I was not interested to learn the most accurate dry section of a waterproof window. I wanted to meet culture, I wanted to work with Scarpa in Venezia, where you learn architecture, and the world, not technique and finally I had the chance to work with Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn there...'. Open mind.

I think the first decade of OMA, brought in a complete revolution, simply by saying that the modern movement was not finished or frozen. The attitudes, the expressions, the techniques are still effective. They just have to be improved and combined differently. It's an open encyclopaedia to pose questions, not answers.

Finally, if you consider the 2014 Venice Biennale of Rem. What is he saying? Ceilings, stairs, doors, roofs, floors, etc. Elements of Architecture; Architectonics. You combine them and you have infinite architectural possibilities. Whatever the style, the price, the place etc. It's a lesson in freedom. I think this is the most important thing I learned there at that time. Feeling like you are standing, free and outside the *Doxa*!

Georges Heintz (Strasbourg, 1959) founded *Georges HEINTZ et Associés* in 1987. *HEINTZ* builds mainly in the field of public architecture. Heintz is also a Professor of architectural and urban projects at the National School of Architecture of Strasbourg and was a Visiting Professor at many universities around the world. He is also a State Consulting Architect for the Ministry of Culture and a full member of the National Academy of Architecture.
