

MAXXI, ROME

ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS



Mark Garcia, editor of *The Diagrams in Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), one of the first significant accounts of the diagram in architectural design, provides a unique insight into the diagrammatic form of Zaha Hadid Architects' new MAXXI museum in Rome.

I wanted a democratic museum ... I wanted a museum that has no predetermined route ... I wanted confrontation, which does not mean having everything confront each other in the same room. I wanted a more transparent view ... a work in a room devoted to a particular artist, and to always have other views possible of works in other rooms, even if it is just out of the corner of my eye ... The labyrinth served this ... I could lose myself and so be forced to find landmarks.

Johannes Cladders, 1999¹

The competition for Rome's new Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo (MAXXI), won by Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) in 1998, provided an opportunity to create a masterpiece. The resulting museum, which opened in November 2009, was established to update and increase Rome's stock in the international contemporary art world. Before MAXXI, Roman modern art was served in meagre offerings with few choices in limited and unsatisfactory venues. MAXXI was commissioned to deliver a national museum and cultural centre focusing on art and design (including fashion, cinema, advertising

and architecture). In addition to spaces for exhibitions and the museum's growing collection of more than 300 works (including art by Boetti, Kapoor, Kentridge, Merz, Richter, Warhol, Scarpa, Rossi, Nervi, Ito, Rota and de Carlo), the MAXXI complex also consists of an auditorium, library and media library, bookshop and cafeteria, outdoor spaces, offices and leisure and retail spaces. At a cost of 150 million euros, and with a total site area of 29,000 square metres (312,153 square feet) – on an L-shaped site between two main streets and at an intersection of smaller roads that formerly housed jeep-manufacturing facilities and a military barracks – this new museum is expected to draw up to 400,000 visitors a year.

MAXXI was conceived of primarily as a diagram. Hadid's planimetric diagrams of MAXXI are also its most iconic image, aerial views visible only from a plane or obliquely from nearby hills and high-rises. These can also be linked to non-architectural diagrams: geological/geographical diagrams (found in MAXXI's geological, fluvial, landform and field morphologies), organic diagrams (which come from the branching, dendritic, snaking aspects of MAXXI), textile diagrams (from its network of intertwined, stranded, plaited, unravelling and threaded strips), and urban diagrams that evoke the power and

Zaha Hadid
Architects, MAXXI,
Rome, 2009

below left: Pilotis
in the piazza,
eastern elevation
and ground floor.

below centre:
Ground-floor
external view of the
northeast elevation
and third-floor
gallery cantilever
from the north to
southeast.

below right: MAXXI
study painting.
Aerial perspective
of the River Tiber,
the Olympic
Stadium and MAXXI
(micro and macro
superimposition)
from central Rome,
south of MAXXI,
1998.

bottom: Plexiglass
presentation model,
1998.

opposite left:
Elevation from
the southwest
of the site to the
northwest.

opposite right:
MAXXI diagram,
1998.

controlled violence of high-velocity trajectories of raking, civic engineering, infrastructures and armatures found in rail tracks, bridges, canals, autostradas, tunnels, locomotives and streets. There is also a luminous set of diagrams derived from the reflecting, refracting, diffracting, deflecting qualities of rays, streaks, stripes, trails, beams and diffusing gradients of light. These layers of diagrams and the spatioformal logics and operations they produce in the real spaces and experiences of MAXXI originate in Hadid's layered system of drawing in her design method.²

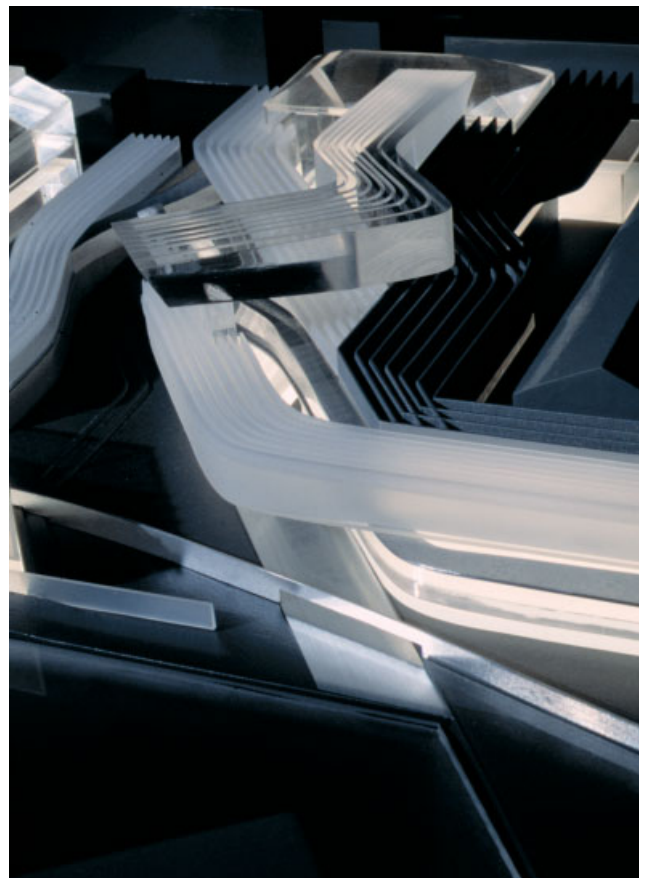
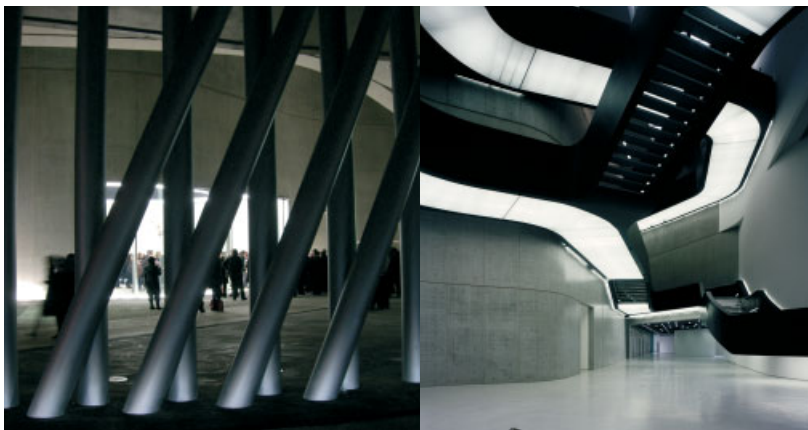
Elements of the MAXXI diagrams can also be found in other of Hadid's works.³ The wraparound L-shape of MAXXI's diagram (recalling ZHA's Madrid Museum for the Royal Collection, 1999, and Landscape Formation 1 of 1996) also addresses its context through its registry and its reticulated redesign of its locality. Its successful translation into a real building is therefore partly an index of, and partly a reformation of, its context, achieved through the absorption, implosion and extension of its site vectors. MAXXI is thus a projective genealogical excavation and a generative condensation, a blurring inflection and archaeological amplification of its urban grid into a higher resolution. It maintains the height of adjacent buildings and generously provides building- and street-line inflecting landscaping around itself with a public piazza. The public piazza unfortunately closes at night.

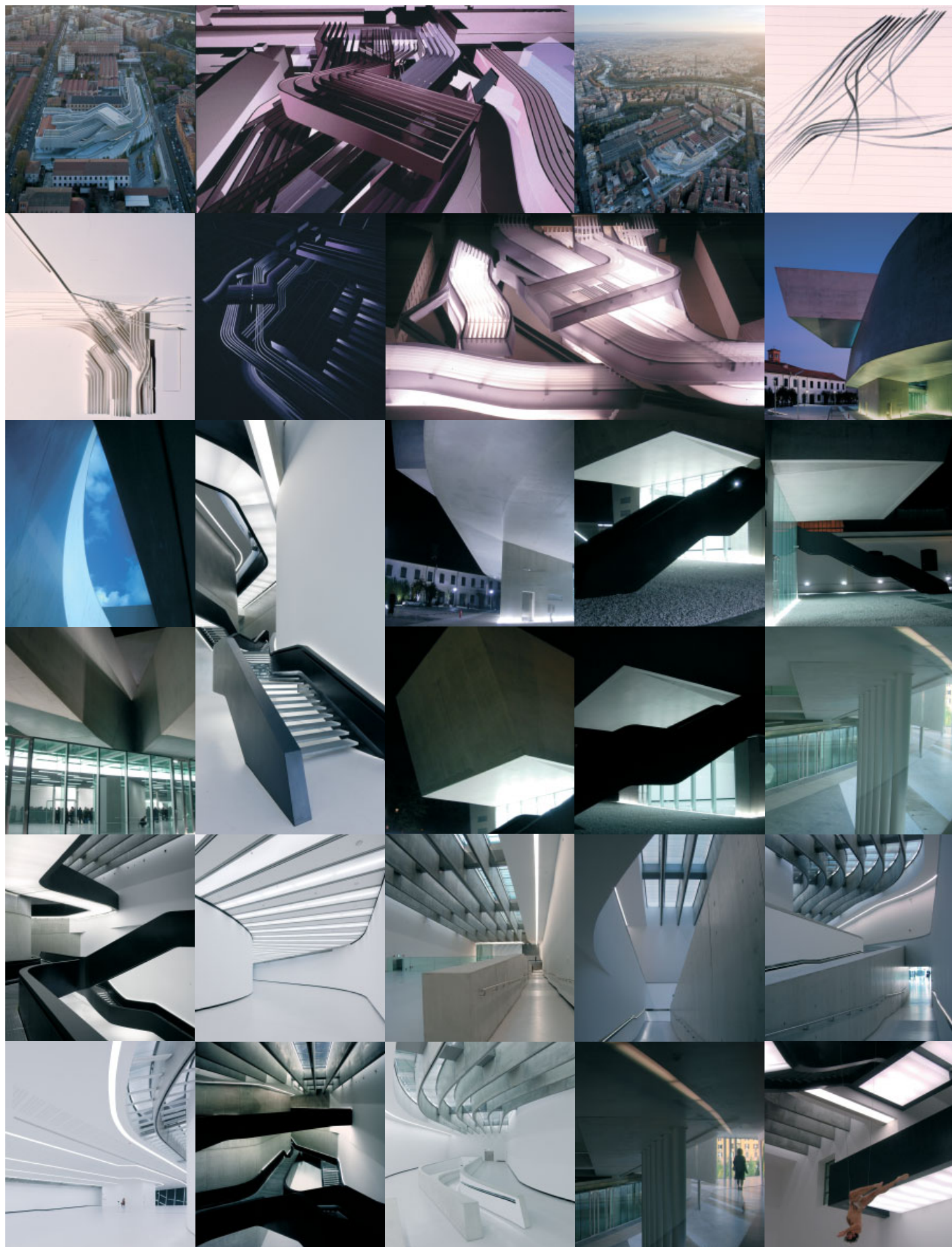
The completed complex has elements of Constructivism, Productivism, Futurism, Deconstructivism, Surrealism and Brutalism. And in parts its high-performance engineering

pushes it towards High-Tech, Structural Expressionism and Minimalism. The functions and effects produced through Hadid's diagrams thus create a range of integrated programmatic, contextual and psychological effects.

MAXXI's pultruded diagram connects the museum to its external urban context, taking the existing circulatory and morphological flows of the city and streamlining these across three floors into the five interlinkable, or separable, 'suites' of galleries within the museum. This gives MAXXI an unusual capacity to accommodate more subjective, unexpected dimensions in its aesthetic effects. It orchestrates and materialises a sequence of layered views into theatrical, spectacular and arcade-like spaces that drift into each other, enabling the distracted, peripatetic and nomadic *passeggiata* described by Siegfried Kracauer⁴ and theorised by Walter Benjamin⁵ in the concept of the *flâneur*. Together with the museum's material organisation, the routes and views constitute a set of effective and efficient content and experience-management tactics and strategies.

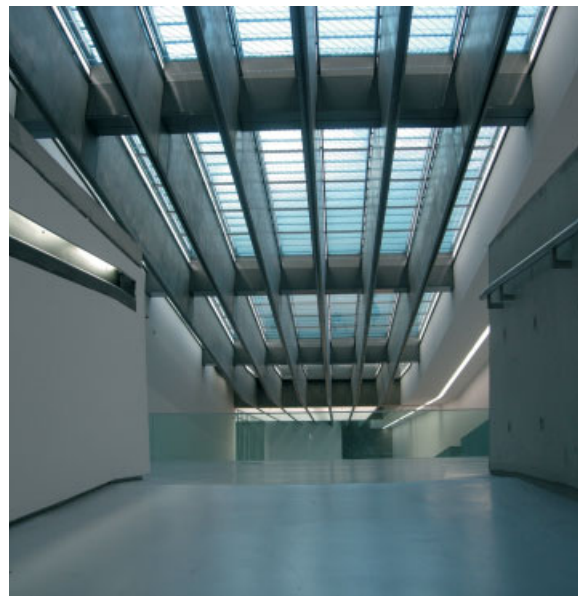
MAXXI partly deconstructs Modernist object and exhibition space taxonomies and traditional, historical museological aesthetic classification systems and their simplistic linear movement and view itineraries. This delinearisation creates possibilities for more unpredictable and variable visual displays, allowing individuals to interrogate the museum through a number of different narrative and circulation sequences and through the co-presencing, intervisibility and interaccessibility of the spaces. These enrich the number and density of the different views of the artworks and their





Zaha Hadid Architects, MAXXI, Rome, 2009

right: View into the piazza and to the atrium facade from above, also with a view of the interior of the bridge to the exterior northeast. far right: View down the centre of the first-floor gallery to the northwest. opposite from left: Aerial view of the museum to the west of Rome and the Tiber; Computer rendering, 1998; Aerial view; MAXXI diagram, 1998; MAXXI card study model, 1998; Study painting. Aerial perspective from northwest to southeast; Internally lit presentation model, 1998; Ground-floor interior entrance hall to the north; External view upwards from below the bridge in the piazza; Ground-floor entrance hall and grand staircase to the northwest; Ground-floor external view of the northeast elevation and third-floor gallery cantilever from north to southeast; Ground-floor external view under the cantilever from the northwest corner towards the northeast; Ground-floor external view under the cantilever from the northwest corner towards the south; Ground-floor gallery from the exterior/piazza to the northwest; External view of the Cardiff Opera House 'jewel-like' cantilever from the ground floor, from the northwest corner towards the north; Ground-floor external view under the cantilever from the northwest corner to the northeast; View into the piazza and the atrium from above, inside the bridge to the exterior north; First-floor interior walkway to the north; Ground-floor gallery interior to the northwest; View down the centre and down the ramp of the first-floor gallery to the northwest; View into the second-floor southeast corner from the bottom of the bridge-linked ramp on the first floor; View from the ramp on the second floor in the southeast corner; Second-floor gallery cantilever looking north and northeast to the exterior and out of the Cyclopean cantilever window; Second-floor interior of the entrance hall to the north; Second-floor gallery to the south end of the museum; View from inside the bridge to the exterior north and exterior west side of the bridge; Ground-floor entrance hall.



interrelations, multiplying their effects and provoking a more pluralist, subjective, critical, emergent yet stochastic interpretive process of review and revision of the art.

MAXXI's choreographed congestion of these social, spatial and aesthetic effects is a consequence of its diagram's proliferation and balancing of spatial and formal diversities and the self-similarities within its five suites of galleries. Its surprising and kaleidoscopic isovists create some aesthetic and psychological dislocations and disjunctions which also (ironically) create what has become a staple of the best new museums: a subjective relocation of the shifting interactive links between object, vision, idea, exhibition, building, city and space through personal and bodily presence.⁶ One of the most interesting things about MAXXI, then, is that it is a museum of museum spaces and museology,⁷ in fact if not in possibility.

These spatial effects are also intensified through their materialisation, significantly with the use of glass to enhance vanishing, veiled views and grand curving deviations into other galleries or into divergences to the outside (and sometimes illusory images that combine three, four and more of these at once). The flexible system of partitions (suspended from the ceiling-track system of lacerating concrete-clad fins) and the connections of spaces accent these effects. The meandering, swerving and switch-back ramps and anthracite staircases that float over fluorescent light-boxes and hang in veering, swaying swags seem to swing rhythmically in precipitously cantilevered branching terraces over vertiginous voids to create some uncanny and plunging warpings of multiple, multilevel bridged and labyrinthine perspectives and vanishing points that recall Piranesi's Carceri, Moses King, Erik Desmazières and FW Murnau. All of these spatial effects rely on an austere, ascetic palette of exposed concrete, glass, white walls, grey steel, white floors and light.

Once the art is installed this year, MAXXI's success will be sealed, for any artist or curator will be able to find or make space here appropriate to their objects and intentions. Ultimately, Hadid's museum will propel the 'Eternal City' into the future of the international artistic avant-garde. But then the genius of art, space and time has always been part of Rome and of Zaha Hadid. **AD+**

Mark Garcia is an academic, author and journalist. He has worked in industry as Research and Development Manager for Branson Coates Architecture and has held academic research and management posts at St Antony's College, Oxford, and in the Department of Industrial Design Engineering at the Royal College of Art. He has taught MA and MPhil/PhD students in the departments of Textiles and Industrial Design Engineering, and in the Department of Architecture where he was most recently Research Co-ordinator and an MPhil/PhD supervisor. He is the guest-editor of the AD issues *Architextiles* and *Patterns of Architecture*, and editor of the book *The Diagrams of Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

Notes

1. Johannes Cladders, cited in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Press (Zurich), 2008, p 63.
2. See P Jodidio, *Zaha Hadid Complete Works*, Taschen (Cologne), 2009, p 12.
3. For example, the Qatar Museum (1997), IIT Campus (1998), Graz Art Museum (1999), Reina Sophia Museum (1999), the Quebec Library (2001), BMW Leipzig (2001), Grande Mosque de Strasbourg (2000), Sagaponac Villa (2002), Guggenheim Singapore (2006), Jesolo Retail Centre (2006), Energy Research Centre, Aachen (2006), BBVA Bank (2008), Naples-Afragola station (which also has similar stripes of rooftop tracks) and in the later Issam Fares Institute Beirut (2006–11). It is also present (vertically) in the Singapore Guggenheim (2006) and (in deep elevations and sections) in the Pierre Vives, Montpellier (2002). The only work of architecture not by Hadid that bears any resemblance to the MAXXI diagram is Greg Lynn's model of the Stranded Sears Tower (1993).
4. See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Once again in the street', *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Oxford University Press (New York), 1960.
5. See Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk or The Arcades Project* [1927–40], ed Rolf Tiedemann, trans Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Belknap Press (New York), 2002.
6. K Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, Berg (London), 2006, p 62, and R Krauss, 'Postmodernism's museum without walls', in R Greenburg, BW Ferguson and S Nairne (eds), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge (London), 1996, p 347.
7. I Karp and SD Levine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press (Washington DC), 1991, p 7; Greenburg, Ferguson and Nairne, op cit, p 3; and BM Carbonnel (ed), *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Blackwell (Malden, MA), 2004, p 2 all theorise this.

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