

A305 HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN 1890–1939: FROM 1975 TO THE PRESENT

Tim Benton

Abstract

The first third-level art-history course, A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939, at The Open University was originally presented in 1975 and ran for eight years. The course included 24 text Units of 12,000 words each, bound in pairs, 24 TV and 32 radio programmes and featured an eight-week student project. By way of a series of coincidences, the course achieved a wider diffusion. The course was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1976, and six of the TV programmes were translated into Italian and shown on Italian national television. The course made a token reappearance in the Radical Pedagogies exhibit at the Biennale of 2014, and this led to a full-scale exhibition at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal (2017–18) with a second showing at Garagem Sul (Centro Cultural de Belém Foundation) cultural centre in Portugal. This article explores the reasons for the interest in the course outside the University and possible lessons it might have for us in the age of the massive open online course (MOOC).

Keywords: A305, architecture, design, film, distance teaching

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Biographical note

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A305 HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN 1890–1939; FROM 1975 TO THE PRESENT

Tim Benton, *The Open University*

A strange and wonderful thing happened in November 2017. The prestigious Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal (CCA), founded by Phyllis Lambert, opened an exhibition entirely dedicated to The Open University course *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939*, first presented in 1975 (Fig. 8.1). Accompanying it was a book *The University Is Now on Air* by the exhibition curator Joaquim Moreno, with a photograph of me aged 27 filming Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (A305 TV 13) on the cover (Fig. 8.2). The exhibition provided a thorough documentation of the course, including all the printed and media materials, as well as student comments, explanation of the production processes and comments on the relevance of the course at the time and in the present (Fig. 8.3). The exhibition was restaged at Garagem Sul / Centro Cultural de Belém, a cultural centre in Portugal in 2018 (Fig. 8.4).¹

This trajectory prompts reflection on a number of points. How could a piece of distance teaching of the 1970s seem relevant in the age of the MOOC (massive open online course)? How can the media be best used in teaching? What, if anything, has The Open University to learn today from early examples of its teaching methods? This article aims both to reconstruct something of the history of the course and do it from a contemporary perspective.

The first Open University third-level art-history course – *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* – was originally presented in 1975. The course traced the history of the rise of the modern movement in architecture and design from the period of the Arts and Crafts Movement to the International Style. The agreement with the BBC was that they would equip and staff television and radio studios at Alexandra Palace to make programmes for The Open University for an agreed annual fee. The course included 24 TV and 32 radio programmes and featured a student project. There was rigorous assessment (8 tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and a three-hour exam). Assessment was not of the short-answer kind but in discursive essays or short texts in which students

¹ For a review of this exhibition, see Wright (2019).

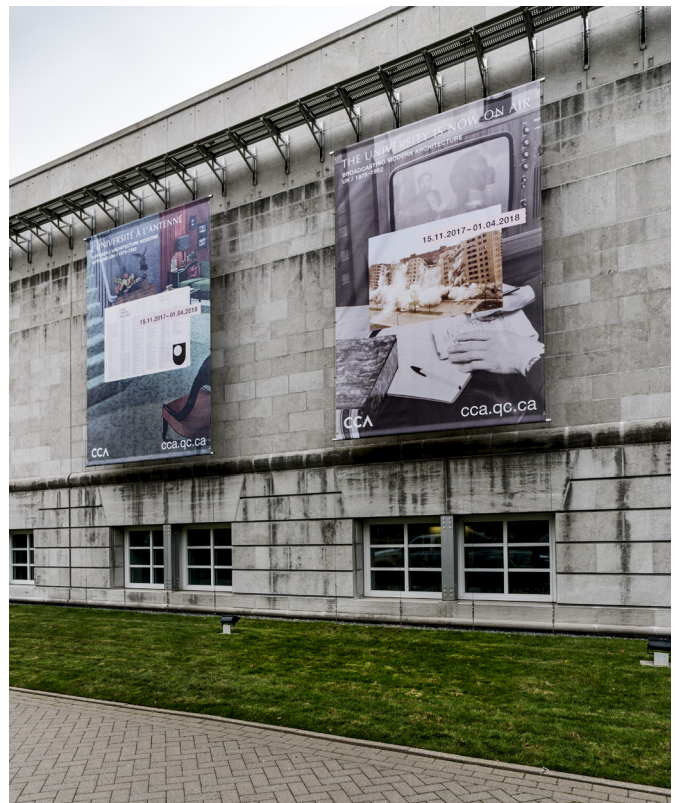


Figure 8.1: A305 exhibited at the Canadian Center for Architecture (CCA), Montreal, in the *The University Is Now on Air, Broadcasting Modern Architecture* exhibition, 15 November 2017 – 1 April 2018. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.2: Joaquim Moreno, *The University Is Now on Air*, CCA, 2017–18. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.3: A305 course materials at *The University Is Now on air* exhibition, CCA, 2017–18. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.4: The CCA exhibition *The University is Now on Air*, re-exhibited at Garagem Sul / Centro Cultural de Belém, Portugal, 2018. (Photo: Tim Benton)

were encouraged to develop their own ideas using the material available to them. Students were provided with a surplus of documentary and other material, requiring them not to reproduce teaching content but to explore and select material in response to questions put to them in the TMAs. Students had personal contact with a tutor (as associate lecturers were called then) who carried out teaching in their comments on the TMAs and in other face-to-face or telephonic contacts with the student. There was a summer school at the University of Sussex and a regular schedule of day schools. The first examiners for A305 were Reyner Banham and Joseph Rykwert, two leading architectural historians who already had worldwide reputations. The course was studied by around 500 students per year.

The CCA exhibition was the culmination of a series of curious events. Working backwards in time, the story begins with the exhibition staged at the Venice Biennale in 2014 at which Professor Beatriz Colomina of Princeton University assembled an exhibition of a set of 'radical' experiments in the teaching of architecture (Fig. 8.5). Each of these teaching initiatives was represented by a tear-sheet containing the basic details of the course, a few photographs and a single publication or pamphlet. As Colomina has pointed out in numerous lectures around the world, radical pedagogies was a continuing collaborative project at Princeton University, beginning in 2010, to investigate architectural education in the 1960s and 1970s, at a

time of unrest, protest, revolutionary rhetoric and direct action across the globe (Colomina et al, 2010). Among the hundreds of token representations of these radical, revolutionary and typically off-campus experiences was 'A305 Open University' (Fig. 8.6).

The presence of this document was in turn due to the fact that the course, *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939*, had been exhibited at the Venice Biennale in the 'Gruppo Scuola' (pedagogical section) in 1976, the period studied by Beatriz Colomina, in the context of violent debates in Italy about the opening of tertiary education to a greater number of students (Fig. 8.7). The decision to open the doors of tertiary education in Italy resulted in the swamping of schools of architecture with ten times the number of students that the schools could handle and stimulated nationwide student protest and debate. The possibility of using distance teaching methods was clearly an option and this made A305 seem highly significant.

The course was presented in Venice like an open book, with the twelve covers of the Units enlarged to frame cubicles where course materials were displayed. Six of the television programmes were dubbed into Italian and presented in the exhibition. They were screened for several years on Italian national television (RAI), thanks to Enzo Scotto Lavina, who worked at RAI and curated the exhibition. He edited the booklet describing the course at the Biennale (Fig. 8.8). As Ripa de Meano explained in the catalogue, experiments



Figure 8.5: Beatrice Colomina and research group, *Radical Pedagogies* exhibition, Venice Biennale, 2014. (Photo: Caroline Maniaque)



Figure 8.6: A305 represented in the *Radical Pedagogies* exhibition, Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Caroline Maniaque)



Figure 8.7: A305 (Units 15–16, 17–18 and 19–20) exhibited at the Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.8: Enzo Scotto Lavina (ed.), booklet in Italian describing A305 and listing the contents, published for the Venice Biennale, 1976.

were being carried out at the University of Venice to see if the innovations of The Open University could be adapted to Italian conditions.

The 1976 Biennale exhibition was in turn owed to the presence at the OU in 1975 of a young Italian architect, Daniele Doglio, sent to England by the Mondadori publishing company in 1975 to find out about distance-teaching methods that the company hoped to exploit in Italy (Fig. 8.9). Daniele and I got on

well – he spoke good English and I speak reasonable Italian – and we shared an interest in architecture. The result was that on his return he pitched for an exhibition of the course at the Biennale, funded by Mondadori. Two televised press conferences were held at the 1976 Biennale on the topic of architectural education, one with representatives from the ministries and experts in teaching, and one with architects, designers and architectural historians (Fig. 8.10).



Figure 8.9: Daniele Doglio, Tim Benton and Giuseppe Samona at the second press conference at the Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Charlotte Benton)

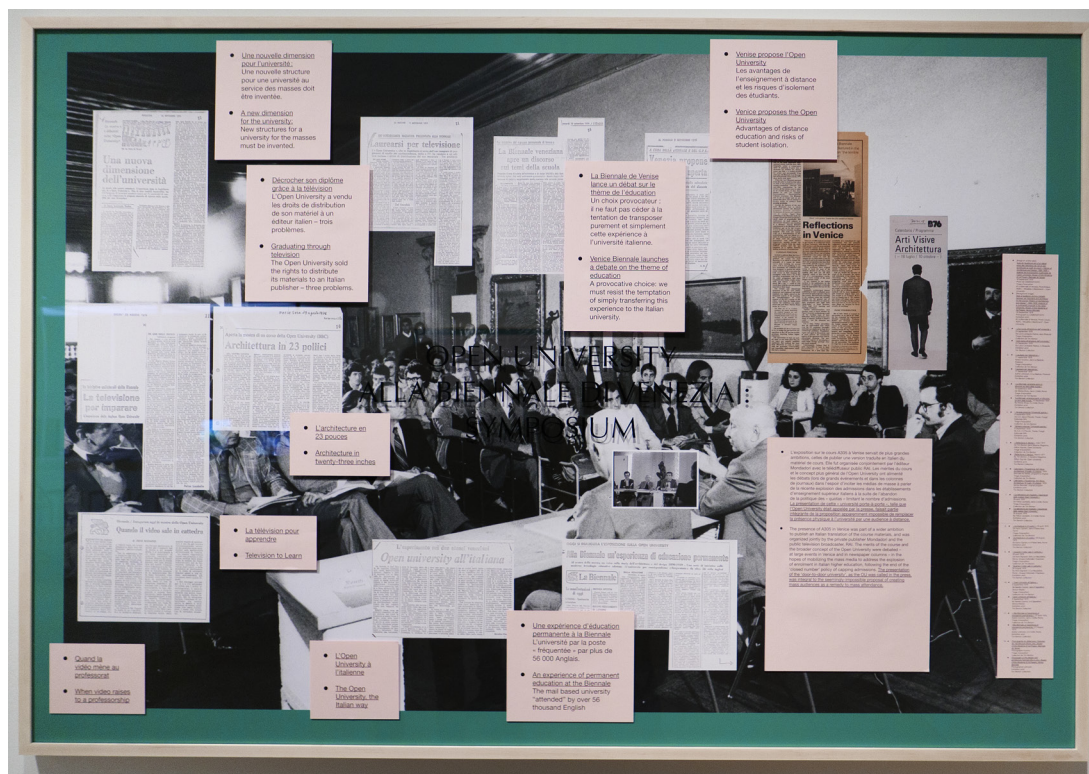


Figure 8.10: Image of a press conference at the Venice Biennale, 1976, presided by the venerable Italian Modernist architect Giuseppe Samona, with Tim Benton on the right, shown at the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

As can be seen, the circumstances leading to the presentation of A305 in these two 'radical' contexts owed more to the means of presenting the course than to its intellectual content. A305 was not a revolutionary course in its theoretical methodology or its political standpoint. It was produced by an established British university in collaboration with 'Aunty BBC', both of which were not exempt from censorial scrutiny and it was aimed at OU students and the general public rather than rebellious architects. But in its delivery and in some aspects of its teaching practice, A305 was highly innovative. And this is what captured the interest of Joaquim Moreno, a Portuguese researcher at Princeton, who was sent off by Professor Colomina to look into The Open University and A305.

Joaquim's starting point was not the events of the 1970s but rather the crisis of architectural, and other, education in 2014. In particular, he wanted to compare the OU's methods with the spread of MOOCs promoted by Harvard and other universities and increasingly imitated across the globe. He was convinced that most MOOCs failed to deliver effective learning experiences. He became fascinated by the history of the BBC and public education in Britain

from the 1930s through to the 1970s, and he became convinced that The Open University model of distance teaching had a great deal to teach today. His starting point was therefore the use of the media and the intersection between the one-to-one relationship of teacher and student and the one-to-many distribution of public broadcasting. But, as his research deepened, he became increasingly interested in the whole logistical project of The Open University course production and the intellectual content of A305. The book he edited and largely wrote himself is an excellent analysis of the course, the OU in its early years and the cultural context, not without criticisms of the course and its methodology (Moreno, 2018).

Moreno assembled a personal archive that included all the texts and set books, the TV and radio programmes and even the scripts for the programmes. I visited the OU Library with him and helped him with his research, but the exhibition and book were entirely of his making. Joaquim recorded a brief account of his ideas for the CCA website (CCA, 2019).

The exhibition was an admirable example of what Joaquim Moreno called 'MOOCs archaeology'. From 1975 to 1982, the TV and radio programmes for

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BBC2		Wednesday tv	
6.40 am – 7.55 pm Open University 6.40 <i>The Animal Kingdom</i> 7.5 Cool: 7.30 <i>Chemistry of Carbon Compounds</i> 7.55 Closedown 11.0 am Colour Play School Story: <i>The Hare and the Tortoise</i>, illustrated by Laurence Henry. Presenters Chloe Ashcroft, Fred Harris (Repeated on BBC1 at 4.0 pm) 11.25 Closedown 5.0 – 7.5 pm Open University 5.0 <i>Open Classroom</i>. 5.25 <i>An Architect at Work</i>. 5.50 <i>Chicago</i>. 6.15 <i>TV as a Source</i>. 6.40 <i>The Necessity for History</i>.	7.45 Colour Pioneers of Photography A series of eight programmes 4: <i>Famous Men and Fair Women</i> Julia Margaret Cameron's Success with the complex wet-collodion process is still one of the peaks in photographic history. Narrator Brian Coe Curator of the Kodak Museum Questions spoken by Joyce Grenfell and Yvonne Gilan Series adviser Aaron Scharf Film cameramen Peter Sargent, Bill Matthews Producer Ann Turner (Next programme: 5 March) 8.10 Colour Dust A Case History	9.0 Colour Top Crown Champions of Crown Green Bowling compete for the BBC2 Masters Trophy. Second Semi-final Fred Hulme (Cheshire) v. Pat Heaney (Derbyshire) After his great win in the quarter-finals Hulme must be favourite for a place in the final. Introduced by Stuart Hall from the green of the Waterloo Hotel, Blackpool. Commentator Harry Rigby Producer Ray Lakeland 9.25 Colour The Love School Beata Beatrix by Robin Chapman	

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THURSDAY tv	
BBC1 6.40 – 7.30 am (UHF only) Open University 6.40 <i>Psychosexual Differences</i>: 1. 7.5 <i>An Architect at Work</i>. 9.5 am For Schools, Colleges 9.5 <i>Brazil</i> Skycrappers and Slums (Repeat) 9.27 <i>It's Your Choice</i> Skills You Need (Repeat) 9.48 <i>Out of the Past</i> Charles Dickens: 1 (Repeat) 10.10 <i>Science Workshop</i> Tracks: 2 (Repeat) 10.32 <i>Scene</i> Britain's Nuclear Defence Narrator Nick Ross Producer Andy Walker 11.5 – 11.20 <i>Maths-in-a Box</i> Weight Watchers (Repeat) 11.30 <i>Search</i> The Welsh Chantists by Harri Webb	

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RADIO 4		Saturday	
Stop the Week with Robert Robinson A personal collection from the week's crop of sense and / or nonsense revealed in informal conversation with Dennis Barker, Dr. Edward de Bono, Benny Green and who knows who else. Musical ideas by Peter Skellern with Nottingham Festival Producer Michael Ember 7.0 News 7.2 Desert Island Discs Valerie Masterson, soprano, discusses with Roy Plomley (in a programme devised by him) the records she would take to a desert island. Producer Ronald Cook (Repeated: Monday 12.27 pm) (Valerie Masterson appears by permission of the English National Opera)	11.15 News preceded by Weather 11.30 Closedown 11.45 – 11.48 Inshore forecast 9.5 am – 12 noon and 2.0 – 5.0 pm Open university VHF only 9.5 <i>Open Forum</i>. 9.25 <i>Inter-Atomic Force Laws</i>. 9.45 <i>Science</i>. 10.10 <i>Is History Bunk?</i> 10.35 <i>Maths</i>. 11.0 <i>Renaissance and Reformation</i>. 11.20 <i>A Good Education</i>. 11.40 <i>Trails of Paul</i>. 2.0 <i>Decision Making in Britain</i>. 2.20 <i>The Digital Computer</i>. 2.40 <i>What is Crime?</i> 3.0 <i>Meat and the French Revolution</i>. 3.20 <i>Development at Oke Sani</i>. 3.40 <i>What is Design?</i> 4.0 <i>National Income and Economic Policy</i>. 4.20 <i>Decisions on Energy</i>. 4.40 <i>Language and Learning</i>.	• Arrivé en 1982, les cours de l'Open University seront relégués vers des tranches horaires beaucoup moins avantageuses – soit tard le soir et très tôt le matin. • By 1982, Open University courses would be relegated to much less favourable slots in the late evening and early hours of the morning.	

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TUESDAY	
RADIO 3 <i>Lavatevi presto</i>, written to be inserted in the pasticcio <i>La Circe</i> presented at Esterhazy in 1788. Clues Ahnaja, Aldo Baldwin (tenors) Michael Devlin (bass), Lausanne Chamber Orchestra conducted by Antal Dorati (Belgian Radio recording) VHF only Open University 5.55 <i>am Instruments and their Music</i>. 6.15 <i>The Best Laid Plans</i>. 6.35 – 6.55 <i>Mechanics and Applied Calculus</i>. 11.40 pm <i>Theories of Art: Plato</i>. 12.0 – 12.20 am <i>What is Design?</i>	

Figure 8.11: Part of a panel in the CCA exhibition showing how The Open University programmes were transmitted in 1975 (left) and 1982 (right). (Photo: Tim Benton)

A305 were broadcast twice a week, on weekdays and weekends, with audiences of up to 40,000 people. A panel in the exhibition showed the transmission times of the first two A305 TV and radio programmes at the end of February 1975, embedded in the BBC public broadcasting (Fig. 8.11). It also charted the erosion of visibility of OU programmes in BBC scheduling. For example, in 1975 A305 TV I *An architect at work* by Geoffrey Baker was transmitted at 8.55 a.m. on Saturday 15 February and again at 5.25 pm on Wednesday 19 February, on BBC2. By 1982, the times were 9.20 p.m. on Sunday and 7.05 a.m. on Sunday. Radio I *An introduction to design* went from 3.40 p.m. on a Saturday in 1975 to midnight on a Tuesday in 1982. Later, OU programmes were transmitted at night and eventually distributed on cassette and DVD.

Since then, the A305 programmes disappeared, apart from a few bootleg copies, especially in the United States where an enterprising entrepreneur included them among his collection of avant-garde films with which he toured the art and architecture schools. The printed Units (course texts) also went underground, represented here and there in libraries but only intermittently in the statute libraries. The Open University courses float between the ephemeral and publication. This is true of all university courses which live on in the memories and notes of students,

but it is more paradoxical in the case of an organisation that produces tangible teaching materials – books and programmes. Many university lecturers translate their courses into books, but the investment in OU courses was significantly higher than most university courses and contained much material worth conserving, such as archival sources and interviews with important protagonists and historians. For example, A305 included many interviews with architects who were active in the 1930s, as well as the historians and critics who wrote the set books used by the students. The more recent strategy in the Arts Faculty of co-publishing course texts with established publishers and delivering media on DVD or other supports has changed this somewhat. Unfortunately, the BBC does not seem to have conserved the original 16mm film and one-inch ampex tapes, and the historian must work with degraded telecine copies of the programmes.

To view A305 from a contemporary perspective, we can do no worse than follow the trajectory of the exhibition at the CCA. On the CCA website is a filmed tour of the exhibition, called 'Counter-tour: Tim Benton's cut' which fleshes out the brief description below (CCA, 2017a). The exhibition began with a room recording the foundation of the OU and presenting the 24-course Units, bound in pairs (Fig. 8.12). The national organisation of the OU, with its then existing regional



Figure 8.12: The 24 'Units' that constituted the core of A305, in the CCA exhibition (Photo: Tim Benton)

- Higher education today is facing a crisis of access and quality; MOOCs (massive open on-line courses) offer a way to reach wider audiences but also raise questions about who produces knowledge and who is responsible for mass education. *The University Is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture* attempts an archaeology of this contemporary situation through a symmetrical inquiry into Open University's televised education, and the history of modern architecture it broadcast in England in the second half of the 1970s, through its third-level course *A305: History of Architecture and Design, 1890–1939*. The course mobilized the convergence of mass media and mass education to broadcast modern architecture to an audience far broader than its enrolled students, reaching BBC primetime evening audiences and the constituents of the architecture culture: practitioners, educators, and students. This overexposure of education in public media transformed both the transmission of knowledge and the knowledge being transmitted, and radically opened up its means of dissemination. The exhibition contrasts A305's historical account of modern architecture with its context in the 1970s, a moment in which architecture itself was in great transformation. It also recreates the shared yet domestic experience of a door-to-door university education directly in the home, and offers insight into the machinery, logistics, and infrastructure required to bring about this educational innovation.

The Open University was a blended system of higher education for adults. It combined radio and TV broadcasts with mail delivered study materials, in-person tutorials, and residential summer sessions on conventional university campuses. It welcomed everybody irrespective of educational background and provided interdisciplinary foundation courses to foster a common denominator of academic preparation across a very diverse student body. The Open University's concept of "openness" contrasts with that of Umberto Eco, as articulated in his *Open Work*, roughly from the same generation. While Eco was interested in ambiguity through a proliferation of meanings, the Open University was interested in opening the doors and walls of higher education and opening up access to knowledge. Broadcasting education, however, implied reducing ambiguity for the sake of effectiveness. This central contrast provides an extraordinary opportunity to analyze the role of mass media and the university in the transformation of architecture culture, and for a close-up on the radical Labourist political and social project of sharing knowledge through open-channel mass media.

Joaquim Moreno

Figure 8.13: Curatorial statement by Joaquim Moreno introducing the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

centres and study centres was also shown, along with a statement of intent by Joaquim, stressing the role of media in the course (Fig. 8.13). He emphasised:

Higher education today is facing a crisis of access and quality; MOOCs [...] offer a way to reach wider audiences but also raise questions about who produces knowledge and who is responsible for mass education. [...] The course [A305] mobilized the convergence of mass media and mass education to broadcast modern architecture to an audience far broader than

its enrolled students, reaching BBC primetime evening audiences and the constituents of the architecture culture: practitioners, educators and students.²

In accordance with the Joaquim's primary interest in the media, the next two rooms presented the 24 TV programmes, sixteen in the first room, eight in the

2 The words are taken from Joaquim Moreno's introductory statement in the exhibition *The University Is Now on Air*, Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal, 15 November 2017 – 1 April 2018.



Figure 8.14: CCA exhibition, room showing the first sixteen TV programmes (the other eight were in the next room). (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.15: A305 TVI screened on one of four television sets in the first room of the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

second. There was a token panel on the wall for each programme, and on each TV set four programmes cycled through continuously (Figs. 8.14 and 8.15). In the four side rooms, the emphasis was on the material history of the course publications, the production site at Walton Hall, the student experience and something of the architectural context in the 1970s, including the crisis in housing and its impact on the course contents below.

Interviews were screened with four of the participants in the course, Nick Levinson (Senior BBC

producer for A305), Tim Benton (course team chair), Stephen Bayley (author of two units and three TV programmes) and Adrian Forty (author of one unit and one radio programme) (CCA, 2017b-e). The first room presented the 'factory' at Walton Hall and the first mailing for A305, including units 1–8 and all the supplementary material (Figs. 8.16 and 8.17). The other rooms focused more on the broadcasting element – TV, radio and radiovision – although space was also allotted to assessment and the project (more on all this later). Despite Joaquim's primary interest in the media the exhibition was scrupulous in showing the essential nature of the printed material and the importance of assessed tuition and examination. The intellectual content of the course was represented by a display of the set books and the key books that influenced the authors at that time.

Joaquim was well aware of the paradox of OU study, the solitary work of the student and the social context of the family and the wider viewing public. He coined the phrase 'Classroom of solitudes' and had this printed over a photograph of a student with her baby about to watch a TV programme (Fig. 8.18). Quotations from student feedback and images of students at work, on the bus or in the home, lined the walls (Fig. 8.19). In the last room, the exhibition pointed to the course team's efforts to relate the housing crisis of the 1970s



Figure 8.16: A305, the first mailing, including Units 1–8, the radiovision booklet, *Documents*, *Images*, the broadcast notes, coloured film strips and supplementary materials. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.17: A305 Course anthology, *Form and Function*, Granada, 1975. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.18: 'Classroom of solitudes': OU student preparing to watch a television programme, as shown in CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

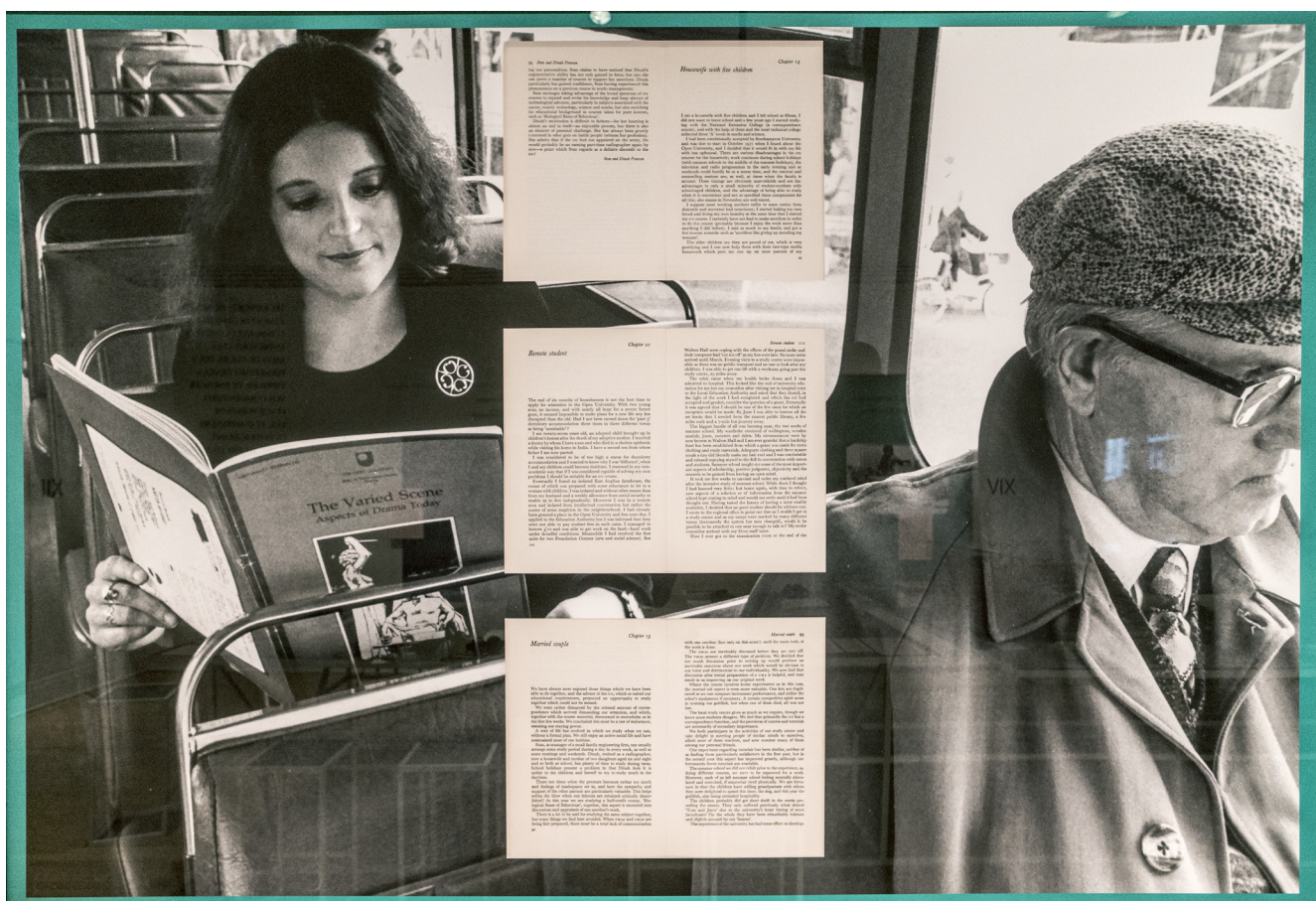


Figure 8.19: Presentation of comments by students on their experience of OU study as shown in CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.20: Final room of the CCA exhibition, showing Units 23 and 24 *The Garden City* and TV 23 (*The semi-detached house*) and TV 14 (*English flats of the thirties*) featuring Quarry Hill flats in Leeds. (Photo: Tim Benton)

with the situation in the 1920s and '30s, for instance in the TV 14 on two English flatted developments of the 1930s and TV 23 on the semi-detached house (Fig. 8.20). Part of TV 14 was a filmed analysis of R.A.H. Livett's Quarry Hill flats in Leeds, a major and controversial housing scheme near the centre of the city, which was demolished in the late 1970s (see also, Benton, 1975b). An A305 student, D. Squire Jones, who was an engineer, wrote his project on the demolition of Quarry Hill. The final TV programme presented housing developments in Britain of the 1960s.

The CCA also hosted lectures and discussions about the course and about the OU. The book *The University is Now on Air* included critical and historical essays by Nick Beech, Laura Carter, Ben Highmore and Joseph Bedford (Moreno, 2018). An occasion to make a direct comparison between the OU and a contemporary MOOC took place at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in November 2018, when a workshop was held comparing A305 with a world-famous MOOC, 'The architectural imagination', offered on their edX platform. With a star cast led by Michael Hays, the ten-week course combines some sophisticated discussion and fancy graphics. The course is free, but you can pay for certification. Take-up, particularly in South America, is huge. I was

invited to stress the differences between the OU method and modern MOOCs (however brilliant the content). Although MOOCs courses can stimulate, they cannot match the learning potential of discursive teaching allowing time for reflection and re-reading, discussions with tutors and an invitation to explore open texts and source material. Our basic teaching is carried by printed texts validated by external examiners. Furthermore, more or less sophisticated graphics and some photographs are no replacement for the experience of moving through a building. To take just one example: The AEG turbine hall by Peter Behrens in Berlin is usually presented by one historic black-and-white photograph of the exterior and perhaps one interior view. We filmed it in colour, giving scale to the building and explaining its structure with moving images. We even filmed from the moving gantry recording the sounds and atmosphere of a working industrial plant. It is worth repeating all this at a time when OU provision has changed rather significantly following successive governments' betrayal of the ideal of life-long learning. Withdrawal of government support for higher education, in order to reduce the national debt, meant that fees for Open University courses rose significantly. The resulting diminution of student numbers has threatened the basis of blended teaching

strategies and the high investment required to provide adequate audio-visual teaching materials.

Chronicle of production of A305

I joined the OU in May 1970 at the age of 25. Before beginning work on A305 in 1972, I had already accumulated some experience of the use of media, contributing three TV and one radio programmes to courses A100 and A201. The Broadcasting and audio-visual sub-committee (BAVSC), responsible for allocating resources to media production, believed that broadcast media should be used on the large population foundation courses, to introduce students to the staff, and for the study of process (things moving). Nick Levinson (Senior Producer) and I encountered some hostility to the idea of investing heavily in media for a single discipline Arts course unlikely to attract more than 500 students. We had to persuade them that although buildings are indeed static, the experience of moving through a building enormously adds to spatial awareness and an understanding of architectural intention. We were fortunate enough to be allotted 24 TV and 32 radio programmes.

The initial course team included myself, Sandra Millikin, Clive Lawless and Ellie Mace (later Chambers) from Institute of Educational Technology (IET), the staff tutor Liz Deighton, Charlotte Benton as research assistant and Lyndsay Gordon as course assistant (as course managers were called then) and the all-important Tony Coulson (picture researcher). The BBC was represented by Nick Levinson (Senior Producer) and Ed Hayward for television and Helen Rapp for radio. Sandra Millikin left after eighteen months and was replaced by Dr Geoffrey Baker, on a two-year secondment from Newcastle University and, after he had to return, Stephen Bayley, who joined the team in the last six months of production. This meant that at any one time, there were only two lecturers and a research assistant writing the material. OU course teams typically include from six to 20 writing members. The 24 A305 Units were 12,000 words long each, and scripts for TV and radio scripts varied from 2,000 to 3,000 words. With such a small writing team, we were always going to have to use consultants. Of the 24 Units, seven were substantially written by invited authors: Reyner Banham (Unit 21), Adrian Forty (Unit 20), William Curtis (Units 17 and 18), Geoffrey Newman (Unit 19), Bridget Wilkins and Stefan Muthesius (Units 5 and 6). Most of these are household names in the fields of architectural and design history. Of the 32 radio programmes, 18 were provided by invited experts, either as scripts or as interviewees and

two of the 24 television programmes were written and presented by consultants. In addition to the 18 Units, the course team also prepared an anthology of texts, *Form and Function* published by Granada (Benton & Benton, 1975), a supplementary volume of texts called *Documents* and three avant-garde picture books, called *Images*.³ *Form and Function* had an after-life in the United States as a textbook with the title *History of Architecture and Design* where it was used as a sourcebook for many years.

Sandra Millikin is an architectural historian specialising on British architecture. She wrote part of Units 3 and 4 and an unfinished draft on Frank Lloyd Wright. She made three excellent TV programmes, on Mackintosh's Hill House, Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House and Rudolf Schindler's Lovell Beach House. Dr Geoffrey Baker was a lecturer at the School of Architecture at Newcastle University, a practising architect and historian, whose books on Le Corbusier's design method are well known. He contributed significantly to the Introductory units with a case study of the Paris Opéra by Charles Garnier. The first television programme was on the house he designed for himself and his family and set up one of the themes of the course: house and home. He remodelled and rewrote most of the units on Frank Lloyd Wright. He made a significant impact on the television programmes, writing and presenting five excellent programmes. Stephen Bayley arrived in the last six months of course production, following Geoffrey Baker's return to Newcastle. He wrote a unit on flats in Britain and another on the housing question, which was also a kind of conclusion about the impact of interwar modern architecture on contemporary Britain, and three television programmes. The rest of the course was written by myself and Charlotte Benton who also edited the *Documents* anthology.

The strategy that Nick Levinson and I worked out for the television programmes was to make as many as possible on 16mm film on location. We wanted to recreate as much as possible the experience of actually visiting a building. In the end, the budget only allowed for fourteen filmed programmes on location, while the remaining ten were made in the studio. In 1975, the OU BBC department was located in Alexandra Palace, occupying the studios that had been used in early television experiments in the 1930s. In 2017, the CCA shot some of the interviews used in the exhibition in

3 *Images* included the expressionist manifesto *Ruf zum Bauen* (Arbeitsrat für Kunst, 1920), Walter Gropius's *Internationale Architektur* (1925) and a selection of images from Erich Mendelsohn's *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (1928).

what was left of these studios (Fig. 8.21). These 25-minute studio programmes were recorded in one hour, allowing for virtually no retakes, using pedestal cameras and graphics mounted on boards. This was partly the consequence of the nature of OU BBC budgets. Certain costs, such as the use of the studio, control room and editing suites were considered 'below the line' because they were part of the capital investment at Alexandra Palace. So, a day in the studio, with associated production and editing facilities, was virtually free, as far as the course budget was concerned. 'Above the line' costs, such as travel, copyright and the hiring of local staff for lighting and transportation, had to be paid for in cash.

Outside broadcast monochrome video units were occasionally used, for example in the film on the London Underground (A305 TV19) and for parts of TV1. We were also able to use the studio as a gallery, introducing pieces of furniture that had been exhibited in 1923 at the Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar (TV 8 *The Bauhaus in Weimar*) or, for TV 17 *Wood or metal?*, comparing wooden furniture manufactured by Heal & Sons with tubular steel furniture made by Pel (Fig. 8.22). This programme was made in 1976, by which time the technology had advanced. The studio was converted to colour video, and we were able to insert substantial filmed sequences into studio programmes. A305 TV 17 also featured 'processes' – cutting dovetail joints and



Figure 8.21: The carcass of the OU/BBC television studios at Alexandra Palace, used for some of the CCA interviews. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.22: A305 TV 17 *Wood or metal?* Dressing the studio set with furniture by Pel. (OU/BBC film stills)

manufacturing tubular steel chairs (Fig. 8.23). We noted earlier that the BAVSC tended to prefer programmes that illustrated 'process'.

One of our arguments for the use of the moving image in the course was that spatial awareness is only really possible with a changing perspective. Zooming or panning on a photograph or on location can simulate movement and create an impression of progression by effective montage, but only physically tracking the camera on a dolly can reproduce the spatial awareness that comes from a changing perspective. This is a particularly important concept for modern architecture. Le Corbusier referred to moving through

a building as a '*promenade architecturale*' and called on architects to adopt the 'Arab lesson', that architecture can only be fully understood in motion. Unfortunately, persuading BBC cameramen to take their cameras off the tripod and mount it on a track or lightweight dolly was too much, especially in the light of the budgets that were allotted. In most cases, film sequences simulated movement through a building by cutting together a sequence of static shots. OU BBC crews had to travel light, and time on location was strictly limited. The filming of the Villa Savoye in Poissy, South of Paris, was made in three BBC days (Fig. 8.24). That meant starting early on one day, driving to Poissy, via



Figure 8.23: A305 TV 17 *Wood or metal?* Filming the manufacture of a tubular steel chair. (OU/BBC film stills)



Figure 8.24: Part of sequence introducing Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in A305 TV 13. (OU/BBC film frames)

the ferry, and setting up for the first shot around 2pm. Filming ended on the third day at 12.00 to allow the crew to return. On that shoot, almost every shot was used, including one where a large insect can be seen crawling across the corner of the lens filter. We were able to use movement in this film, shooting from a car as it approached the house and moving up the ramp with the aid of a lightweight dolly. This sequence, which combined shots taken from the roof of a car, tracking shots on a dolly moving up the ramp and tripod views, followed the presenter as he entered and rose through the house. This sequence matched one used by Le Corbusier himself in a film made in 1931 and exemplified what Le Corbusier called the 'promenade architecturale'. I believe that this fluidity of movement impressed viewers and ensured that the film won a

silver medal at the 7th Congress of Architectural Films in Madrid in 1976 (Fig. 8.25).

Another of our films that won a medal at a media conference in Padua in 1976 was about the 1920s housing settlements in Berlin (A305 TV9 Berlin Siedlungen). The intemperate weather meant that the crew were happy to shoot several sequences from a moving vehicle (Fig. 8.26).

Close cooperation with the BBC was possible because its producers were members of the course team and participated in the design of the course. The OU/BBC producers were almost all new recruits, selected for their academic qualifications as much as their experience of media production. Nick Levinson had a degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art, for example. The top brass at the BBC, however,



Figure 8.25: Nick Levinson and Tim Benton with the silver medal awarded for TV 13 Villa Savoye in 1976. (Photo: OU press office)



Figure 8.26: Nick Levinson and BBC crew filming the Siemensstadt housing settlement in 1973. (Photo: Tim Benton)

were nervous about the OU BBC department. We won prizes at a quarter of the cost of the Music and Arts department in Television Centre at Shepherd's Bush. They believed that most academics lacked the skills of professional presenters and that our scripts were too boring and technical. There was a tension between academic and infotainment standards that was enshrined in the dual write-off that each programme was subject to: one from the course team and the external examiners and one from the BBC. There were frequent disagreements. Over time, academics were progressively excluded from the OUTV programmes, by replacing scripted programmes by collages of interviews and by dubbing the scripts by professional actors. This was deemed to satisfy the public audience but did not serve the interests of effective teaching.

Nick and I were both critical of the style of arts programme perfected in Lord Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* series (broadcast between February and May 1969). The format for these was that Clark was filmed in front of a building delivering a short script. These 'to-cameras' were interspersed with excellent filmed sequences with a voice-over. We wanted to use every second of the precious 24 minutes 20 seconds to present the subject of study. Short to-cameras were only used to introduce the aims of the programme and sometimes to sum up. Our approach was to mimic the visit, exploring the exterior before going in through the front door. The student who properly prepared for the programmes would have already learned something about the building and seen all the key names and dates in print. Film allows you not only to show something but also indicate what's important, by zooming or cutting as well as through a commentary. I learned quickly that word and image are in fierce competition when watching a film. The viewer will quickly lose the thread if he or she cannot see the relationship between what they are seeing and what the voice is saying. Editing a good visual documentary is a constant toing and froing between sequences of images – the film cut – and the text. You write a preliminary text or treatment and then shoot to that. You then see an edited roughcut and will have to change your script, sometimes dramatically, to match it. And so on. This process worked well when academics and producers know and trust each other and less well when media production was put out to independent companies. I like to believe that the A305 TV programmes were effective partly because of this good relationship between word and image.

Eighteen of the 32 radio programmes were conceived as 'Radiovision', taking a lead from Sir John Summerson's radio talks on the classical orders,

which had an accompanying illustrated booklet. This in turn drew on the tradition of using essays in *The Listener* to back up radio programmes in the 1930s. We gave students a *Radiovision Booklet* with six pages of illustrations for each programme, and the presenters referred to these illustrations by number. It must have sounded very strange for any drop-in listeners, who tuned in to the radio programmes every Wednesday and Saturday, to hear presenters refer to 'Figure 1 in your Radiovision Booklet'. The radiovision programmes were particularly successful with students.

Compared to the traditional method of teaching architectural history, with lectures illustrated either by stock black-and-white slides or transparencies shot by the author, television allowed an intensity of experience, scale and information that was quite unique. Pevsner was still teaching the Slade lectures at Cambridge in the 1960s with black-and-white glass transparencies taken in the 1920s and '30s. Television programmes are also a challenge to research and film. The camera is very unforgiving. We need to know at every point what the camera is seeing, what has been altered, what has been damaged and so on. It is less easy to hide behind generalisations and one or two black-and-white photographs. Working on a TV programme often developed into research projects because buildings or objects are effectively primary sources – raw data – that have to be interpreted and explained. For example, the programme on modern wooden and tubular steel furniture around 1930 (TV 17 *Wood or metal?*) developed into an exhibition at the Architectural Association and a publication on the British firms Pel and Cox (Sharp et al, 1977) and an article in *The Architectural Review* on the retail store Heal and Son (Benton, 1978). The radiovision programme I made in 1973 on Le Corbusier's drawings for the Villa Savoye developed into a book first published in French 1984 and later revised and reissued in English in 2007. The illustrations for this radiovision programme were reproduced on an A1 sheet (Fig. 8.27).

The University ruled that transmitted media could never be an 'essential' part of the course, and indeed not all students regularly watched or listened to the programmes. We made every effort, however, to integrate the programmes into the teaching material, listing the TV and radio programmes in the course units. For example, the Unit on Le Corbusier, written by William Curtis, refers throughout to the Villa Savoye, which was the subject of a TV programme and a radiovision programme. Research carried out by Ellie Mace for IET proved not only that a significant majority of A305 students found the programmes helpful or



Figure 8.27: The sheet of illustrations for Radiovision 17 (*Villa Savoye* preparatory drawings) and the back cover of Units 17–18, showing the first and executed plans for the Villa Savoye. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.28: Coloured film strip supplied with each pair of Units, exhibited at the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

very helpful but that many of them referred to them in their exams many months after transmission. An underlying reason for this was our introduction of Broadcast Notes, subsequently widely adopted in Arts courses. Printed in two A4 booklets, the notes provided students with an outline, some preparatory work to do before watching or listening, and some revision and additional notes for use immediately afterwards. The idea was that taking notes during a swiftly flowing media presentation is not a good idea, and we were reluctant to use the modern technique of repeating essential points every five minutes. Furthermore, the notes were helpful for students who either missed the programmes or who wanted to revise their content in preparation for the exam at the end of the course.

The course ran from February to October, with a summer school in July. Assessment was a combination of an end-of-term, invigilated, three-hour examination and eight tutor-marked assignments. The texts, bound in pairs of Units, were published in-house and printed by Martin Cadbury for the OU. We went against the University's house style in adopting double column to facilitate the use of in-text plans and diagrams. We opted for thicker than usual paper to avoid see-through. The half-tone plates were printed separately on art board to maximise the quality and then bound into the end of each pair of Units.

Printing half-tone illustrations in colour was considered too expensive but we managed to exploit a peculiarity in the funding model to provide each pair

of Units with a colour-film strip of twelve frames (Fig. 8.28). We were able to do this by applying to the 'Kit fund', intended to provide students of science and technology with equipment and materials. We even supplied students with a fold-out plastic slide-viewer.

A lesson I learned very quickly is that most people have not been taught to read plans. We made a fundamental decision to have every plan in the Units redrawn to the same convention and include a 'Plan-reading guide' on a buff card, including notes on how to find your way round a building and identify the location of photographs from the plan (Fig. 8.29).

We made a controversial decision to include an eight-week student project, in which students would research an actual building and write it up. This counted for three of nine assignments. Students were required to find archival material – images, plans,

A305 Plan-reading guide

Walls

- 1 Load-bearing, usually brick or masonry
- 2 Partition wall
- 3 Cavity wall of brick or breeze block usually marked as 1
- 4 Low wall or garden wall outside main building
- 5 Wooden partition
- 6 Movable wooden screen
- 7 Wooden or metal balustrade

Apertures

- 8 Glass framed by wood and metal from floor up
- 9 Door
- 10 Window set in a wall
- 11 Niche in wall
- 12 Fireplace

Overhead

- 13 Indicates a change in ceiling level or overhang of upper floors
- 14 Indicates an important structural beam overhead

Entrances

- 15 Main entrance
- 16 Alternative entrance for servants or to garden
- 17 Fitted furniture – seat, dresser
- 18 Fitted cupboard with double doors

Roofs

- 19 Projecting roof seen from above (sloping roof)
- 20 As above but flat roof

Stairs

- 21a Spiral stair (ascending in direction of arrow)
- 21b Straight stairs ascending in direction of arrow
- 22 Stairs down to basement

Circulation

- 23 Indicating areas of circulation in a house (corridors, passages etc.)
- 24 Paved areas on verandas and terraces

Supports

- 25 Wood, stone or concrete pillar
- 26 Steel stanchion
- 27 Flue for fire or boiler
- 28 North point

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| HALL OR H | - Hall |
| LIVING OR LR | - Living or sitting room or parlour |
| DINING OR DR | - Dining room |
| BED OR BR | - Bedroom |
| DRESSING OR D | - Dressing room |
| NURSERY OR N | - Nursery |
| BATH OR B | - Bathroom |
| WASH OR W | - Wash house (clothes) |
| KIT OR K | - Kitchen |
| SC | - Scullery |
| WC OR | - Lavatory |
| STORE OR S | - All forms of storage – coals, pantry, linen cupboard |
| SPACE | - An empty space over a room below |

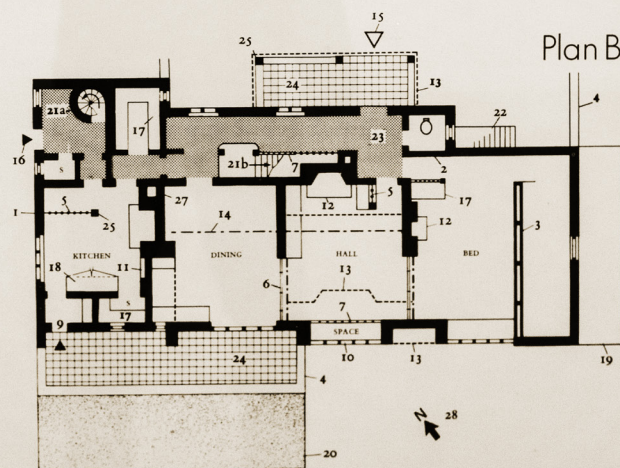
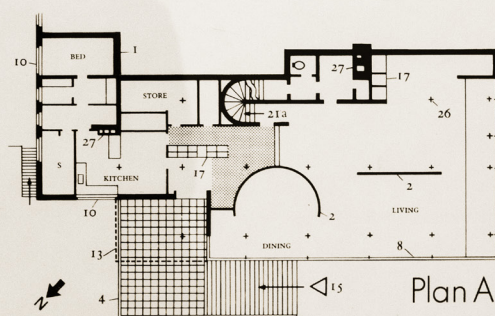


Figure 8.29: A305 Plan reading guide. (Photo: Tim Benton)

documents – to support their work. This ran against a University doctrine that held that students should be able to complete their studies with what we sent them through the post. Projects were reserved for fourth-level courses. The A305 project was considered by students to be one of the most successful parts of the course. The 5,000-word reports deposited in the RIBA library have proved of interest to scholars, who have found material on little studied buildings and those pulled down or altered since the 1970s.

Many of the TV programmes were case studies of individual buildings, a policy born partly out of necessity, and partly to serve as models for the student project. Two radio programmes took this further, tracking the evolution of a research project on a modern house, 66 Froggnal by Colin Lucas of Connell, Ward and Lucas. In the first of these programmes (A305 RV23), I took a series of photographs of the house and we walked through it asking questions without answers (Fig. 8.30). In the second programme, a week later, some of these questions were answered, with an examination of the building history and the legal disputes resulting from the construction, an analysis of the drawings and interviews with both the client and the architect. This programme was supported by the publication in *Documents* of two original articles about

the house. The programme simulated the kind of work students were expected to carry out for their project.

The teaching strategy of the course was to cover the basic history of modern architecture and design in the first sixteen weeks and then focus on more generic themes, with a general orientation towards Britain, to support students in their project. The two Units on British design (A305 19–20) included one on the electric home by Adrian Forty. The next Units included one on mechanical services by Reyner Banham and one on apartment buildings by Stephen Bayley, concentrating on British examples.

The Units were relatively advanced, in British architectural-history teaching at the time, in making extensive use of untranslated French, German, Italian and Russian source material, much of which was published in English for the first time in *Form and Function* and *Documents*. Although our students were not expected to be able to visit libraries, we provided them with a great deal of archival material and a short list of set books that they were required to read.

The course was also unlike courses in most schools of architecture in devoting considerable attention to design history, following the lead of Nikolaus Pevsner and Reyner Banham. Eight of the 24 Units, nine of the 32 radio programmes and six of the 24 TV programmes



Figure 8.30: Sheet of illustrations accompanying radiovision programme 23 on the house by Colin Lucas, 66 Froggnal, Hampstead, displayed in the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

dealt exclusively with design history. A strange consequence of this was that many of the tutors for the course were pioneering the research and teaching of design history in the Polytechnics, for example at Middlessex, Brighton and Leicester. Our tutors were mostly lecturers in Universities and Polytechnics who were attracted to teach the course part time, partly to support their role as teachers and partly as a means of contacting other like-minded teachers and researchers. We played a role in initiating the first of a series of design history conferences in 1976 at Newcastle Polytechnic which turned into the Design History Society and its prestigious journal, edited for ten years by Charlotte Benton. In two articles in *Design Issues*, Clive Dilnot (now professor at The New School for Design, Parsons College) devoted several pages to A305 as part of the origins of design history in Britain (1984a, 1984b).

A305 had a week-long summer school, held at the University of Sussex, which was an extremely intense experience for students and staff. Among the summer school tutors were several of the course tutors but also many University and Polytechnic lecturers invigorated by the lively exchanges with other researchers. Many of those who went on to write books and articles on architecture and design taught at the summer school at least once. We always employed at least one practising architect who ran a plan-reading session for those still anxious about interpreting historic plans and elevations. We were able to visit Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff's De La Warr pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea (1933) as well as a number of other modern or Arts and Crafts buildings in the Brighton area. The summer school, like the student self-help groups, was a fertile forum for discussing approaches to the project as well as any difficulties with the course material and it also exposed students to a wide range of different methodologies and viewpoints.

It has to be said that in methodological terms – a keyword of the 1970s – the course was relatively conventional but in the combined effect of the materials it marked a sea-change in the teaching of architectural history. It was conventional to the extent that many of the Units focused on the 'big-name' architects and worked within the conventions of art history at the time, concerned with the formal similarities and differences that identified modern architecture. On the other hand, we also included many subjects not normally covered by histories of modern architecture, such as the traditional architect Edwin Lutyens, Art Deco and popular and social housing.

We had a considerable drop-in audience among architects, both for the media and the texts, and we

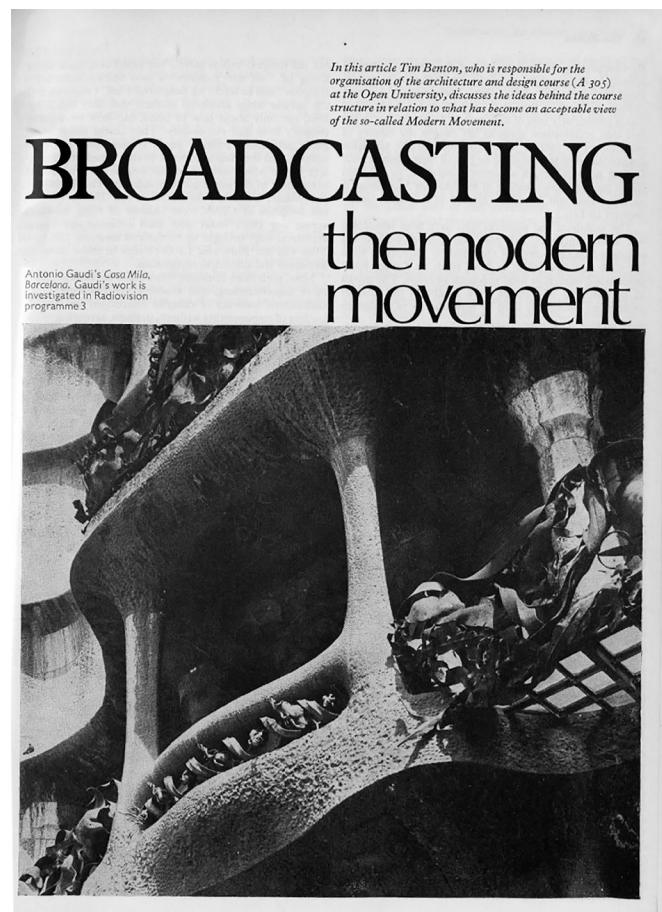


Figure 8.31: Tim Benton, 'Broadcasting the modern movement', *AA Files*, 1975. (Photo: Tim Benton)

encouraged this by publishing articles in *AA Files* and *The Builder* listing the broadcasting schedules (Benton, 1975a) (Fig. 8.31). Debates on the course were held at the RIBA and the Architectural Association. The teaching of architectural and design history in many departments in the UK and in the US were influenced by the course materials, despite its lack of theoretical glamour. The course was conceived as a historical project rather than engaging with current debates, and I believe both approaches are valid.

The starting point for the course was Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, published in 1960. This book was a set book, along with Pevsner's venerable *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (later *Design*) (1936) (in its 1960 edition), Hitchcock's *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1958) and Hitchcock and Johnson's *The International Style* (1932). Another set book was the English edition of Le Corbusier's classic text, published in 1927, as *Towards a New Architecture*. Students had to buy these books, as well as *Form and Function* and a lively market in second-hand books quickly established itself among them. Although the dramatic decline of modernism in architecture was well under way by 1975, accelerated by the collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in

East London in 1968, the course focused on the period 1890–1939. At the end of the course Geoffrey Baker and Stephen Bayley looked at an example of postmodern housing (the Byker wall in Newcastle) and the contemporary crisis in housing.

The permeation of architectural criticism and history by French theory was under way: the semiological tract *Meaning in Architecture* by Charles Jencks and George Baird came out in 1969. Charles Jencks's *Modern Movements in Architecture*, with its semiological dressing, was published in 1973 but Manfredo Tafuri's *Progetto e utopia* (1973) was only translated in 1976 and his modern architecture text books with Francesco Dal Co in 1976. Many of the course tutors were living the postmodernist moment, either as architects or historians, and were also engaged in feminist, semiological and structuralist criticism, which were under-represented in the course. This provided a lively dialogue, as the course progressed, between tutors and central staff and between tutors and students, especially at summer school.

Although the general thrust of the course was biased towards the rise of modern architecture in Europe, Russia and America, the later programmes turned more towards architecture and design in Britain that was not necessarily part of the pure modern movement. We also covered more traditional architecture – Sir Edwin Lutyens, English classicism and art deco, the London Underground and the semi-detached house. We knew that most students would not be able to write about a modern-movement building in their area. Furthermore, we were well aware that most students lived in traditional houses and had broadly traditional taste. We were determined to try to encourage students to express their own views and preferences.

For this reason, as already pointed out, a dominant theme in the course was the house. I was mocked by some architectural critics for asking the question 'What is this like, as a house, to live in?' during the television programme on Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. But I still think it is a relevant question. The course began with a television programme by Geoffrey Baker showing us round the house he designed for himself and his family outside Newcastle (Fig. 8.32). The programme showed both how an architect works towards a design solution but also how the history of the rise of modernism studied in the course was relevant to contemporary practice. In the first radio programme, I introduced students to Siegfried Giedion's concept of anonymous design in *Mechanization Takes Command* (1947) and asked students to look around and ask if they can identify objects transformed by the development of modern design in the twentieth century.

A key figure in constantly reminding us of the need to see the material from a student's perspective was the staff tutor Liz Deighton. She constantly rapped us on the knuckles for using too much unexplained jargon and dropping too many names. Today, the course texts sometimes read as naïve, because they lack the sprinkling of academic keywords with which we now assert our credentials before our peers. They also included a discursive framework. The flow of information was interrupted by 'exercises' and 'discussions' (Fig. 8.33). Students were asked question about what they had read and encourage to make notes that did not reproduce what had been written but interpret it. There followed short paragraphs that provided plausible responses. I look back with nostalgia to a time when we tried to make learning complex things easier.



Figure 8.32: A305 TV | *What is architecture?* Geoffrey Baker explaining the design of his own house. (OU/BBC film stills)

Look at **Plates 35–41** and **Figures 35 and 38**.

1 What sort of overall impression do you think the tubular metal furniture exhibited in the 1928 exhibition might have made [Plates 35–9 and Fig. 38]?

2 Can you detect the use of any other new materials in any of these pieces?

• 1 The first point is that the placing of utilitarian pieces like the hospital furniture [**Plate 36**] next to the ‘private’ furniture is indicative of the exhibition organizers’ programme. The connotations of hygiene, durability and versatility, which attracted designers of tubular steel furniture, could be stressed by exhibiting hospital equipment which palpably has, of necessity, these virtues. Secondly, there is an almost aggressive stress on versatility and ingenuity of construction—the opposite of the ‘standard solutions, incapable of further improvement’ which Breuer and others sought. I am thinking of the use of curving tubes and extreme delicacy of the members. Thirdly, the fact that the designers of these pieces came from all over Europe must have been important in supporting the view that tubular steel was more than a mere Bauhaus fad.

2 The use of moulded fibre-board [**Plate 35**] and plywood [**Plates 39 and 41**] was an important portent for the future. Rietveld, in particular, made many experiments with fibre-board chairs around 1927, as Heinz and Bodo Rasch did, with plywood, around 1927–8. After 1930, plywood and laminated boards of different kinds would be used by many designers, notably Alvar Aalto, in Finland, Josef Albers in Germany and Breuer, after his move to Britain (see Radiovision booklet, programme 30). The Bauhaus stool [**Plate 41**] was a comparative late-comer in this field.●

Figure 8.33: Example of ‘exercise’ (in bold) and ‘discussion’, taken from Units 15–16. (Photo: Tim Benton)

A key lesson I learned is that the biggest difficulty for the student of the visual arts is not that they don’t know what you are trying to teach them, but that they don’t see what the more experienced eye sees in a building or artefact. Giving students experience of seeing a building through the eyes of someone who has explored its history, understands the plan and structure and presents it as a commented sequence of moving images should be, I believe, a corner stone of spreading awareness of the importance of architecture and design, especially when diffused to a larger audience. The glory days of high investment in life-long learning are over and the university has adapted to new realities and new methods. The wealth of opportunity and

dangers of the web and online presentation present new opportunities and challenges. But it is perhaps useful to look back to the ‘world we have lost’.

A305 prompts reflection on the advantages and dangers of combining higher education with mass participation. University students have different needs and expectations from those of a mass audience. This created tensions in the 1970s and ’80s and would continue to do so today. Nevertheless, the ability to present undergraduate teaching materials to a wide audience was extremely valuable. Some MOOCs attract wide audiences through the charisma of the people taking part and because they offer an insight into fashionable and prestigious ideas. This is an important role. Deep learning requires something more: the transference of skills that will enable students to find things out for themselves, to interrogate texts and form judgments based on principles of sound verification. This is all the more necessary when public media are full of opinion and uncorroborated statements. Open University courses aimed to do this by providing a surplus of information which students were expected to interrogate and draw their own conclusions. A discursive element was maintained in the texts with exercises and discussions and through the TMAs, prompting student essays and responses from the tutors. The summer school added a priceless ingredient of continual discussion. The first courses of the OU also prompt reflection on current production standards. Academic quality has not diminished and has in some ways been improved through the practice of co-publishing teaching texts, thus achieving wider diffusion of the printed material and a wider academic scrutiny. But as the diffusion of our printed material has somewhat expanded, our media output has shrunk. The Open University’s concerns about copyright has meant that many excellent audio-visual products are distributed through narrow-casting to our students and almost nobody else. Furthermore, the reduction of funding has meant that a production of 24 TV and 32 radio programmes is unthinkable today.

* I’m grateful for the support of the archivists in the OU Library, and also the help of Elizabeth McKellar (The Open University), in the production of this essay.

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