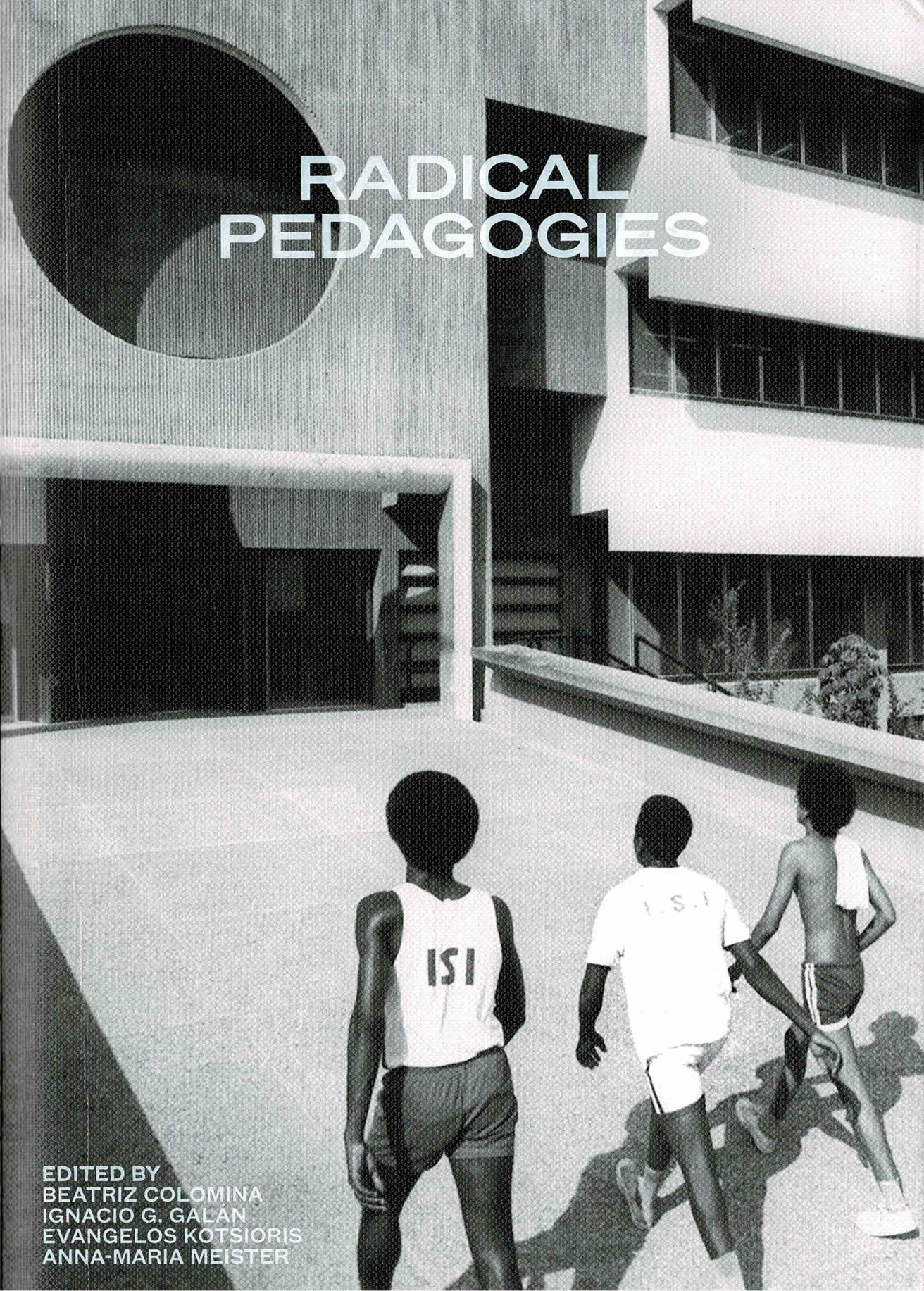
RADICAL PEDAGOGIES



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It is important to consider the tumultuous context in which the studio took place. In the spring of 1970, there was enormous unrest in New Haven and at Yale. The Black Panther trials were in progress, and there were riots in the city and rallies at Yale. Two bombs went off at the Yale hockey rink. The architecture building burned down the spring before the Levittown studio—a "Free the Panthers" banner appeared on the burned shell. There is a note on the syllabus indicating that the studio and the lecture room would be at 165 York rather than in the school. So somehow, this turn toward housing occurred within a density of urban unrest and challenges to normative architectural education. Not by chance, the Yale student journal *Novum Organum* promoted Venturi and Scott Brown's pedagogical projects alongside devastating criticism of the school and its building. The panels of the Learning from Levittown studio reflected this political context with images of poverty and racial inequity.

After the studio, Venturi and Scott Brown were planning a book called "Learning from Levittown"—and in fact there is a manuscript in the archives written with Virginia Carroll, who had been a student in the class—but the book was never completed. Perhaps the strong criticism of their studio had an effect. As Venturi recalled during an interview:

> It's interesting that the heads of the schools weren't very happy about what we did. Even Charles Moore was not very happy about what we were doing at Yale, although you think of Charles Moore connecting with the everyday environment. What did he say once at some conference? "I did not learn anything from Las Vegas."[7]

On the other hand, Scott Brown was quick to point out during the same interview that, under Moore's deanship, the Yale School of Architecture allowed them to take all the semester credits for the students, so that the Learning from Levittown studio was the equivalent of four courses relative to all the reading and research it required (which explains the elaborate syllabus and extensive bibliography they had prepared). All the students did during the semester was this studio: design, research, teaching, and communication—all combined into one collaborative experience.

Perhaps not by chance, Venturi gave up teaching right after the Learning from Levittown studio, while Scott Brown remained active in the classroom. Part of the research later materialized in the exhibition *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* at the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian Art Museum in Washington in 1976, where Venturi, Scott Brown, and Steve Izenour put together the signs and symbols of the commercial strip and the suburban home, in a way reuniting Learning from Las Vegas and Learning from Levittown.

< "Free the Panthers" banner on the burned shell of the Yale School of Art and Architecture building, New Haven, CT, 1970.

<< "Learning from Levittown" presentation panel, 1970.

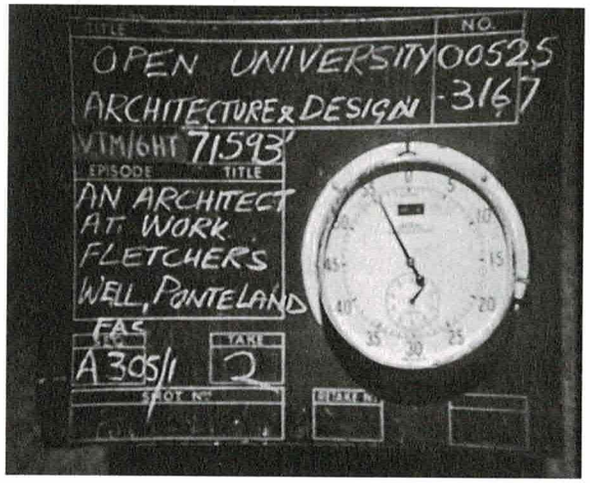
1. Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, RHA studio brief, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Philadelphia.
2. Beatriz Colomina, "Learning from Levittown: A Conversation with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown," in *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscape*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008), 49–69.
3. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, "From La Tourette to Levittown," *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 138. Izenour had been a student teaching assistant in the studio.
4. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).
5. Colomina, "Learning from Levittown: A Conversation," 49–69.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

ON AIR: LEARNING THROUGH THE WAVES

Joaquim Moreno

Protagonists Tim Benton (1945–), Charlotte Benton (1944–), Geoffrey Baker (1931–), Sandra Millikin, Adrian Forty (1948–), Stephen Bayley (1951–), Dennis Sharp (1933–2010), Reyner Banham (1922–1988), William Curtis (1948–), Aaron Scharf (1922–1993), Nick Levinson
Institution Open University, Arts Faculty
Location United Kingdom
Dates 1975–1982

"A305: History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939" was a groundbreaking Open University (OU) arts course broadcast on BBC between 1975 and 1982, with a total enrollment of around two thousand students. Also known as the "University of the Air," the OU was "open to people, to places, to methods and to ideas,"[1] in the inaugural words of its first chancellor, Lord Crowther. Sharing the space opened up by television and radio, it reached well beyond the cloisters of conventional universities, entering the domestic realm of an unseen and unspecified audience—not just young people of student age, but the general population. Academic discourse had to learn how to speak to a much broader audience. Established in 1969—but first proposed by the Labour Party leader Harold Wilson in 1963—this new institution was intended to be a shared public resource that mobilized mass media to make university teaching accessible to less affluent parts of society. This was higher education for the "second machine age," to paraphrase Reyner Banham, conceived to increase social resilience and literacy to prepare people for the challenges of the age of information.



The new media environment and the new audience demanded a new message—a new way of writing history, with new voices writing new narratives about new protagonists and new themes. Architecture history was on air and the TV set was asking common questions about notable buildings and sometimes debating common problems about the built environment, inviting common audiences to use their own experience to learn from their surroundings, or explaining the symbolic function of design through the very radio or TV set that was broadcasting the program.

Roughly eight hours of film, ten hours of audio, and almost two thousand printed pages were produced and edited by the course team, the BBC's Arts Faculty, and the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology specifically for the A305 curriculum. This mass of pedagogical material was distributed across twenty-four television broadcasts, each one corresponding to a course unit, complemented by thirty-two radio programs, twelve course unit booklets, five supplementary booklets and an anthology of primary source texts called *Form and Function: A Source Book for the History Architecture and Design 1890–1939*. Instead of a syllabus, A305 had a broadcasting schedule prefaced with precise specifications about the different structures of its television and radio programs. TV programs were dedicated to the experience of visiting buildings and inquired about the ways of living they facilitated. Radio programs were, mostly, interviews and presentations by prominent architects, designers, and architectural historians. While television concentrated on objects and object lessons and asked the audience to mobilize their experience to learn, radio offered the opportunity to hear the protagonists of modern architecture address the audience directly. The accompanying *Radiovision Booklet* enriched most of the radio programs with sequences of selected images, while the *Broadcasting Supplements*, with guiding texts, allowed students to experience the broadcasts unencumbered by note taking.

New learning materials and new means of transmission and circulation of information required new means of production. The wider OU project, which effectively dematerialized the transmission of knowledge, required industrial-scale infrastructure. The university's campus had begun to grow in a piecemeal way on a former greenfield site in

< Open University tutor working from home. Telephone tutorials enabled those who could not attend face-to-face tutorials to receive support, 1988.

Milton Keynes. A vast machine for the dissemination of knowledge, it relied on room-sized computers, robust logistical networks, and shared telecommunications infrastructure to produce the support materials for the broadcast components and to distribute those materials throughout the country. The entire operation was managed by a new mixture of industrial and academic professionals.

Much like television, this infrastructure was based on the premise of centralized production and domestic reception—the point being that students in this new hybrid educational system should be able to study without leaving home. A web of local and regional centers with libraries of audiovisual recordings ensured that even those living in areas without TV coverage could attend class.

The circulation of knowledge through seemingly immaterial waves had material consequences, in the form of a whole new architecture of production, storage, and distribution. A vast network of tutors, reachable by phone or mail, enabled another feedback loop of personalized support. The OU mobilized, in fact, the biggest printing press of the time and the biggest postal operation in the UK. Both were components of larger networks that distilled the contents of the courses into formats compatible with small mail packages, adjusted broadcast times to the pace of study, and produced supporting material for tutors to ensure uniform grading.

At the same time, the medium of broadcasting transformed the spaces of reception, inventing a new social collective. While education no longer provided a point of physical convergence, the synchronized periods of study produced a shared sense of belonging, countering the loneliness of studying at home. Acquiring a TV set became a form of subsidizing your education, of enabling a private space to respond to a public mandate, much like bringing your own chair to class. The black and white (and soon color) TV set became a means for the state to fulfill the rights to education of each individual. It also offered the tools for emancipation from its own domestic setting—a setting still dominated by hierarchical dynamics and gender discrimination.

Finally, A305 not only spoke to a large and dispersed audience but listened to it. Both tutoring and recordkeeping provided the feedback that sought to make the whole system more effective. The course not only taught through the eyes of modernist architects and historians but also surveyed the impact of modern architecture across Britain from the perspective of its students. Research did not stop with the creation of the syllabus but became a continuous process of recording, editing, and surveying. In other words, listening. A305 added other voices, vectors, and visions to the history of modern architecture. Student feedback configured an alternative map of modern architecture—one in which the voices of its protagonists coincided with their own experiences of the intense transformation of everyday life. The course pursued that relation, seeking to translate the students' experiences into learning opportunities. The course's attention to anonymous objects (and to the flows of energy and information that ran through them) and to contemporary housing debates—addressing both working-class social housing and monotonous middle-class semidetached houses in the suburbs—made the students the real protagonists of their learning and incorporated their voices back into the information loop that A305 set in motion.[2]

<< "What is Architecture: An Architect at Work." Television broadcast 1 of History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939, written by Geoffrey Baker, directed by Edward Hayward, and produced the BBC/Open University. Aired BBC2, February 15, 1975.

1. For the full transcript see: https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/pdf/script/script:5747089b4a53f
2. For a fuller discussion of A305: History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939 see my *The University Is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2018).

Front cover Arieh Sharon, Ife University, Nigeria, 1960s. **Inside front cover** Driftwood village, Experiments in Environment workshop, 1968. **Back cover** Demonstration in the central hall of the FAU-USP building designed by Vilanova Artigas. Photograph by Raul Garcez. **Inside back cover** Gyorgy Kepes, 1967. Photograph by Ivan Massar.

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