gta Films : Publikation zu einer Ausstellung am gta der ETH Zürich

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Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich
ZORA URL: https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-141385
Published Version

Originally published at:
Along with writings, sketches, photographs, and plans, the gta Archives has also amassed important film material. To date, however, this reservoir of knowledge and recollections has remained largely unexamined. This substantial collection of audio-visual documents, in different formats, encompasses films by architects, as well as about architects, buildings, and cities. It includes various kinds of documentation, from recordings of inaugural lectures and discussion panels to materials used for teaching and research, stretching to films that were intended for promotional purposes. In short, this repository consists of a diverse set of fragile materials that has been little or not at all researched. Studying this repository is now a pressing matter, not least for conservation reasons.

The exhibition gta Films is conceived as a commentary on the gta’s 50th anniversary. It foregrounds the fact that our ability to envision the institute’s past depends upon institutional mechanisms and preserved sources. From this perspective, films occupy a paradoxical position: on the one hand, they have been preserved in architectural archives like the gta Archives, yet at the same time these same films are largely absent from the architectural histories constructed with the help of such archives. This state of affairs corresponds to a general tendency in the practice of architectural history, where preference is given to static documents. This is all the more surprising considering the fact that during the twentieth century architectural practice embraced the moving image to treat spatial questions, a move that deeply influenced architectural discourse, documentation, propaganda, and teaching. The use of computer-generated renderings and the impending impact of virtual reality are convincing illustrations that the moving image remains a powerful and relevant medium in architecture. In this sense, the exhibition gta Films does not claim to have exhausted the research into this format, or for that matter to be conclusive, but instead represents a point of departure from which to query the many facets of the relationship between film and architecture, or indeed films and architects, and to propel an exploration and appraisal of the rich filmic repository of the gta Archives.

During the course of the exhibition, 15 films are displayed at different locations in the HIL building at the ETH Zurich Hönggerberg campus. The films differ in historical context, content, genre, and mode of production: they range from the 1930s to 1990s, from buildings under construction to architects’ congresses, from early documentaries about cities to promotional films about prefabrication, and from amateur recordings to state television productions. The exhibition encourages visitors to consider these archival materials as a medium of representation and memory in the awareness that the topics and questions addressed and discussed in them continue to lie at the heart of current debates in architectural history.
Situation plan
HIL D
Film Nr: 1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/11/14/15
Alberto Camenzind – Architecte presents a conversation between Swiss architect and ETH professor Alberto Camenzind (1914–2004) and Swiss journalist Bertil Galland (b.1931). The discussion takes place in the architect’s house in Astano. The garden porch, the armchairs by the fireplace, and the colonnade on the upper floor provide viewers with three perspectives on this domestic space that differ in lighting conditions and privacy. These changes in setting correspond to changes in the conversation. As Galland quizzes Camenzind on both his private life—his family and upbringing, his relationship with rural and urban culture—and his professional career, the architect positions himself in the history of the region, evoking the relevance of the engineers, builders, and architects of Ticino. As a result, the viewer is presented with a staged intimacy that translates the public encounter with the influential architect into a domestic scene. gta Films exhibits Alberto Camenzind – Architecte next to four other films that belong to the same genre. Taken together, these documents are more than mere personal portraits: they testify to the role that film as a medium played in constructing the image of the architect in the twentieth century.
Die Welt, in der wir wohnen – Rudolf Olgiati presents Swiss architect Rudolf Olgiati (1910–1995) in the wider context of the geography and culture of Canton Graubünden. Through montage, the film first weaves and then unravels three narrative threads: Olgiati’s intellectual affinities and affiliations, a collection of his housing projects, and the anonymous architecture of the Alps. One example of this approach is the close-ups of the window frames taken from both indoors and outdoors, whereby the focus on one particular window is presented recursively in formal relation to the windows traditionally found in Graubünden. Another is the sequencing of scenes where Olgiati reads passages from Le Corbusier’s (1887–1965) theories on proportions with views of his own built projects, a technique that assists the Graubünden architect in embedding modernist references into his own work. In addition, footage in which the camera moves from the inside to the outside of Olgiati’s projects, as well as all around them, evokes a link between his freestanding buildings and their surroundings through views of the distant Alpine landscape.
This film celebrates the 80th birthday of Swiss architect and ETH Professor Alfred Roth (1903–1998). The source material is a conversation lead by Roth in the Fellowship Home in Zurich. Realized in 1960–1961, the building combines rooms for students with Roth’s own apartment. The film portrays the architect as he moves through the main living and working spaces, a tour during which Roth narrates stories of friendship and exchange, evoking numerous figures including Le Corbusier (1887–1965), Willi Baumeister (1889–1955), and Max Bill (1908–1994). One feature of the Fellowship Home is an enfilade of niches designed to display Roth’s art collection. During the film, he speaks in front of Composition in Red of 1930 by Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), which he considered to be the most important artwork he owned. In front of this painting, Roth makes a plea to reconsider architecture and the arts as universal metaphors for twentieth century life. At the same time, viewers of the film are presented with a more specific situation: the translation of Roth’s elective affinities, intellectual encounters, professional commissions, and pedagogical vocation into a concrete domestic environment.
Messias des Neuen Bauens celebrates the centenary of the birth of the Swiss architect and the Bauhaus’s second director Hannes Meyer (1889–1954). The East German production constructs Meyer’s biography as the narrative of a revolutionary who rejected his wealthy upbringing, lived by his vanguardist beliefs, and ended his life in isolation. Viewers are thus drawn into the film as spectators of a complex *mise-en-scène*. On the one hand, a series of interviews with historians and with Meyer’s daughter stage the storytelling about Meyer’s life as the gradual rediscovery of a forgotten hero. On the other hand, a broad selection of iconographic material reconstructs Meyer’s life as a path towards social and political enlightenment, which culminates in the belief that architecture could solve the problems of modern society. *gta Films* exhibits this film alongside four other architects’ portraits. In contrast to the other films, however, *Messias des Neuen Bauens* uses historical footage, photographs of his executed and unrealized projects, and animations of portraits of Meyer to resurrect the architect in the service of East German architecture. However, this encounter between architecture and politics not only took place on-screen, but also in the film’s own historical circumstances. Carla Kalkbrenner (b.1953) undertook the project in the midst of the epochal transformations that culminated in the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. Set to be broadcast in October, the film had to be rescheduled to a midnight slot after Egon Krenz (b.1937) was appointed leader of the German Democratic Republic and an interview with him was aired in its place.
Häuser nach Noten

Häuser nach Noten was produced for television by Rudolf Haase (1920–2013), former head of the Hans Kayser Institute forFundamental Harmonic Research at the Hochschule fur Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. The film aims to associate the ideas on “harmonics” developed by the institute with those of “harmony” cultivated among architects. It focuses in particular on the work of Swiss architect André Marie Albert Studer (1926–2007) and on his strong interest in music and architecture. As a consequence, a number of Studer’s built projects are described in the film as a result of a careful design process that explicitly related musical scores with architectural plans. In several scenes, Studer appears seated at a piano, improvising musical compositions based on the spatial intervals of his floor plans. These scenes are key moments in Haase’s analysis: they translate the logic of Studer’s buildings into a series of stereometric figures, informational graphics, and experimental operations. Studer’s approach is supported by testimony from a number of children who express a preference for his architecture over “modern” alternatives. As a result, Studer emerges from this film not only as a prolific professional, but also as a mystic initiated into the riddles of Pythagoreanism.

Häuser nach Noten
Rudolf Haase, Wolf-Dieter Hugelmann
1974
Various locations in Canton Zurich, Switzerland
40 min
gta Archives, ETH Zurich: 119-22
© Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF)
EXPO features the national exhibition of 1964 in Lausanne (Expo64). The film was produced solely for a 1996 gta Institute exhibition about Swiss architect and ETH professor Alberto Camenzind (1914–2004), who was the chief architect of the Expo64. The film is a unique montage of different visual and audio recordings that all date from different years. The soundtrack derives from an interview that Bertil Galland (b. 1931) conducted with Camenzind in 1987, which is also featured in gta Films with Alberto Camenzind – Architecte. This combination of materials presents the viewers with scenes in which image and sound are often desynchronized yet successfully produce a retroactive commentary of the project. The film starts with Camenzind being asked about his role in the Expo, accompanied by footage of the construction site and the inauguration. The narrative, however, then changes dramatically, with images taken using a different cinematic technique—a camera mounted on a monorail, making the viewers direct visitors to the event. This motion through the spaces of the pavilion complex underscores Camenzind’s conceptions of architecture and his discourse on the notion of “atmosphere.”
In the early 1930s, German journalist Heinrich Hauser (1901–1955) made a trip to the USA, visiting, in his own words, “the heart of the continent,” namely Chicago. As a filmmaker, photographer, farmer, and globetrotter, Hauser constructed a critical yet comprehensive narrative on the city. On the one hand, the camera follows the many flows that daily enter Chicago from the peripheries: products, commuters, boats, trains, cars. As it does so, it constructs impressive portraits of the works that dramatically changed the urban landscape at the turn of the twentieth century: the high-rises, the warehouses, the elevated train tracks. On the other hand, the film offers critical visions of the living conditions in Chicago and its suburbs, contrasting industrial boom with urban poverty. Hauser worked in the same genre as Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt of 1927 by Walter Ruttmann (1887–1941). He investigates the city’s social, political, and economic problems, thematizing mechanization, homelessness, and mass leisure. In contrast to Ruttmann, however, Hauser’s camera often pays tribute to the avant-garde admiration for Chicago’s architecture. The film reveals a logic and phenomena that are still relevant for today’s viewers.
Chicago,
Herz des Kontinents Amerika, hat Zugang zu zwei Meeren durch große Wasserstraßen.
This TV documentary of 1998 features a group of Chicago notables as they watch and discuss Heinrich Hauser’s 1931 film Weltstadt in Flegeljahren: Ein Bericht über Chicago. The film pivots on their discussion about past and present, which Wilfried Reichart (b.1937) and Hans-Ulrich Werner (b.1954) render through a sophisticated vision and sound approach. For example, the film makes use of the split-screen technique, in this case used to place scenes of the Chicago of the 1930s and 1990s side by side. The contrast between colored and black-and-white images successfully delineates — through time and space — the urban transformations that have made Chicago a laboratory of modern life. In addition, the camera often mirrors Hauser’s journalistic gaze, capturing the discussants gesticulating in front of the screen in the act of recalling their memories of the city.
Das Bauhaus und die DDR

This documentary captures the celebrations and encounters during the third Bauhaus Colloquium, set against the background of the centenary of the birth of Walter Gropius (1883–1969), the founder of the institution. The film intersects politics, architecture, history, and media. Produced by East German state television, *Das Bauhaus und die DDR* ostensibly attempts to construct a comprehensive perspective on the history of the Bauhaus for its viewers. The version held in the gta Archives, however, reveals a perspective that is, in retrospect, far from all-embracing. In fact, the film appears to evade the problematic phases that Bauhaus modernism went through, including its ostracism during East Germany’s campaign against functionalism in the first postwar decade. Instead, it echoes the attempt to rehabilitate the position of the Bauhaus and its design principles in East German society that began in the late 1950s. The film focuses on well-known protagonists of Bauhaus history, namely Gropius and the buildings in Dessau. Oral testimonies comment on a well-chosen visual collection of indoor furniture, fabrics and construction details, staging a recognition of the Bauhaus as integral to the cultural heritage of the German Democratic Republic.

Das Bauhaus und die DDR
1983
Weimar and Dessau, German Democratic Republic
c.25 min
gta Archives, ETH Zurich: 119-18
© Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)
**Variel System**

**Variel System** illustrates the production rationale behind Variel AG, a company founded in 1963 by Swiss architect Fritz Stucky (1929–2014) specialized in building prefabrication. The film touches upon many of the aspects that characterized the Swiss building industry as it developed during the Cold War. Factories, business interests, trade activities, and the relation between industry and architects are interwoven to showcase Variel’s architectural solution to the question of prefabrication. This is centered on two elements: the production of preassembled spatial modules with the same dimension as those of standard shipping containers to facilitate their transportation, and the assembly of modular buildings based on heavy lifting cranes. Moreover, the film reveals the complex logistics undertaken by Variel to export Swiss products to decolonized North Africa and the Middle East. Reflecting the portrayed architectural solution, the film was produced based on a modular logic that allowed the assemblage of numerous different variations generated from a single message. The gta Archives hold several versions of the film. Each one of them differs in length, language, and cut. Despite these differences, however, all of these versions adhere to one and the same objective: to promote Variel by instructing viewers on its technological innovations, and to facilitate the commercialization of its products. **gta Films** exhibits **Variel System** in the newly inaugurated ETH building of the Institute of Technology in Architecture (ITA), providing visitors with a perspective from which to query the development of mechanization in building production—from the economy of past prefabrication to the vision of future robotic fabrication.
The Halen housing complex is a settlement designed and built from 1955 to 1962 in a suburb of Berne by the Swiss architectural office Atelier 5. Niklaus Morgenthaler (1918–2001) played an important role in Atelier 5 in the execution of this project, in this case filmmaker and architect being one and the same person. Halen guides the viewer to discover the settlement by following its residents as they walk between the buildings. Special focus is given to children and their spontaneous appropriation of both private and collective spaces. The film juxtaposes sequences of the actual buildings with images of traditional settlements in North Africa, mediating the approach of postwar modernism of basing new housing projects on distant references of domesticity. The soundtrack is an important feature of this film, and it arguably operates on multiple levels. First, it blends two well-known songs—“Going Home” by The Rolling Stones (1966) and “Don’t Worry Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin (1988)—into a positive and uninterrupted background that translates the mood of the residents recorded by the images into music. Second, the soundtrack expresses the association of Atelier 5 with the countercultural scene in Berne. Third, the success of this experiment in collective living is implied by the historical gap of the more than two decades between the two songs. This short film is therefore something more than a piece of architectural history: it is a montage that overlays views of the terraced architecture of the Halen housing complex, of its public places and stairs, with the perceived impressions of its various social residents and the expectations of its architects.
Situation plan
HIL E
Film Nr: 12/13
Written together with Dutch architect Mart Stam (1899–1986), this documentary directed by Ella Bergmann-Michel (1895–1971) records everyday life at the Budge Heim, a newly built retirement home designed by Werner Max Moser (1896–1970) and Stam for the Henry und Emma Budge Stiftung on the outskirts of Frankfurt am Main. Between 1931 and 1933, Bergmann-Michel produced a series of pioneering documentary films that embraced an avant-garde approach and promoted modern architecture in Germany through socially engaged narratives. Besides emphasizing modernism as an aesthetic, Bergmann-Michel was equally interested in showing real living conditions and the social implications of architecture. In particular, Wo wohnen alte Leute? contrasts the old with the new, juxtaposing a sequence of scenes conveying daily life in the old parts of Frankfurt with the lives of the elderly in the spacious, light-flooded, modernly equipped rooms served by collective facilities in the Budge Heim. Moreover, by showing how modern technologies and materials are assimilated into the daily life of the residents, the film aims to promote an architecture capable of reconciling organized conviviality and individual space. The film opens with scenes of the townscape of central Frankfurt with shots of its dark and narrow streets and alleyways. In contrast to the grayness of the initial scenes, the footage of the newly built retirement home are lively and dynamic. The narrative unfolds to focus on well-lit, clean, and orderly equipped interiors. This dialectic deliberately serves to demonstrate that architecture should respond to modern advancements while still remaining loyal to a humanistic agenda. Wo wohnen alte Leute? is in addition particularly interesting for its use of animated diagrams to illustrate the functionalist building program.
dort
wohnen alte Leute

ALTERSHEIM
GRÜNLÄCHEN
UND RUHE

[Images of architectural designs and photographs of buildings]
Zett-Haus

The film illustrates the entire construction process of the Zett Haus, a multi-use building in Zurich that included commercial stores, apartments, a restaurant, a swimming pool on the terrace, and a cinema. Designed by Rudolf Steiger (1900–1982), Carl Hubacher (1897–1990) and Robert Winkler (1898–1973), the building was executed in 1932. The narrative takes a chronological approach. It begins with views of the demolition of the previous neoclassical-style house, and then proceeds by offering broad insights into the construction phases, continuing until the building’s completion. The film reaches its climax with a scene showing the residents enjoying an evening swimming pool party with a splendid view out over Zurich. Throughout the film, views of the construction site are interspersed with didactic texts about the modern techniques applied in the architecture of the building, diagrams and drawings of the project, as well as details of the materials adopted. Long shots of the city’s skyline and close-ups of men at work are instrumental techniques that serve as pointers to the viewer to appreciate the importance of this innovative architectural project of the early 1930s. In addition to being a valuable record of a construction process, Zett-Haus is also a historical document revealing the dramatic urban transformations that took place in Zurich in the first half of the twentieth century.
The Hungarian born artist and Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) produced Architects’ Congress to promote the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM). The film was commissioned by CIAM General Secretary Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) to document the fourth CIAM congress held aboard the Greek cruise ship *Patris II* between 29 July and 31 August 1933. The event took place as a round-trip between Marseille and Piraeus, stopping for an extended sojourn in the Cyclades and an official reception in Athens. Although the film has to date not received as much attention as other works by Moholy-Nagy, it nonetheless treats the subject with his characteristic originality. For example, the long scene in which a camera follows a chain of cups passing from hand to hand during the presentation and analysis of a city map is a demonstration of Moholy-Nagy’s experimental research into montage and parallel editing. Scenes of Mediterranean landscapes and cities are interspersed with close-ups showing ongoing work, plenary sessions, and spontaneous leisure time as well as visits to anonymous architecture. Architects’ Congress is also an important primary source for architectural historians studying this turning point in modernism. It captures the social and interactive aspects of a unique collective endeavor in the history of modern architecture that are missing from other sources. Together with Hans Richter’s *Die Neue Wohnung* of 1930, this belongs to the most significant filmic material held by the gta Archives.
This film presents the sanatorium Bella Lui in Montana (Canton Wallis, Switzerland), designed by Arnold Itten (1900–1953), Rudolf Steiger (1900–1982), and Flora Steiger-Crawford (1899–1991), and built between 1928 and 1930. Despite its brevity, the film is embedded in a larger context. Around 1930, the moving image became a significant promotional instrument, which avant-garde architects adopted to present their use of new building techniques, materials, and furniture. Part of this trend, Bella Lui is a showcase of situations: from Steiger’s windows and door details, to the Antimott chairs and the smoking tables by Max Ernst Haefeli (1901–1976) in the main hall of the sanatorium. The version included in gta Films records a sequence of tests. The goal was to find the right technique to stage the “animation” of the glass doors of the dining area of the sanatorium: the desired effect is the opening of both doors while the camera moves across the threshold. In the well-known film Die Neue Wohnung of 1930, Hans Richter (1888–1976) produced a similar result by animating domestic interiors with the technique of stop motion. Bella Lui instead achieves this effect with the disappearance of the human operator, who moves the doors while trying to remain off-screen as the camera moves through them. Nevertheless, as shown by the numerous tests recorded in the film, this technique was difficult to achieve. To thematize these trials, Bella Lui is displayed in conjunction with the main portals of the HIL building on the ETH Zurich Hönggerberg campus, which are opened by means of automatic mechanisms. Exploiting these devices as “objets trouvés,” gta Films juxtaposes the repeated trial runs of the manually operated doors in the film with the set of mechanically powered doors on the ETH campus. This display provides visitors with a perspective from which to reflect on how the film manifests the desire for buildings to perform tasks and to assist their occupants, and thus to become “modern” before they were actually technically equipped to do so.
gta Films

September 28 – December 20, 2017
ETH Zurich, Hönggerberg, building HIL
Monday – Friday, 8:00 – 20:00
Saturday, 8:00 – 12:00
Closed on Sunday and public holidays

November 2, 2017, 8:30 – 9:30
Lecture by Prof. Richard Koeck, University of Liverpool
gta "Donnerstagsgespräche", HIL E 71

November 3, 2017, 14:45 – 16:15
Lecture by and seminar session with Prof. Richard Koeck, University of Liverpool, HIL E 9

During the exhibition, Jacqueline Maurer and Daniela Ortiz dos Santos are teaching the elective course “Opening the Black Box: Architects and Films” at the Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich, Hönggerberg, HIL E 9

Exhibition curated by Samia Henni, Andreas Kalpakci, Jacqueline Maurer and Daniela Ortiz dos Santos, realized in collaboration with gta Exhibitions, ETH Zurich

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Our deepest thanks go to

We are also grateful to the generosity of copyrights holders
Christoph Dörffel (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv), Pete Gassmann (Praesens-Film AG), Benedikt Loderer, Alexandre Mejenski (Association Films Plans-Fixes), Sünke Michel, Hattula Moholy-Nagy and the Moholy-Nagy Foundation, Franziska Schonger and Michael Seidel with Volker Kronz (Schongerfilm GbR with VK Media), Dagmar Fleischhacker and Ruth Stifter-Trummer (ORF), Birol Teke (WDR), Janine Göllner and Anne Vadakkekara (ZDF).

The selected films are documents preserved in the Cinetheque's collection of the gta Archives. A number of these materials have been established to be partial versions that differ in length from those held in other institutions.

https://archiv.gta.arch.ethz.ch/collections/cinetheque
Chicago, Herz des Kontinents Amerika, hat Zugang zu zwei Meeren durch große Wasserstraßen.