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Broadcasting Knowledge: The Role of the Television Archive in the Pedagogical Legacy of OU's A305 *History of Architecture and Design (1890–1939)*

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Abstract

The paper explores the critical role of television archives in preserving and reviving forgotten histories of pedagogical experimentation, with a specific focus on the Open University's A305 course, *History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939*. The analysis begins by contextualising the shifting nature of television as a medium, once deemed ephemeral and now rediscovered through archival efforts. It underscores how early dismissals of television's educational potential led to the loss of valuable content, while grassroots initiatives and researchers, such as Joaquim Moreno, have since worked to reconstruct and revalorise these overlooked materials.

The A305 course, delivered via a hybrid of television, radio, print, and interactive assignments, exemplified a revolutionary approach to education. Developed by the Open University in collaboration with the BBC, it dismantled traditional boundaries between academia and everyday life. By broadcasting lessons into homes, the course democratized access to design and architectural history, reaching tens of thousands of formal students and public viewers. Its multimedia ecosystem incorporated filmed lectures, radio interviews, guided reading, and printed visual aids, enabling a dynamic and participatory learning experience.

Moreno's recovery and digitisation of A305's fragmented materials illuminated both the scope and the innovative nature of this pedagogical model. His curatorial efforts, culminating in an immersive exhibition, emphasised the archive not just as a memory repository but as an active educational tool. Through this case study, the paper argues that television, when framed as an ecological and convergent medium, can function as a powerful vector for knowledge production. The rediscovery of A305 provides a compelling prototype for rethinking how media and education intersect, and how archival work can resurrect visionary models of cultural transmission that remain relevant today.

Keywords: Audiovisual archives; Design; Media archaeology; Open University; Television history.

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1 TV Is Dead, Long Live the Archive: Archaeology of a Medium in Transformation

TV is dead. Long live the TV is the title chosen by Borland and Hansen for their article in Wired, through which they narrated a profound, long-foreseen—and eventually confirmed—transformation in the structure of television production and consumption since, already in 2007, on-demand streaming services were prevailing over the linear flow of traditional free-to-air channels. The expression encapsulates, in a few concise and incisive words, the intrinsic transformative and prismatic nature of the medium—far more intricate than the mere binary of death and rebirth. Television's capacity for reconstitution is clearly discernible through its history, marked by moments in which certain of its forms seemed to fade away, while simultaneously affirming its stubborn persistence, grounded in a remarkable ability to adapt.

This invites us to question what historical opportunities for change and revival have occurred, what experiments and short-lived phenomena took place, and what the origins are of today's most entrenched televisual practices. A glance to the past—towards the lesser-known chapters of the medium's history—can uncover and revive uses that were once set aside, exhausted within their moment, or perhaps simply premature for the times in which they emerged. Television archives fulfil the essential role of documenting the many identities of the medium, particularly when it comes to niche or discontinued content.

Undoubtedly, the television archive serves as a tool for the preservation of produced and broadcast content; an indispensable support to both production and editorial strategies; "the historical memory of the company that established it, as well as a constitutive part of the social memory of the country, preserving events, faces, sounds, and colours" (Sfardini and Balossino 2024: 130).[1]

Yet, beyond its institutional and mnemonic role, it may also serve as a compass for the use of a medium that remains, in certain respects, still not fully explored—or better, not yet exploited to the full extent of its possibilities—regardless of the market it generates. The unpopular history of television content could, in this sense, become a potential point of re-departure for yet another renaissance of the medium, should we once again glimpse its decline on the horizon.

However, the act of constructing an archive that gives voice to this forgotten history encounters numerous obstacles. Above all, the lack of systematic collection and organisation of material has considerably prevented the emersion of an alternative televisual narrative. The reasons for this archival neglect can largely be traced back to the preference for live broadcasting during the early years of television's success, which made recording difficult or altogether unfeasible, and to the widespread perception that the ephemeral nature of television rendered it unworthy—or in no need—of historicisation (Scaglioni 2019).

In addition, practices that today we would consider misguided or even harmful have further worsened the archival situation, significantly reducing the possibilities for rediscovery. Numerous are the accounts of fires and accidents during material transfers—such as those affecting the ITV archives in Great Britain or WNED-TV in the United States.

Moreover, the practice of *wiping*, notoriously adopted by the BBC throughout the 1960s and 1970s, led to the loss of substantial portions of television and social history from an era that was both creatively and mediatically vibrant. In more recent times, such loss has prompted grassroots initiatives aimed at reconstructing serial content—*Doctor Who* (1963–1989) being a paradigmatic example (Hills and Garde-Hansen 2017; Antenore et al. 2019)—with missing episodes recovered among the personal belongings of long-time fans across the globe. The case of Rai is not dissimilar. The Italian public broadcaster began adopting an archival approach only in the 1960s, initially prioritising:

> The major programmes of the National network and, from 1961, those of the Second channel, for which a selection of sample episodes was preserved while the rest were erased. [...] In retrospect, that decision resulted in a substantial cultural loss, partially mitigated over the years by occasional recoveries, often owed to viewers or collectors equipped with home recording devices (Fiamma 2025).

1. Unofficial translation by the author of this paper.

Such experiences suggest that the enrichment of television archives cannot be confined to merely rummaging through the audiovisual content of broadcasters and the media enterprises orbiting the various phases of ideation, production, and distribution. While this is undoubtedly a necessary point of departure, in order to intensify the tone of what Scaglioni (2019: 10) refers to as *pale archives*, the approach must become ecologically archaeological.

An archaeology that considers not only the target medium, but the entire ecological apparatus surrounding content and channels of dissemination, can retrace and reconstruct television history by drawing upon complementary sources that are almost always difficult to locate due to their heterogenous languages, diverse forms, and frequent status as privately or personally preserved artefacts. On the other hand, these *paratelevisual* materials may be disseminated widely, despite being disordered, and may paradoxically be more accessible and catalogable.

From this perspective, attempting to reconstruct a portion of the televisual archive starting from non-television materials—originating from a time predating the advent of the internet—requires venturing into other media realms, excavating through languages, and unearthing the fossils scattered across, at times, unconventional communicative habitats (Scolari *et al.* 2014).

From a professional standpoint, the *archive producer* (Fiamma 2025) plays the role of a television archaeologist, tasked with retrieving the necessary materials to support productions or various institutional needs (Barra 2013). The researcher, by contrast, oriented toward exploration and dissemination, is committed to the discovery and circulation of fragments of media history—forgotten or simply lesser-known—reconstructing the full narrative ecosystem surrounding the object of study.

This is precisely what the work of Joaquim Moreno (2018) on Britain's Open University (OU) has revealed: an excavation that unearthed a fragment of English television history extending well beyond the boundaries of the medium itself.

Indeed, the UK's television archive—particularly that of the national broadcaster BBC—has suffered from the same archival shortcomings that have affected the majority of major, at least Western, broadcasting centres.

"Television was considered an ephemeral medium at this time, with programmes being broadcast live without any recording to keep them for posterity", according to the British Film Institute's retrospective analysis of the origins of UK television archiving (British Film Institute 2023). It is only thanks to initiatives such as those launched in 1969 by the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA) that fragments of a certain segment of television history have been preserved at all. The ITCA provided the national broadcaster's television archive with an annual grant to begin acquiring copies of programmes from various television companies operating across the country, leaving the selection of titles to be preserved in the hands of expert committees drawn from the fields of television, journalism, and archiving.

Prior to that point, even in the United Kingdom, the traces of television reality from the 1950s through the 1970s remain blurred, incomplete, and conceal stories of the medium that were unjustly left untold yet are today essential for re-understanding the communicative flexibility of the audiovisual medium.

It is precisely the TV of that twenty-year period that offers multiple insights, given the medium's rise in popularity and its domestication in the post–Second World War period, unleashing creative experimentations, as the medium was still unfamiliar, unburdened by established interpretations or habitual uses.

Among the many experimental ventures, peculiar forms of educational content began to emerge, attempts to foster national literacy through the televisual medium. In Italy, *Non è mai troppo tardi* (Manzi 1960–1968) remains a celebrated example, offering elementary instruction to the country's less affluent population during a phase of national reunification (Colombo and Eugeni 2015). In the United States, the 1958 the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) promoted a broad spectrum of initiatives aimed at strengthening knowledge in scientific and technical disciplines (Manfra and Quercia 2024). Meanwhile, in the same years, the UK's Open University brought near-university-level education directly into the domestic sphere via television, supported by supplementary non-audiovisual materials (Moreno 2018).

Design—a discipline that, at the time, was gradually detaching itself from architecture and beginning to carve out its own distinct academic space—often played a central role in such pedagogical innovations on television.

A socio-medial snapshot of pedagogical television content concerning design, through a close reading of the British Open University's A305 course, becomes emblematic in understanding how the dissemination and teaching of design on television appeared much like a comet across the televisual sky—one among others, worth following not only to uncover the history of the design discipline itself, but also to grasp the audiovisual medium's potential to serve as a *valid educator*, rather than a *bad teacher* (Popper 1994).

2 Educational Screens: Literacy, Television and Design from the 1950s to the 1970s

In the post-war Western world, during the 1950s, the audiovisual device *television* underwent a significant spatial transition: it moved from public settings of collective and communal viewing into the domestic sphere, taking up a central position within the living room (Spigel 1992). The screen, once a window onto the events of the world shared in public venues, became the property of a growing number of households. As a result, viewing groups shrank, limited to acquaintances, neighbours, friends, and family members, hosted in rooms carefully furnished in a quasi-theatrical arrangement—armchairs, chairs, and sofas all oriented toward the remote-controlled stage—thus connecting the public broadcast dimension with the privatisation of the viewing space (Buonanno 2008).

This shift was driven by the emergence of a middle-class, bourgeois subjectivity, one that clearly distinguished the space of life from the space of work (Silverstone 1994), carving out time for leisure across various moments of the day, depending on familial and social roles. It was precisely in this context that daily life—also lived increasingly indoors—became punctuated by indoor activities, among which television consumption took on a prominent role, reshaping and blending the boundaries between public and private spheres (Meyrowitz 1985).

In the British context, the explosion of television-mania was accelerated by the *epoch-defining media event* (Dayan and Katz 1992) of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation—broadcast live and, for the first time, extending beyond the conventional time slots of scheduled programming.

In the UK, nearly eight million people tuned in at home, while 10 million crowded into other people's houses to watch. There were a further 1.5 million viewers in cinemas, halls and pubs. The number of TV licences shot up from 763.000 in 1951 to 3.2 million in 1954. Many see the coronation as UK television's tipping point (BBC News 2013).

This event provided an early glimpse of what would later be theorised as the televisual *flow* (Williams 1974)—a continuous, and at times arbitrary or trivial, yet compelling stream of programming.

Nevertheless, British television in the 1950s, unlike its already consumption-driven American counterpart, was still shaped by a cultural framework informed by post-war austerity. The television set broadcast only a single channel, limited to afternoon hours, with an intentional break before the evening schedule—almost in theatrical fashion—where the empty screen evoked the curtain falling between acts of a live performance.

Commercial television only arrived in 1955, and the 1960s quickly came to embody, even in Britain, a decade of renewal, light-heartedness, and openness toward a youth-oriented culture—one that was, inescapably, becoming embryonically globalised. ITV emerged as the pioneer of this new wave of British commercial broadcasting, departing from the solemn tone of the national channel to offer entertainment, levity, and to spread a culture of consumption that promised innovation and transformation (Turnock 2007).

The complexity of the programming schedule began to evolve, moving away from the earlier model of isolated, time-restricted, content-driven shows. Instead, it adopted a more continuous broadcasting format, increasingly structured around the network's own identity. This shift gradually eroded traditional time boundaries, in some cases removing any pause from the audiovisual flow altogether.

Amid programmes exploring youth culture, fashion trends and rebellious subcultures, investigative reporting on the country's social struggles, music shows like *Top of the Pops* (1964-2006), and light entertainment in-

terspersed with commercials, the archetypal communicative model of the television era began to take shape: spectacular, one-directional, and generalist. With only a handful of channels available and few households owning more than one TV set, audiences were largely conceived as a singular, undifferentiated mass. Messages were broadcast to most viewers as if they were one cohesive entity.

The novelty of the medium's not-yet-fully-discovered affordances, combined with its unparalleled capacity for dissemination, made the period from the 1950s to 1970s a fertile ground for programming that was not only eclectic but also fundamentally hybrid in nature.

The trend triggered by the overwhelming success of the domesticated medium set the tone for a more visual and immediate style of media communication, composed of stimuli beyond the spoken word, scattered with symbols and hypertextual references—sometimes merely hinted at and open to interpretation. This mode of communication soon spilt over into numerous commercial sectors within the expanding cultural industry, a machine producing endlessly replicable pop products, understood here as widely disseminated cultural artefacts.

This model infiltrated other media forms, giving rise to a kind of *proto-remediation* (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of so-called hot media, which began to resemble cool media: looking at print products, for instance, one observes layouts increasingly hybridised, borrowing the visual form of television and merging it with the structure of magazines. Text gives way to image, appropriating television's aesthetics, languages, and semiotics, thus transforming the content of one medium into that of another (McLuhan 1964).

It is Schnapp's (2012) retrospective study that recognises in these contaminations a reorganisation of the communications landscape—one driven by image-based language, by the triumph of certain cognitive and cultural styles, and, most notably, by the blending of high and low culture, mass and elite aesthetics, and the early blurring of boundaries between media forms, be they books, magazines, music, television, or film.

It is therefore essential to conceive of television as a tentacular entity extending beyond the boundaries of the screen, since this premise already allows us to interpret the medium as a perennial bearer of what was then an embryonic, even prehistoric, form of media convergence, anticipating by decades the phenomenon that would later redefine the entire framework of inter-media relations at the close of the 20th century. In this new paradigm, media freely borrow languages and formats regardless of their original domain, ushering in a profound hybridity.

These were thus the years in which television programming became infused with a wide array of proto-ecosystemic content, including initiatives aimed at re-education, forms of alternative literacy, often bordering on quasi-university-level instruction, in subjects of broad public interest, at least within the historical moment of the 1950s and 1960s.

The discipline of design appears to follow the developmental trajectory of the television medium itself, as its establishment does not precede the same two-decade period. Moreover, it seems to require the support of a total medium with its multiple *verbi-voco-visual* languages—paraphrasing McLuhan's *Explorations* (1967)—which stimulate the audio-visual senses, making them particularly apt for conveying the specificities of a predominantly visual field, since, in the 20th century, design increasingly focused on objects, their forms, and their colours.

As Berruti and Oppedisano (2024: 21) state:

> Audiovisual media prove particularly effective in the treatment of disciplines in which the visual element is essential. Industrial design is a clear example of a field whose full understanding necessarily requires visual support. Given the frequent presence of large-scale objects, works, and constructions—often geographically distant or non-transportable—television emerges as an ideal tool for visual mediation. It is capable of overcoming physical barriers, documenting major architectural works, reaching leading exhibitions, and bringing the testimonies of contemporary design directly into the homes. It is significant that the period between the 1950s and 1960s represents a crucial moment for the development and affirmation of design at the national level, coinciding with the birth and immediate diffusion of television as a domestic medium.

Indeed, throughout the 20th-century television era—and beyond—numerous experiments were conducted involving architecture and design-themed television programmes across both European and American networks. However, no systematic mapping of such productions has yet been undertaken, and the archives of public broadcasters often lack comprehensive collections of this content.

Within the specific realm of quasi-university-level pedagogy of design on television, examples from both the United States and Italy have been identified, highlighting the innovative character of both the discipline and its mediated delivery—demonstrating significant experimentation with the medium in both national contexts.

In the United States, the Western New York Public Broadcasting Association—operating under the slogan "Better Television"—was funded through the NDEA plan and aimed to address a growing political interest in consumer culture and communication. The association commissioned designer and professor Victor Papanek to curate and host a television series entitled *Design Dimensions* (1959-1962). Broadcast sporadically on WNED-TV Channel 17, the programme not only sought to educate the public about industrial design culture but also, perhaps unexpectedly, encouraged critical reflection on consumerist values and the social contradictions of the era.

Through episodes bearing provocative and ironic titles such as *The Air-conditioned Nightmare* (S1E7) and *Our Kleenex Culture* (S1E10), Papanek satirised post-war American culture, marked by increasing materialism and the glorification of domestic comfort as a symbol of individualistic and patriotic success. The programme offered a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on design, which had until then been largely technocentric, avant-garde, and aligned with the expanding culture of consumption.

No audiovisual traces of the TV programme remain today, as the broadcaster's archives from the 1960s appear to have been lost in a fire, according to Kathryn Larsen, current Vice President of Content Distribution at Buffalo Toronto Public Media. Nevertheless, the work of Alison Clarke (2021) has brought the programme back to light, preserving in the archives of the Papanek Foundation the episode outlines and scattered references in journalistic articles or commentaries citing the series title. Furthermore, Clarke's research confirmed a direct correlation between the programme's content and the themes later expanded upon in the volume *Design for the Real World* (Papanek 1971), suggesting that the show embraced a strongly countercultural vision of design, far from being a generator of the superfluous.

The uniqueness of the show goes beyond its contents, highlighting a historically significant moment in the use of television for educational purposes: the NDEA plan for youth re-education in the United States aimed to promote scientific and technological literacy via television in order to counter the technological advancement of the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Manfra and Quercia 2024).

University lectures thus step beyond the walls of academia to be condensed within the four corners of the screen and broadcast on a mass scale, embodying the centrality of the new medium in the dynamics of stimulation and education, responding to a global conflict where media tools became strategic weapons in military hands.

In Italy, by contrast, preserved in the Teche Rai archives, programmes such as *L'Età del cemento armato* (1964) and *Bauhaus: origini dell'estetica industriale* (1967) began in the 1960s to disseminate architectural and design culture, which, in particular, began to emerge on television either to recount what already existed or to interpret what was to come. However, the airtime devoted to it remained largely informational, offering educational content without ever aspiring to the pedagogical intent seen in Papanek's work.

Certainly, differing historical contexts—and therefore national needs—shaped these programmes in distinct ways. In fact, Italy would have to wait until the 2000s to see the first dedicated series on Rai Tre titled *Lezioni di design* (1998-2000).

Lezioni di design was created by Alessandro Mendini, one of the most influential Italian designers and theorists, and hosted by Francesca Molteni, a design historian and curator, who played a key role in disseminating design culture through a critical and in-depth language. Her narrative approach moved beyond the analysis of objects and projects, positioning design as a tool for social interpretation. The direction and authorship of Ugo Gregoretti gave the programme a distinctive visual and narrative style that complemented its educational and

cultural aims, making design culture more engaging and accessible to the television audience by combining documentary elements with creative storytelling (Berruti and Oppedisano 2024).

Lezioni di design stands as the first original Italian television programme to explicitly define itself as educational, not merely informative, with the clear objective of teaching and bringing the national audience closer to the discipline of design.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Italian public television largely favoured generalist broadcasting, almost entirely avoiding structured educational programming. A notable exception occurred in 1977, when Rete Uno aired *Storia dell'architettura e del design 1900–1939*, an eight-episode series adapted from the British Open University's A305 course. The programme, intended for a general Italian audience, was a curated selection of the original television materials from *History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, stripped of its broader didactic framework.

In the United Kingdom, by contrast, the Open University had radically transformed access to knowledge: courses such as A305 combined television, radio, print, and interaction with the aim of liberating the production and transmission of knowledge (Moreno 2018), while encouraging active, critical learning (Manfra 2024).

3 From Living Room to Archive: the Media-Ecological Legacy of OU's A305 Course

The Open University was founded with the aim of making university-level education accessible to a much broader audience—education that had long remained confined within the walls of private institutions and largely out of reach, particularly for the burgeoning middle class. Unlike traditional correspondence courses, the Open University is, to this day, the most attended public university in the UK dedicated to distance learning (Weinbren 2015).

Its founding—driven by a distinctly political interest from the Labour Party—was rooted in a desire to introduce a wave of innovation capable of restoring education as an accessible and egalitarian right, in an era when higher education was still considered a luxury. The institution's mission, focused on personal and communal development, the enhancement of skills, and the broader advancement of the nation's economy and technological capacity, led to the design of a system that was, by definition, *Open*: a decentralised, ubiquitous, accessible, and usable centre for learning (Bell and Tight 1993).

Its name not only signals the liberation of knowledge from the physical confines of the classroom but also introduces the notions of a free learning environment, flexible and adaptive study schedules, and, crucially, the social benefits of a university accessible even to those who could not afford traditional higher education. The distinctive strategy of delivering courses via distance learning, supported by widely consumed media, made the university a powerful symbol of the dismantling of geographical, cultural, and—above all—gender barriers. Approximately 43% of the first students were women, while, in its early years, 15% were housewives, 3% small business owners, 2% farmers, miners, and factory workers, 11% office staff and clerks, 5% salespeople and personal assistants, and 2% unemployed or retired individuals—addressing the educational gap experienced by working-class and socially disadvantaged groups (Moreno 2018).

Following the Labour Party's electoral victory in 1964, a governmental committee transformed the idea of such a distance-learning university into a concrete project: the Advisory Committee for the University of the Air was established, tasked with designing an educational institution that would be as accessible as possible (Bell and Tight 1993). The chosen approach relied on a fully integrated teaching system to deliver courses at a distance via print materials, radio broadcasts, and part-time tutorials, making use of media that were already present—and rapidly proliferating—in domestic environments. In composing the individual course materials, the University made significant use of a range of emerging educational technologies, including home experiment kits, computer-assessed assignments, and audio and video tapes (Bates 1984), even though printed materials remained the foundation of the educational and assessment process.

The undergraduate courses offered ranged from the arts to engineering, hard sciences, and social sciences, all accessible without formal admission requirements. The academic path of distance learners followed dynamics similar to those of students enrolled in traditional, in-person institutions, including course sessions, tutoring, graded examinations, and ultimately, the awarding of a degree.

What the Open University introduced was, without doubt, an alternative and flexible pedagogical model—both remote and customisable—characterised by the separation between student and teacher, a preparation of learning materials aimed at autonomous study, opportunities for bidirectional dialogue, a one-to-one relationship between student and tutor, occasional interaction within study groups, and, crucially, the use of print, television, and radio as channels for course delivery (Keegan 1986). The Open University effectively disrupted the traditional university structure beginning with the development of its educational plans, involving working groups composed of a mix of academics, broadcasters, editors, technologists, and specialised external consultants. The teaching techniques adopted—exemplified most clearly in course A305—were based on the most recent pedagogical strategies, which responded to the evolving media landscape of British daily life.

The aforementioned tools were, in fact, the mass media—capable of reaching such a significant portion of the public that they could be considered to encompass almost the entirety of the population. These then-novel media technologies were used not only as didactic instruments, but as enablers of an innovative pedagogy and channels for the implementation of experimental teaching strategies. This involved a language that extended beyond the spoken word, mediated and massified, yet accessible and intelligible to its viewing audience.

To realise its media-based educational project, the Open University entered a partnership with the British state broadcaster, the BBC, and its vast audience. Although it served as the broadcaster, the British public service merely lent its infrastructure to the university: this detail helps to identify one of the many obstacles to the synchronous or retrospective archiving of the university's multimedia materials. As reconstructed by Moreno (2018), the materials became entangled in the lack of sustained collaboration between the Open University and the BBC and were subsequently neglected—later rendered private to avoid infringement of distribution rights and copyright attached to the programmes and their content.

In any case, at the time, the Open University regularly broadcast its programmes on BBC channels, which included video lectures, academic debates, and other types of content. The first episode, aired in January 1971 under the title *Open Forum* (S1E1), soon became a recurring broadcast. In this initial airing, new students were welcomed; in the following episodes, enrolled students were invited to participate—when geographically close to the various audiovisual recording centres—to share their personal and educational experiences (Bell and Tight 1993). This helped foster connections with their local learning districts and activate relationships with tutors distributed across the country.

These types of broadcasts are also included in the estimated total of 1500 television and 1.500 radio programmes aired by the BBC on behalf of the Open University (Weinbren 2015), highlighting an extraordinarily prolific production—of which, however, only partial archives survive, and those not always easily accessible.

Joaquim Moreno, architect and professor, came across the Open University in a manner that was almost accidental, yet recurring, as his own words suggest.[2] This encounter sparked his curiosity and led him to explore both the institution and the iconic course A305—*History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, which was dedicated to innovatively teaching his discipline.

Two chance events can be identified as having brought Moreno and the Open University together. One of these was a comprehensive description of the educational project found in the publication resulting from the 1976 Venice Biennale (Scotto Lavina 1976). On that occasion, the renewing potential of the Open University was celebrated through an interactive and deeply media-oriented, televisual exhibition. The layout featured a display of television monitors showing the course covers and, behind them, small alcoves where TV and radio programmes could be played, accompanied by printed materials and film strips related to the content.

2. The experience of Professor Joaquim Moreno has been reconstructed through secondary sources, including the volume *The University Is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture* (2018) and the lecture *Open Everywhere*, held at the University of Camerino in 2021.

The exhibition provided a comprehensive overview of the course itself, though only a partial glimpse of the entire Open University experience, which also included interpersonal relations, student assignments, exams, and specific strategies for adapting content to television.

All of this, as previously mentioned, forms the body of material at the heart of the contested responsibility between the BBC and the OU—thus rendering it seemingly inaccessible. That is, until another fortuitous event occurred: Moreno happened to meet Tim Benton, emeritus professor of art history at the Open University, as well as a writer and broadcaster, in the library of Columbia University. Their encounter revealed experiential insights into the institution and the teaching of architectural and design history. Benton was able to accompany Moreno to the OU archive, where they were granted access to the preserved materials and began the meticulous historical reconstruction of course A305 (Moreno 2021).

When Joaquim Moreno began exploring the preserved materials of course A305, *History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, there was no tangible memory of its original content or structure. The course appeared to have vanished—not out of negligence, but rather through a disappearance that seemed, in some way, intentional. A305 had not been designed to be archived, nor to be reproduced on demand according to contemporary models of media consumption. It was a product of its time, conceived to exist within a specific temporal window, and to expire with it.

One of the clearest indicators of this process can be found in its broadcast schedule: initially aired in the early evening prime time slot, it was progressively pushed by the BBC into marginal timeframes—late at night or early in the morning—thus contributing to its gradual disappearance. Although fragments of the course later resurfaced within other television formats, both on British networks and, years later, on Italian channels such as Rai, A305 was never subjected to a systematic historicisation.

Further complicating the picture is the absence of a systematic archive: at the time, it was not standard practice to collect and preserve student data in a structured manner. This makes it difficult today to trace the contours of all the activities that accompanied the television and radio broadcasts of the courses and to reconstruct the full educational experience.

This lack of documentation does not reflect the true significance of the university, and particularly of the course itself. With A305, for the first time, architecture and design entered the home, breaking down the traditional barrier between specialised knowledge and everyday life. Throughout the twentieth century in Britain, the divide between architectural knowledge—often perceived as elitist—and the public's common understanding of lived space gradually narrowed, thanks in part to growing awareness of the social and political relevance of architecture. The BBC played a key role in this process, beginning in the interwar period, when it first began dedicating radio programming to architectural topics, demonstrating with its earliest broadcast that architecture—through themes such as housing, urban planning, infrastructure design, and leisure—could be a matter of public interest, relevant and immediately relatable.

The A305 course materials were vast and structured with an unprecedented level of detail: they included approximately eight hours of film, ten hours of audio recordings, and nearly two thousand printed pages, all specifically produced for the course curriculum. This volume of content reflected both the pedagogical ambition of the project and its inherently multimedia nature.

Unlike other Open University courses—typically organised over thirty-two weeks with weekly television broadcasts—A305 devoted eight weeks of its calendar to a field research project. This decision reduced the number of televised broadcasts to twenty-four, each directly associated with one of the course's twenty-four units, but it was offset by thirty-two radio programmes designed to expand and deepen the course content.

The course structure was based on a refined balance between *cool* and *hot* media: television was complemented by immersive and analytical tools such as books, audio recordings, and film strips, in a form of *radiovision* that integrated radio broadcasts with guided reading. This combination—often involving listening to a voice while following along with printed material—was later translated into a television format, through a precise process of multichannel adaptation. The entire system required careful planning by the Open University, particularly concerning the user experience: each component had to be coherent, accessible, and interconnected.

The radio programmes mostly consisted of interviews and recorded presentations with architects, designers, and architectural historians who had been active during the period studied by the course. This gave students the opportunity to hear directly from the leading figures of the discipline.

The printed materials were supplemented by twelve-unit booklets, each accompanied by a sequence of colour slides and a plastic viewer for consultation; five additional pamphlets; and an anthology of original texts, conceived as a foundational collection for the development of critical knowledge.

Among these resources were the *Radiovision Booklet* (Open University), containing curated image sequences designed to enhance the experience of the radio programmes; the *Broadcasting Supplement* (Open University),[3] offering guiding texts and questions intended to support listening and viewing without the need for note-taking; *Documents*, a compilation of primary sources presented in full or in excerpts, often referenced during the broadcasts or used to contextualise specific course debates; and *Images*, a selection of facsimile translations of relevant visual and textual materials that were not originally available in English.

The educational programme was also supported by a carefully curated selection of texts, including Benton's *Form and Function: A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, which served as a central reference. This book paved the way for a specific study of design that granted equal scholarly consideration to anonymous everyday objects.

To facilitate access to this complex multimedia system, Open University study centres were equipped with materials from the four foundational courses and devices for audio and video playback. Among these were the well-known Hacker radio receiver, rebranded with the OU logo and included in the standard equipment of local centres; an audio cassette player specifically designed for the OU, without recording functionality and limited to playback and rewind; and a compact tabletop projector capable of screening television programmes directly from the original 8mm film format.

The format of the lessons broadcast on TV and radio, planned in advance and supported by printed materials with images, examples, and exercises, greatly facilitated the understanding of built architecture through the lens of movement. While photography was sufficient to convey the static image of a building, the audiovisual language—particularly that of television—enabled the exploration of architecture's dynamic dimension: the way it is lived in, perceived, and traversed over time and space. A particularly emblematic example is episode *TV7* (S1E7), entirely dedicated to the work of Erich Mendelsohn, structured by using his design sketches, a 360-degree footage of a model of his Einstein tower—built specifically for the programme—and archival footage from the First World War.

The episode highlights a secondary, yet significant, aspect in the broader reconstruction of the course. The resources available for lesson production were limited, which often meant filming whatever was readily accessible in the cities—sometimes not without issues of copyright and privacy and what could not be documented was instead drawn, simulated, or recreated through models and graphic reconstructions.

This necessity sparked a resourceful and imaginative use of materials, pushing the production toward hybrid solutions that blended documentary with animation—materials now partially lost, of which only the televised evidence remains.

One of the greatest strengths of the course lies in those episodes structured as full-fledged debate formats designed not merely to inform, but to educate, aiming to stimulate critical thinking and enhance design awareness. The stated goal was not simply the transmission of knowledge, but the sharpening of visual analysis and interpretive skills in relation to architectural artefacts. This pedagogical intent was embodied in the audiovisual materials themselves—for instance, the teaching of how to read architectural plans, delivered through detailed explanations, visual aids, and support tools specifically devised to make even the most technical codes accessible to non-specialists.

Course A305 was designed for a notably diverse audience. First and foremost, there were the officially enrolled students: in 1975, 718 individuals participated in the programme as registered learners. But there was also a second, broader and more general audience who tuned in to the scheduled television broadcasts—airing,

3. Parts one and two.

for instance, on Saturday mornings at nine o'clock. From the very first episodes, these broadcasts reached approximately 40.000 viewers.

This dual audience necessitated a twofold validation process for the course content: on one side, approval from the BBC, which focused on accessibility and general public interest; on the other, endorsement from the course's academic team, who ensured scholarly accuracy, pedagogical suitability, and adherence to university standards.

A third audience could also be identified: scholars and historians of architecture and design who encountered A305 through its media presence and approached the course as an opportunity for professional development and critical reflection. In this sense, the A305 audience was not merely passive—composed of listeners and viewers—but also active, made up of students engaged in a deliberate and participatory learning journey.

The students of A305 were not trained architects or designers, so the paper-based self-assessment component of the course was central. It included not only responses to theoretical questions or queries linked to what was shown on television and discussed on the radio, but also, as a final assignment, students were required to produce a written report on buildings accessible within their everyday environment.

Far from being peripheral exercises, these final reports were fortunately preserved in the library of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and have since proven to be reliable enough to serve as sources in heritage conservation initiatives. Alongside these documents, a list of students—later anonymised—was also recovered, allowing Moreno to trace additional course-related materials within the personal belongings of former students and their families.

Overall, the volume of material produced across the many dimensions of the course was so vast that it required storage in dedicated archives, many of which are now partially unexplored or no longer exist. As a result, the traces of the course's history—and, with it, of architecture, design, television, and society—must now be sought in unexpected places.

Moreno's investigation made it possible to recover these documents, bringing to light both the pedagogical materials and the tangible outcomes of the teaching process, as well as a foundational piece of television history—now made legible on paper. From a social standpoint, these student-produced reports have, in some cases, become the only existing testimonies of specific building technologies or construction strategies that have since disappeared. A particularly striking example is a detailed account of the demolition of a prefabricated structure, which now stands as the only accessible documentation on the history and construction features of that specific system.

Taken as a whole, A305 challenged the normative timeline of modern architecture—traditionally framed between the historical avant-gardes and postmodernism—by re-reading the icons of modernism through alternative narratives, multiple perspectives, and diverse architectural cultures, all presented simultaneously and amplified by the ever-expanding channels of mass media.

Enabled by television, the course emerged as a cultural artefact of extraordinary complexity, born at the intersection of a new era of mass communication and a modernist movement that, even as it was being studied, appeared already to be approaching its twilight. In this sense, the course functioned simultaneously as an archive and a reinvention: it collected and disseminated the memory of an architectural era in transformation, making it accessible to a broad and heterogeneous audience through tools that translated its legacy into the languages and forms of the present.

The life of A305 did not end with its original broadcast schedule. After its official conclusion, some materials were translated into Spanish and circulated beyond Britain's borders, while videocassettes were copied—without authorisation—in the United States as well, a testament to the perceived value of the course and to the strong desire to access an educational model that was both innovative and difficult to replicate elsewhere.

More than forty years after its original airing, Joaquim Moreno gathered and systematised the entire A305 experience, culminating in an exhibition held in 2017. The exhibition project was the outcome of a long process that had begun in 2015, when Moreno discovered the existence of *Design at the Open University* and set in motion a digital archival reconstruction of the course.

In order to organise the exhibition and build a coherent and accessible archive, Moreno conceived and assembled a portable digital archive, digitising video recordings, archiving broadcast transcripts, original scripts, scans of the recommended books, cited sources, and supplementary materials—including booklets, images, and the well-known facsimile translations of rare or otherwise inaccessible texts—as well as slide sequences.

In parallel, he launched a series of seminars with students, reconstructing the entire course episode by episode. Each session included a full viewing of the televised broadcast and a guided analysis of the accompanying materials, in a form of curated rewatching that replicated the original learning experience of the course, but now through a critical and historical lens.

The exhibition, conceived as a display of archival materials, faced a significant challenge: how to effectively convey the original televised experience. To address this, Moreno chose to recreate the domesticity of the television medium within the exhibition space, setting up areas with period televisions, vintage sofas, and video sequences from the original broadcasts. This immersive atmosphere evoked the moment of home viewing, bridging the gap between the historical content and its original mode of consumption.

To complete the project, several of the lecturers and professionals who had worked at the BBC and the Open University in the 1970s were invited to participate. In the now-decommissioned original studios, short films and interviews were recorded—now publicly available on the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) YouTube channel—which added a testimonial and reflective dimension to the rediscovery and valorisation of A305.

4 Conclusion

The Open University and its course A305 introduced bold and forward-thinking innovations across academic education, architecture and design pedagogy, and the ecological use of television as a learning medium. At a time when television was mostly associated with entertainment and passive consumption, A305 radically transformed the screen into an educational environment—an ephemeral classroom with no walls, where knowledge could travel freely between teachers and viewers. The course successfully activated the full spectrum of television's ecological potential, aligning with what McLuhan (1977) described as a form of *entertainment pedagogy*: engaging, participatory, and distributed.

A305 exemplifies what Raymond Williams (1974: 51) called "a remarkable demonstration of some of the true possibilities of television". It operated as a transmedia educational experiment structured across broadcast television, printed materials, radio, and individual activities—merging diverse languages into a cohesive learning experience. The TV screen served not just as an interface but as the central entry point into an ecosystem of content, at a time when television itself was reaching its peak cultural presence.

The rediscovery and critical curation of A305, led by Joaquim Moreno, illustrates how archives are not merely passive repositories of memory, but dynamic tools for rethinking the present. Far from being a static collection, the archive here is reactivated as a knowledge device: through digitisation, critical commentary, and exhibition design, what was once a dispersed and fragmented body of material becomes an articulated narrative; what was once peripheral is repositioned at the centre of pedagogical and cultural discourse.

In this context, television is reframed as a complex cultural space that can be re-engaged today not just as a medium, but as a temporal and spatial architecture of knowledge.

Reviving and circulating archival experiences such as A305 means recovering models of knowledge production that defy linear, frontal teaching with multidimensional and participatory strategies, where learning unfolds through the convergence of formats, perspectives, and competencies. In a time when cultural transmission is searching for new paradigms, these archives provide early and compelling prototypes, visions already realised, offering concrete reference points to reimagine how we teach, communicate, and learn.

A305 rediscovery underlines the capacity to assemble media, people, and ideas into shared environments of meaning. In Moreno's hands, the archive becomes a site of cultural rewriting, and a means to bring back into circulation educational forms that were once visionary and are perhaps even more so today.

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