titled “Fellowship,” the filmmakers introduce a younger generation of Japanese students who made the pilgrimage to Taliesin (including one of Endo’s sons, Raku). A not entirely convincing effort is made to recuperate Raymond as a true Wrightian despite his clear European modernist leanings, and several Japanese architects with no apparent ties to Wright are proposed as belonging to the fold. Thus, we are introduced to Kunio Maekawa who entered Raymond’s studio upon his return in Japan after two years in Le Corbusier’s atelier. Kenzo Tange is also mentioned in passing because he worked in Maekawa’s office in the late 1930s. Although it would be extremely difficult to claim that either Maekawa’s or Tange’s designs were indebted to Wright, by introducing them in this context, Severns and Koiachi imply that their work was linked to the “master.” Do the filmmakers intend us to assume that someone who worked for someone who worked for someone who worked for Wright is in some sense a disciple of Wright’s?

Although the recognition of Wright’s followers is valuable, the film does not rigorously evaluate Wright’s overall significance for the history of Japanese architecture. There is little information about architectural practices in Japan at the time Wright was active there. We learn nothing about Wright’s most prominent Japanese contemporaries (many of whom embraced the European-derived historical style that Wright emphatically rejected) or about the ambitious young architects who were drawn to European modernists. To be sure, a handful of architects did respond enthusiastically to Wright, but many eventually embraced modernism or were left by the wayside as the modern movement gained hegemony. By narrowly focusing on a small Wrightian circle to the exclusion of other developments, the film distorts the broader trajectory of twentieth-century Japanese architectural history.

More specifically, the film credits Wright with preventing Japan from “for-sak[ing] its ancient craft tradition and architectural past in the pursuit of modernization.” In fact, decades before Wright came to Japan, Japanese and non-Japanese architects, including Ito Chûta and Edward S. Morse, passionately argued that Japan should not abandon its architectural traditions. (The thorny questions of exactly what “tradition” means and how it should inform modern practice are beyond the scope of this review.) This includes the first generation of Japanese modernists active in the early 1920s while the Imperial Hotel was still under construction. Wright may well have reinforced a commitment to Japan’s traditions already shared by many architects, yet to credit him with sparking the Japanese rediscovery of older architectural traditions is too strong a claim.

These criticisms aside, Magnificent Obsession has much to offer viewers. It assembles a large body of images documenting powerful designs by a compelling architect and introduces the careers of designers not well known to a non-Japanese audience. If the filmmakers occasionally strain their credibility by indulging in hyperbolic claims for Wright and his work, they are certainly not the first commentators to succumb to the myth-making impulse frequently evident in receptions of the architect and his legacy. Wright’s undeniable charisma, strong personality, and decades of activity in varied professional contexts present formidable challenges for an architectural history that seeks to recognize his accomplishments while avoiding the extremes of hagiography.

JONATHAN REYNOLDS
University of Southern California

Note
1. The narrator acknowledges that, despite the hype of Wright and his followers, the hotel did suffer some damage and that other buildings also survived. In the earthquake Wright’s foundations performed far better than some had feared, but they were not as successful as the designs for a number of more conventional structures. For a thorough assessment of the Imperial Hotel’s earthquake performance, see Robert Reithermann, “The Seismic Legend of the Imperial Hotel,” AIA Journal 69 (June 1980), 42–49.

Archigram Movies!
Mito, Japan, 2006, DVD, 31 min., ¥ 3,990, www.uplink.co.jp

In 1963, six newly minted architects based in London formed what is now remembered as one of the primary experimental architectural groups of the decade. Archigram, the name under which the six became known, was first the title of their polemical magazine and then expanded to incorporate other activities of the participants, whether alone, as a collective, in clusters, or with the help of friends. The composite moniker demonstrated their main conceit: the hybridization of architecture, with all the burdens that term implied for young architects in postwar Europe, with the developing novelty of communications technology. This agenda resonated with young British architects of the 1960s who were dissatisfied with what they described as the retrograde state of professional training and institutions, a situation compounded by the traditional skills dominant in the building industry. Besides the lack of innovation with the curtain wall in commercial structures, postwar domestic architecture in Britain often included pitched roofs, flowerpots, and picturesque touches that were posited to restore humanism to modernism. The architectural avant-garde of the previous generation had been galvanized into action by what to them was a clear betrayal of principle. From the Archigram perspective a decade later, the worse offense was the boredom evoked by the stagnant built landscape in which even the innovative practices of the 1950s were implicated.

As a remedy, the Archigram group promoted the integration of street culture and digital technology, two overwhelmingly present and mutually dependent conditions, in architectural thinking. The group drew strategies from the comic book, the fashion magazine, photography and film, among other media, to showcase the technology of their counterproposals to the contemporary urban fabric. The influence of their pop art predecessors was readily apparent in this turn to the generative circumstances for mass
culture. Times, however, had changed and with them attendant social ideologies. While suspicion of imported \textit{Americanism}e was at a relative low in British society, this was not the case in mainstream artistic and literary circles. The stance of the architectural profession was to ignore or denigrate the insurgence of “low” into “high” culture as it had always done. By contrast, Archigram excelled at culling imagery from across the cultural milieu and combining this borrowed information into a theory in which architecture was treated like any other consumer commodity. Over the course of the decade, Archigram participants applied this theory to the scales of the city, individual housing, and combinations thereof. An enthusiasm for American culture—participants often taught in the United States—came along with such tastes, a feature not often shared by other agitational groups.

The central problem, Archigram declared, was this: while emergent technologies were transforming other fields of knowledge and changing the nature of how society related to its environment, buildings—even lighter-weight modern ones—were still exhibiting the same static principles that had always grounded architecture. Electronic technologies combined with newly available synthetic materials enabled the design of environments capable of changing along with the fluctuating desires and lifestyle of the inhabitants. Archigram proposals famously incorporated strategies in which an enclosure or a whole urban landscape could more readily move, adapt, and adjust. The potentials for change addressed by the projects were broad, from the expendability of parts to the transition of objects and on to the flow of particles. Network connectivity demonstrated by the newfangled personal computer was explored as well as the isolated pods of the mobile home, space capsule, and submarine. Additionally, if architectural objects were treated as other mobile consumer products, from frozen peas to cars, they too would have a programmed lifecycle and be discarded when the end of their utility had been reached. As digital technology became commercially viable and thus more prevalent in the public realm over the course of the decade, its techniques and language—terminology like hardware and software, for example—were more explicit in Archigram magazines and projects. The benefit of hindsight also demonstrates the significance of the fact that computing was not harnessed as a drawing aid, already the limiting direction that the profession had begun to pursue, but as an underlay programmed to animate a locale. This enabled the group to stretch the architectural domain to incorporate even the most fleeting of atmospheric effects, including the weather.

While it was through the low-tech medium of print and the postal distribution system that they first became known in and outside of Britain, the group engaged other forms of communication as well, including exhibitions, conferences, lectures, audiovisual presentations, and films. The group’s first collective gesture was, in fact, an exhibition, “Living City,” at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1963. The independent structure of triangulated panels with its own circuit to drive the electrically motivated parts, including a flickering light machine, differed dramatically from the display of consecutive objects that was the norm in architectural exhibitions. The visitor had the sensation of walking into a three-dimensional collage calculated to overwhelm with urban sights and sounds. “What we really need,” Warren Chalk would explain, “is increased environmental stimulus. Because the environmental stimulus is weak, man is inventing novelties like wife-swapping and unisex dressing. He is bored.” The recent resurgence of interest in the Archigram group has again been driven by an exhibition, though of more traditional format. A retrospective has been on the road for twelve years or so, resulting in variety of companion catalogs and related publications. While the catalogs reproduce selections from the same pool of images, a unique contribution was released in 2005: a DVD of three Archigram-related movies.\textsuperscript{5}

Catalogs and their role in constructing and perpetuating the official narrative raise the issue of access to Archigram materials. Until now, much of the stuff has been stored in boxes at the home of Dennis Crompton, who has managed the archive with dedication. Always the most technically adept member, he also administers the official website (www.archigram.net), which provides a biography, selected iconic visuals, and news on retrospective activities. This mediated arrangement, however, has limited access to the range of materials, in large part due to the difficulty of sorting through many uncataloged bins. More significant from the perspective of a historian is the selective nature of the documents that have been made available versus what sort of documents might warrant investigation. The status quo will likely soon change as the result of a grant awarded to the Centre for Experimental Practice of the University of Westminster in London to catalog and create a digital database of Archigram materials. Over the next three years, the database will come online in stages to provide Internet access not only to the celebrated drawings, collages, and models, but also to hitherto unknown items. These will include, for instance, the slide collection belonging to Warren Chalk, one of the most contemplative but less well-represented participants, donated to the project by his daughter. Selected objects will be open to researchers as high-resolution scans through an internal database.

The films that comprise \textit{Archigram Movies!} illuminate a facet of Archigram’s production that was until now poorly documented—the audiovisual cacophony used to compound the message as it could be conveyed on paper in the familiar drawings and photographs. This was no minor aspect of Archigram’s inspiration as indicated, for example, by the affiliation of Peter Cook, the driving force behind the group, and Crompton with the Light/Sound Workshop at Hornsey College of Art. Through this association, the group had the opportunity to interact with some of the most controversial figures on the British art
Indeed that same year, 

“Popular Pak” issue (its loose pages were delivered in an envelope like a coupon pack), similarly featured a bundle of options from which to choose. The film begins with shots of the bustling, bundled grey masses of postwar High Street with the requisite umbrellas, harking back to the oft-repeated Archigram motto, “When it is raining in Oxford Street the architecture is no more important than the rain; in fact the weather has probably more to do with the pulsation of the living city at that given moment.” The rhythm of the film allows hardly any time to register an impression before another supersedes it. The soundtrack reinforces this quality by providing background noise of beeps and jingles from snippets of broadcasts and advertisements, from the haze of which pithy phrases and words—“bionic,” “Teflon-coated”—pop through. From the crowds, the film cuts to a sequence of conventional façades of the houses in which most British people would live—Georgian, Victorian, and twentieth-century housing estates. These segue to an assembly line of boxed popular paks that, in the course of the film, will be bought by a woman shopping in a supermarket alongside the other packaged goods in her basket. Opened, the popular pak (just add milk) will contain the parts needed to take environmental control of life. With this shift to the public as architectural consumer, the fashion and consumer sensibilities of the sixties come very much alive. The film cuts without comment from the mysterious contents of the pink package to models of high profile Archigram projects that demonstrate how the serviced pods of individual living plug together to form an urban fabric. Significance is conveyed through juxtaposition: a pod house with a car, capsule housing with an electrical plug, popular pak with Lego construction. Intended as part of an exhibition pavilion, the visuals of serviced space flashed on the screen would have been lent further explanatory context, now lacking.

Of the three, the earliest film is the roughest and most reminiscent of the intentional homemade, cut-and-paste sensibility of Archigram magazine. Indeed that same year, Archigram 8, the key addition to the architect’s vocabulary—roof, wall, door, window, robot, floor, etcetera. The next stage involves the assumption of certain additional roles previously played by columns, screens, walls, enclosures or at least conditions in juxtaposition with facilities so that the idea of ‘robotisation’ is closely linked to the other ideas of mobility and the gradual melting of architecture.”

Most Archigram footage, like the collages and montages of Archigram images and magazines, spliced pirated sources into a new reality. As a result of the incorporation of found material in Archigram movies, the selection compiled on this DVD is neither strategic nor comprehensive. Rather, it reflects what could be done without prohibitive licensing cost. The assortment nonetheless provides an interesting overview of Archigram, from its ebullient self in 1968 reflected in the “Popular Pak and Robots,” to the more melancholic stage in 1974 of I Remember Architecture, once other more cynical factions had superseded the group. John Bowstead and Roger Jeffs, who worked with Cook and Crompton at the Light/Sound Workshop, were predominantly responsible for making Popular Pak to run as a part of the Archigram installation at the 1968 Milan Triennale. The second film was the product of a studio run by David Greene at the Architectural Association (AA) in 1973. The third film, Aquapoliis Barcellona of 1989, significantly postdates the Archigram group and is quite different in character from the previous two. A walk-through presentation produced by Crompton, it demonstrates a Sea World-type venue designed by the office of another former participant, Ron Herron, and retains Archigram concerns (submarine life) and touches (a guide speaking from a television screen).

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scene.” Active exploration of architecture as a multimedia phenomenon is also at the heart of the much elaborated and truly collective “Instant City” project (1968–70), an itinerant carnival of audio-visual displays that creates a network of knowledge—a prototypical web—as it travels the provinces. As far as filmmaking is concerned, the “official” Archigram movie was produced in 1966 to air as part of an arts program on the BBC; others were made by members and associates of the group.

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The latter third of the film demonstrates, as described by Crompton elsewhere, the treatment of the robot “as a
butcher’s dress (buildings which function as cages; architects who perform butchery on cities; and “A is for architecture, the only art form you can get on a mortgage”), along with the text of a poem he had written for Archigram 7 (1966). At times words alone appear on the screen, with verses about the old technology set to the “Maple Leaf Rag” (Scott Joplin, 1899), and transition to the new “data jungle” of “cybertcircuits” surrounded by contemporary music, including “Aqualung” (Jethro Tull, 1971) and “Are You Ready for the Country” (Neil Young, 1972).

To further emphasize the multidisciplinary nature of the endeavor, a student from the Royal College of Art contributed a cartoon, broken into sections by some leisurely footage of the sea, in which a dot grows into a line and then into the plan of the Villa Savoye (1929). To the heroic opening bars of “Thus Spake Zarathustra” (Richard Strauss, 1896), better known as the music associated with 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), the villa struggles to stand on its spindly piloti. In another scene, an AA instructor poses as an architect on the Borough of Camden payroll who has discovered that, despite good intentions, he is just a cog in the bureaucratic machine. There is also footage taken from a group debate held by modern gypsies who had set up camp under a London bridge and were agitating for the right to maintain their way of life in the city. Interspersed throughout are rapidly changing stills mostly of the American landscape, taken by Myers and set to the blaxploitation music of “Pusherman” (Curtis Mayfield, 1972). The final message—“It’s all artificial”—is followed by the explanation that the film is “offered as a series of questions. Traces. Tracks in the snow.”

Both Popular Pak and I Remember Architecture highlight the central issue of the Archigram project: the temporality at the core of contemporary life. Despite significant differences in tone, they each suggest that architecture must now be a process that suits the way we live rather than an act of setting forms in light; to create, or assemble, and to tear down, or dismantle, is all a part of the same course; and as the boundaries between art, music, and everything else no longer exist, discrete architectural objects function as a hindrance. These are the themes that make Archigram appealing today, not only to historians but also to practitioners who still grapple with these very issues that have only grown more acute. At the same time, the films disclose differences of agenda, glossed over by the group façade, that are essential for understanding the complexity raised for architectural design by digital technology.

Perhaps nothing reveals the consequence of this legacy for practice more than the nature of third film, Aquapolis. While the first two movies promote the rejection of conventional construction, the third defies this logic by presenting a tour of what is quite palpably a building. Taken together with the built project of the Kunsthaus (2003) in Graz, Austria, designed by Cook with the architect Colin Fournier, this film is a good indication of what even an Archigram provocateur might design when he grew up. The process of transitioning out of the realm of the object does not come easily to a field that has always been dedicated to the production of such things, and certainly the object-buildings of Aquapolis and the Graz Kunsthaus do not demonstrate the declared Archigram group ideals. Yet, failure of architectural practice to live up to a tall order does not demonstrate the irrelevance of those ideals, but rather shows how much work still has to be done if architecture is to evolve from being the expression of the industrial age to that of current technology. If nothing else, the difficulty of implementation puts the concerns with present-day technologies, currently the subject of endless scrutiny in the profession, into much-needed perspective.

Hadas A. Steiner
University at Buffalo, SUNY

Notes
1. Nine issues of Archigram were published between 1961 and 1970.
2. The interest in tempering the language of modernism was reflected, for example, in Nikolaus Pevsner’s postwar turn to the subject of The Englishness of English Art (London, 1956).
3. In England, pop art was a phenomenon of the 1950s.
6. The Art Tower, completed in 1990, was fittingly designed by Arata Isozaki who, together with the four surviving members of Archigram, participated in a three-hour panel entitled “Counter Culture and Architecture” as part of the activities surrounding the show.
7. Amongst other opportunities brought about by this connection, Crompton assisted Pink Floyd with the audiovisual display at a music festival in Brighton during 1967.
9. This event was forestalled by student protest—something relatively scarce in Britain even in 1968. It also signified the increasingly difficult time that Archigram would begin to have when accused of political apathy and, worse, of being a tool of capitalism.
10. Two-language versions of this film exist. The one with the narration in French is on this DVD. The other is in Catalan.
11. In an illustration of the way that disparate Archigram activities intermingled despite the different audiences to which each activity was addressed, this Archigram contained a “Milanogram” with bits and pieces of information about the contribution to the Triennale, including a page entitled “INFORMATION” by Bowstead and Jeffs.
12. This statement was first made in the introductory text prepared for “Living City” published in Living Arts, repr. in Archigram, A Guide to Archigram 1961–74, 78.