Notes
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.


1. (2 films, 2 discs) Marc-Henri Wajnberg, director
Oscar Niemeyer: Un arquitecto comprometido/Oscar Niemeyer, un architecte engagé dans le siècle
Belgium, 2000, text by Josep M. Botey, Portuguese with Spanish subtitles, 80 min.

Geraldo Motta, director
Lucio Costa: Brasilia y la Utopia Moderna/The Line: Lucio Costa and the Modern Utopia/O risco: Lucio Costa e a utopia moderna
Brazil, 2003, text by Josep M. Botey, Portuguese with Spanish subtitles, 78 min.

2. Daryl Dellora, director
Jorn Utzon: El limite de lo posible/The Edge of the Possible: Jorn Utzon and the Sydney Opera House
Australia, 1998, text by Rafael Moneo, English with Spanish subtitles, 56 min.

3. Nathaniel Kahn, director
Louis I Kahn: Mi Arquitecto/Louis I. Kahn, My Architect: A Son’s Journey
USA, 2004, text by Antonio Juarez, English with Spanish subtitles, 116 min.

4. (2 parts, 2 discs) Manu Rewal, director
Le Corbusier en la India, 1a Parte: Ahmedabad y El Capitolio de Chandigarh/Le Corbusier en India, 1re partie: Ahmedabad et Chandigarh
India/France, 2000, text by Josep Quetglas and M. Cecilia O’Byrne, English and French with Spanish subtitles, 52 and 48 min.

5. Mirjam von Arx, director
Norman Foster: Construir el Gherkin/Building the Gherkin

6. Fredrik Gertten, director
Santiago Calatrava: El Socialista, el Arquitecto y la Turning Torso/Sossaen, Arkensteken och det Skruvade Huset
Sweden, 2005, text by Josep Maria Montaner, Swedish and English with Spanish subtitles, 60 min.

7. Arun Khopkar, director
Charles Correa: Volumen Cero/Charles Correa: Volume Zero
India, 2009, text by Joseph Rykwert and Anaxu Zabalbeascoa, English with Spanish subtitles, 58 min.

8. Markus Heidingsfelder and Min Tesch, directors
Rem Koolhaas: Más que un Arquitecto/Rem Koolhaas: A Kind of Architect
Germany, 2005, text by Eduardo Arroyo, German, English, and Dutch with Spanish subtitles, 97 min.

9. Hartmut Bitomsky, director
Hans Scharoun: Arquitectura Imaginaria/Imaginäre Architektur: Der Baumeister Hans Scharoun
Germany, 1993, text by José Morales, German with Spanish subtitles, 65 min.

10. Christoph Schaub and Michael Shindhelm, directors
Hersog & De Meuron: En China: Nido de Pájaros/Bird’s Nest:
Hersog and De Meuron in China
Switzerland, 2008, text by Alejandro Zaera-Polo, German, English, Chinese with Spanish subtitles, 88 min.

11. Murray Grigor, director
USA, 2005, text by Juan Navarro Baldeweg, English with Spanish subtitles, 62 min.

12. Rax Rinnekanas, director
Konstantin Melnikov: La Casa de Melnikov, La Utopia de Moscu/The Melnikov House, A Moscow Utopia

13. Rax Rinnekanas, director
Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea: La Esencia de una Casa/Villa Mairea, The Essence of a House
Finland, 2009, text by Antón Capitel, Finnish with Spanish subtitles, 50 min.

14. Rax Rinnekanas, director
Tadao Ando: La Casa Koshino/ Tadao Ando: The Koshino House
Finland, 2009, text by Alberto Campos Baeza, Finnish with Spanish subtitles, 59 min.

15. (2 films, 2 discs) Gustavo Cortés Bueno, director
Enric Miralles: Aprendizajes del arquitecto
France/Spain, 2000, 60 min.

16. Gabriel Petit and Claude Haim, directors
Antonio Gaudi: Un Arquitecto Mesiánico/Une architecte méssianique Antoni Gaudi: The Messianic Architect

Forthcoming
17. Marc Petitjean
Renzo Piano: Visita de obra/Renzo piano, architect au long course
France, 1999, text by Peter Buchanan, 52 min.
Richard Neutra: VDL Casa
Experimental/VDL Research House
USA, 2007/10, text by Juan Coll-Barreu, 40 min.

The documentary collection presented by
the Fundación Caja de Arquitectos of
Madrid in 2008 comprises films devoted to
architecture and architects. The main aim
of this new program is the dissemination of
films in the field of architecture that have
come out on DVD in Spain. The high
documentary quality and architectural
interest of these films has been confirmed
by previous recognition and in some cases
by prizes awarded in international film
festivals. Each release contains additional
material, such as images, lectures, inter-
views, and audio material that contextualize
the film within the current architectural
scene. Each also comes with a booklet
containing a biography, list of prizes, syn-
opses, plans, and graphics, as well as a
printed and filmed commentary by a Span-
ish architect whose work relates to the
subject of the documentary. Films are
continually being added to this series.

The great strength of such a collection
is to offer insight into the lives and works
of architects. The parallel risk is to rein-
force stereotypes. It is surely significant
that in all the documentaries in the collec-
tion reference is made to only two women
architects, Denise Scott Brown and Aino
Aalto, and that both appear as background
figures—half hidden behind their respec-
tive companions and professional col-
leagues. In the film on Villa Mairea it is
somewhat tendentiously asserted, in pass-
ing, that Aino Aalto laid out the kitchen
and the garden, reducing her contribution
to these two areas.1

Despite its scant treatment of women
architects, the Arquia collection contains
extraordinary films that allow us to live the
human experience of being an architect in
different geographical and cultural environ-
ments. The documentary Jorn Utzon. El
Límite de lo Posible is particularly moving. In
it we are privy to the Danish architect’s dif-
culties in creating the magnificent archi-
tecture of the Sydney Opera House in his
studio on the other side of the globe (Fig-
ure 1). At the time of the competition,
Utzon was presented as a visionary archi-
itect capable of reinforcing the identity of a
young country like Australia with powerful
architecture. And yet during the subsequent
development and execution of the building,
the architect would come under relentless
attack due to the jealousy of the engineering
profession and the xenophobia of local
architects, and these forces would get him
removed from the project in 1966. The film
stresses how Utzon found the answer to the
roof structure, something the engineers had
been incapable of resolving in five years of
work. This sparked off the problems that
were to come, since in order to safeguard
their position not only did the engineers
betray him, but, according to the architect’s
collaborators, they raised doubts about him
to the client and even “sneered at him.” In a
one-sided fight, the fragile architecture
studio—a place of creativity and a labora-
tory of ideas—succumbed to the strong
business ethos of Ove Arup and a new
bunch of nationalist politicians. When
things became impossible, Utzon exited the
stage with elegance, and the building was
finished without him—and without some of
the radical ideas and marvelous details he
had worked carefully on for years. “I could
have built this with any engineer. No engi-
neer could have done so without me,” was
Jorn Utzon’s forceful affirmation on aban-
doning Sydney Harbor and the already
forceful presence of his unfinished building
forever. At the end of the film, we see him
many years later in his peaceful retreat, with
a smile trying to recall his Sydney Opera
House project as a true act of love.

Another magnificent documentary in
the collection brings us Le Corbusier’s
major works in Ahmedabad and Chandi-
garh. We have to cast our minds back to
1951 and imagine the difficulties of the trip
to India and the grueling conditions that
the architect would put up with for years.
Despite everything, the somewhat embittered
sixty-four-year-old architect, who had
managed to build very little in France,
would devote himself entirely to this great
adventure in a far corner of the world.
Particularly surprising is Le Corbusier’s
passionate defense of the controversial tap-
estries he designed for a particular spot
inside the High Court in Chandigarh. The
architect desperately defended the integ-
rity of his work as an inalienable right,
made all the more poignant by his claim,
made to his staunch defender and patron,
President Nehru, that he was “undermining
his health in the Punjab projects.”

Anyone who has visited the capital of
Chandigarh will have sensed the exce-
tional emotion of the place and the forceful
poetry of the architectural landscape, which
Le Corbusier was unable to see completed
in its entirety. The vast empty space fac-
ing the Himalayas with the powerful Assembly,
High Court, and Secretariat around it over-
awe as very few monumental complexes do:
in this twentieth-century masterwork, East
and West converge. The documentary
whets one’s appetite to visit the place.
The same feeling is stirred by the evocative
images shown of the Association of Mill
Owners, the Sarabhai House, and the
Shodhan House in Ahmedabad. But the
film goes beyond being an advertisement
for the architecture, embedding the proj-
ects in an ongoing discourse through the
short but magnificent texts by Josep Quet-
glas and others that accompany the DVD.

To work far from home in an unfamil-

1. Timothy Sakamoto

Figure 1 Jorn Utzon (at left) with
model of the Sydney Opera
House (from Jorn Utzon:
El Límite de lo Posible)
for the architect, but it can also be the only opportunity to build on a large scale. The DVDs devoted to Utzon in Australia and Le Corbusier in India are about such difficulties and achievements. And although it does not involve a land that is that remote, the DVD on Calatrava’s work in Sweden brings together the inconveniences and misunderstandings of designing and building at a distance. In the first image of this DVD we see the architect painting a series of small watercolors, looking up and complaining that the sound isn’t loud enough. Next, he replies in anger when they ask him to comment, without explanation, on the role played by Johnny Örbäck on Turning Torso, the Malmö skyscraper. “I think I’ve spoken very clearly in the museum,” he grudgingly answers, “You shouldn’t consider him a failure. He’s a hero and a martyr to the misfortune of being surrounded by weak people. He always backed me up, but people weren’t equal to the circumstances.” This introduction creates suspense. Who is this Örbäck, a martyr and a hero according to Santiago Calatrava? Little by little we come to realize that he was the managing director in Malmö of HSB, a Swedish cooperative traditionally devoted to creating accessible housing for workers. Örbäck confesses that, “captivated” by a small marble sculpture by the Valencia architect, he decided to commission Calatrava to turn a 623-foot-tall, 54-story tower into Turning Torso.

The documentary gradually reveals a set of events that boded ill from the first: apparently the plans did not arrive in time, the budget overran, they could not contact the architect, and the local technical team did not get on with the one in Zurich. The building work was advancing, albeit haltingly, when a meeting was called at City Hall at which all the tension that had been building up became obvious: the delegates do not understand why HSB has embarked on this extremely expensive luxury housing project. The disagreement with Örbäck is profound, and the justifications he presents to the members of the cooperative only make his dramatic, isolated situation worse. “They say I’m building a monument to myself. But it’s not true,” he says, and he defends the commissioning of Calatrava by saying that Turning Torso is like a Formula One car: it is exceptional now, but in the future it will be the norm. The meeting culminates in his sacking. And now, without a developer devoted to such a extreme idea, with the building three years behind schedule, and with losses of €40 million, the work draws to a close. At the end of the film we see, standing beside the Turning Torso model at MoMA, Santiago Calatrava who, gazing up a haggard Örbäck, contentedly comments, “Sweden’s no place for visionaries!”

Some of architecture’s finest offspring are born in the territory of interbreeding, beyond the purview of Western culture. Emerging countries receive and transform foreign influences with limitless strength and energy. It is interesting that five of the thirteen DVDs in the series bring us singular buildings or the careers of significant architects that have taken place in the so-called BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India, and China. And this is leaving aside the fact that Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, and Louis Kahn have also completed some of their most important buildings in these countries, as reflected in the documentaries in the collection. In these films we can appreciate the processes by which, during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the fusion of modern architecture and local tradition has produced buildings that are symbols of identity and renewal for emerging nations and their peoples.

The birth of Brazil’s national identity coincided with the creating of its modern architecture by architects and planners Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa. The first DVD in the collection recounts this adventure. For the young innovators of the new generation, the world of nature inspired a telluric vision very much in keeping with the urban design championed by Le Corbusier. The architecture and revolutionary ideas of that Swiss-French architect, inscribed in his collaboration on some the Gustavo Campanema Palace (Ministry of Education) in Rio de Janeiro (1936–39), would provide a basis for international assimilation and the creation of a local architecture of great expressive power and formal exuberance. It is particularly exciting to witness first hand, in images of the period and accounts from those involved, the way Brasilia, the most emblematic new modern city, was conceived and carried out. Only the strength of a young nation, the unstoppable creative spirit of a few individuals, and the magical convergence of circumstances made this titanic piece of work possible. Not only was it an urban landscape created where there was previously nothing, but a radical break with tradition was made as well. As in other DVDs in the collection, the human side of the main figures emerges in the documentary with the same force as does their work. It is moving to hear Lucio Costa recalling the dramatic death of his young wife, for which he always felt he was responsible. The episode becomes chilling when the architect recounts that a drawing of a bloody dagger that Le Corbusier gave to them before the fatal accident became an awful portent. It is equally moving to hear the soft lament of a lucid, aged Niemeyer in the grip of nostalgia one rainy Sunday afternoon listening to old songs in the studio. “I’m tired of laughter and tears, I’m tired of life.”

In the mid-twentieth century, India—like Brazil—decisively supported and created a favorable atmosphere for the architecture and urban design of Le Corbusier. At the time the country was opening a door to modernity, and a number of local architects contributed to this by taking a firm and positive stand. Outstanding among them was Charles Correa, in whose work Western modern rationality and the magic of Oriental meanings coexist in harmony. Brought together in this DVD compilation of his life and work are his reflections and his creations, which even more than fifty years after their making, are surprising in their topicality. In some of his designs we encounter an open-ended sense of freedom in the use of forms that makes him the precursor of the contemporary language of complex angles. His designs’ integration in the environment proceeded from a spirituality that sought harmony with the cosmos.

Konstantin Melnikov’s house is, notwithstanding its small size, one of the best-known modern buildings in Russia. It was built in Moscow in 1927, and its unusual architecture resulted from a mixture of influences, innovations, and traditions. We get to know this dwelling in detail in the
Meuron is seen doing everything possible amusing and significant scene in which De follows them everywhere. There is a very Olympic stadium in Beijing the camera winners of the design competition for the architects maintain. Once they are declared eligible story of the building of Herzog and tects in the collection narrates the incred- ible 1974 at the age of eighty-four. descending, it is intact down to the last details, just as it was when Melnikov died in 1974 at the age of eighty-four. One of the most interesting documentaries in the collection narrates the incredible story of the building of Herzog and De Meuron’s Bird’s Nest (Figure 2). “China is like a magnet,” the Swiss architects maintain. Once they are declared winners of the design competition for the Olympic stadium in Beijing the camera follows them everywhere. There is a very amusing and significant scene in which De Meuron is seen doing everything possible to get someone to give him a spade so he can participate in the politically important groundbreaking. Nobody pays him the slightest bit of attention. Finally he gives up and exclaims with a smile, “I’m the architect!” In the meantime leading politi- cians and civil servants take great pains to shovel the required spadeful of earth in unison; it is the official photo that will remain for posterity. The architects are not in it. The documentary refers to the difficulties of working in a country with such an unfamiliar culture, and to the strange methods of the client, who was forever testing the architects and even setting traps to verify their abilities and strengths, testing their resistance. Herzog and De Meuron, who had already had a hard time with proj- ects in Russia and the United Arab Emir- ates, formed a team with two individuals who were crucial to their understanding of the local culture: former ambassador Uli Sigg and artist Ai Wei Wei. From the first, both would be essential to the project, ensuring that understanding and rapport between the architects and the Chinese government was not lost at certain critical moments. The film documents difficult moments, as when the price of steel shot up on the commodities market and the client began to consider alternative materials for the framework, such as plastic. In spite of everything, Herzog and De Meuron would not make concessions. Despite the large challenges, the work was brilliantly finished in only four years, winning the admiration of the world and the architects’ recognition abilities of the Chinese.

Rem Koolhaas is today an architect-cum-theorist, as was Le Corbusier during the twentieth century. Controversial, pos- sesed of a high media profile, with strong ideas and emblematic works, the Dutch- man defines himself as “an architect who writes, a writer who builds.” At the begin- ning of this extended documentary, he assures us that “at the age of fourteen I wanted to be a Brazilian architect.” And he goes on to describe the work as a journalist and alternative filmmaker that has marked his unusual way of understanding and making architecture. He also speaks of his political interests and his many influences, which extend from Yves Klein to Anto- nioni and Pasolini and from Constant and the Situationists to Le Corbusier, Dali, Malevich, and many others. Koolhaas displays an endlessly independent turn of mind and takes a critical position vis-à-vis political context that has led him to exclaim “Fuck context!” In 1975, trusting in the collective intelligence of the multidisciplinary group, he joined with Madelon Vriesendorp, Elia Zenghelis and Zoe Zenghelis to found OMA. In 1998 he created AMO as a response to the constant schizophrenia the architect experiences in his relationship with the client and his lack of control over his interests. Koolhaas’s ideas and career trajectory are recorded in the documentary, and some of his more important buildings are represented by documents, commentaries, and exception- al images. These include the Floirac House in Bordeaux, the Netherlands Embassy in Berlin, the Kunsthall in Rot- terdam, and (more extensively) the Casa da Música in Porto. The vibrant, emotive text accompanying the CD is written by Edu- ardo Arroyo, Koolhaas’s former assistant, who passionately describes his adventures as a young Spanish architect who lived through the ups and downs of the daring architectural designs of the OMA studio: “The lines of research Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe, Oscar Niemeyer and a few Russians left open converge, and are extended and resolved in OMAs spatial designs, thus closing the conjectural brackets they opened. The documentary on the building of Norman Foster’s so-called Gherkin in London has something of the suspense movie about it. Over the
weeks of work, we are made privy to events by all those involved on the team. Developers, architects, assistants, and the client are all indispensable actors in a thrilling architecture reality show, as we delve into demanding situations, disagreements, the pressures, the moments of frustration, the distribution of roles, the power, and the helplessness of one and all. Yet Foster hardly appears in the documentary.

It would seem that he drives the great design machinery without dirtying his hands, with subtle elegance and absolute authority. We only see him involved in cultural or social activities, relaxed and wise, above the mundane tensions experienced by all of his team on the building. The illuminating text by Luis Fernández Galiano that accompanies the DVD points out that the movie is both heroic tale and comedy of manners, as pedagogical in its recording of the processes of implementation and decision-taking as it is perceptive in the account of the key individuals, a crowd of executives, bureaucrats, designers and contractors: from Norman Foster, who argues with clipped, chilling courtesy, to the almost sinister municipal planning director—all take shape with empathy and a sense of humor, concocting with their indecision, phobias, and disencounters a living, vibrant soap opera.

Likewise, the documentary on Melnikov’s house, Villa Mairea, by the same director, provides beautiful images and graphic documents to help us understand Aino and Alvar Aalto’s marvelous home. Yet we might make a similar criticism of each: we are given a variety of perspectives of the residence but unfortunately we are left wanting an analysis of its context in the work of its creator and in the history of architecture.

In the documentary on Scharoun, the mythical figure emerges as the powerful creator of a radically personal and in many ways unclassifiable body of work. The German architect represents the modernist project’s many other directions, at a remove from the orthodoxy established by the so-called International Style. The buildings are introduced with spontaneity by the people who live in and enjoy them. The users of his designs—he they public or private—emerge as the true protagonists of Scharoun’s architecture; they embody the humanism of architecture as a spatiotemporal experience. The architect never appears (we are only shown photos of his face over the years). He is present in the singular planning of his organic architecture and in the infinite details he elaborated. At one point in the DVD we are shown a sequence of many different handrails, which gives us an idea of the architect’s unlimited creative repertoire. In contrast to the serial production of functionalist architecture, Scharoun emphasized how each architectural situation is different and unique, like the person who inhabits it.

The documentary of Sir John Soane orchestrates the opinions of a generation of architects—Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Richard Meier, Charles Jencks, Michael Graves, Philip Johnson—who saw in the neoclassical English master a fecund inspiration for the 1970s revision of the modernist project. Soane’s exciting trip to Italy inspired his own controversial reinterpretation of the classical. We are told about Soane’s visit to Palermo and the Villa Palagonia, with its marble floors, mirrored ceilings, and fantastic baroque monsters of wild transgression—magnificent spaces bathed in Sicilian light that became fixed in Soane’s memory. We accompany him at the decisive moment of the trip when he visited the ruins of the Doric temple in Agrigento.

Back in London, the Yellow Room, prototype of the famous “silk parachute” dome of the Breakfast Room, and the Tivoli Corner of the Bank of England expressed the revolutionary English architect’s new vision of the classical world. With the help of several contemporary designers, this documentary takes us through such representative pieces of postmodern architecture as Meier’s Getty Center and Venturi and Scott Brown’s National Gallery in London. This excellent study reveals how Soane inspired those American architects who established links with history and took an unbiased look at the classical world on their way to making a critical revision of the modernist project.

The passionate and controversial life of Louis Kahn is revealed to us through the eyes of his son. Louis Kahn: Mi Arquitecto is a beautiful first-person narrative built around the discovery of an almost unknown father. The man and his complex, secret-filled life are eloquently revealed through his works of architecture. The magnificent script and excellent photography intertwine human drama and architecture as the inseparable life and work of the architect.

Many of the films in this collection recount the adventure of conceiving and building an outstanding work of architecture, sometimes in remote countries and unfamiliar cultures. But the documentary by Kahn’s son brings us closest to understanding the emotions of experiencing architecture and of being an architect.

This useful collection of DVDs provides data, documents, and living testimony that illuminates these buildings and their contexts. They will undoubtedly be of interest to students, architects, experts on architecture, and the interested public. It just so happens that watching the documentaries you begin to feel a burning desire. And it is then that you start fantasizing, and you decide to embark on the journey that will lead you to experiencing the architecture where it is.

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Note
1. As in other professions, documentaries that pick up on the contribution of women to the field of architecture are few and far between. This collection might eventually include Jorg Bundschuh’s Invitation to a Voyage (2006), about the architecture and designs of Eileen Gray, with its excellent documentary material, although the narrator’s comments are occasionally wide off the mark. The compelling work of the only two women Pritzker Prize winners, Zaha Hadid and Kazuyo Sejima (SANAA), has had a certain amount of documentary footage, albeit scarce and scattered. On YouTube, for instance, there is an 8-minute 52-second video called Zaha Hadid: Hermitage-Guggenheim Vilnius Museum (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CXYWU_yHbE [accessed 6 Jan. 2011]) and a 4-minute 28-second video entitled SANAA: Works 1998–2008. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City (http://www.redux.com/stream/ items/1694719/SANAA-Works-1998–2008 [accessed 6 Jan. 2011]). There is also a 42-minute 10-second video directed and produced by Erwin Weimer about SANAA’s Zollverein School of Management and Design, Essen and a 30-minute BBC television documentary (2004), Zaha Hadid Behind the Facade.