Image ARCHIVE. An operating space for architecture videos.

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Image ARCHIVE is a digital archive devoted to collecting, preserving and enhancing architecture videos. It started in 1997 as a complementary activity to the BEYOND MEDIA architecture festival in Florence organized by Image. Image is a non-profit organization active in the promotion of architectural culture, engaged in several initiatives in Italy and abroad. It has worked and collaborated with many subjects towards the creation of events dealing with contemporary architecture. This paper, that is an updated version of what has been released at the MACE Conference in Venice on September 2008, is aimed at introducing what Image ARCHIVE is and how it operates.

PREMISE. Within the realm of contemporary architecture production, video is no longer a secondary element, it is instead expressly a tool for design expression and an important document within certain areas of research in our times. Image operates in close contact with the forms of communication of the architecture project, carrying out a series of actions that recognise the video for its distinction as an important strategic value in the development of architectural thought and practice. Through the activities of Image ARCHIVE, a multimedia archive dedicated to the collection, conservation and valorisation of architecture video, Image is conducting a project aimed at giving ample visibility to the more significant audio-visual documents in order to bear witness to some pivotal steps of contemporary research in architecture.

The current interest in architecture video is a result of a path that have traversed the entire 20th century; a path that has witnessed an interweaving of cinema and architectural practices, often producing considerable effects. And there has been a frequent tendency to highlight this reciprocal exchange between the two worlds. Cinema has been, according to some, the cradle in which modern architecture was able to mature some of its basic principles on spatial concepts. It was also however one of the main vehicles for the disclosure and affirmation of its very image. On the other hand, architecture has often suggested its hypotheses for urban configurations to cinema, as well as the pretexts for narrative themes, generating a mirror for the comprehension of lived-in spaces and their dynamics. A climate of strong complicity has involved both architects and filmmakers for almost a century; and oftentimes, over the years, there have been moments of intense relations between them. We are particularly interested in the viewpoints of the architects who understood cinema as a surprisingly effective instrument for the observation and analysis of urban phenomena, while also using it to seek out veritable starting points for the verification and extension of their own hypotheses. This dynamic tension as it was developed by the architect with cinematographic means and, later in the century, with other forms of audio-visual communication, is starting to encounter a limit. As Le Corbusier noted in the early 1930's, the common tools of cinema production of that period proved to be less compliant than even the more conventional means of expression of the project designer. What was lost, despite his awareness of the strong analogies between the profession of the architect and the film-director, was the immediacy of the architect's interpretative and expressive action.

A NEW CONVERGENCE. At the end of the 1980's, with computing innovation in full swing, the first software for digital modelling, along with animation and especially video editing, sanctioned a fundamental breakthrough. A greater accessibility to technology brought video closer to the daily practices of architects, who adopted it as yet another vehicle, adding to their other existing tools, in order to elaborate a more distinct expression for their design. Architects and project designers started to systematically deal with audio-visual devices as a means of communication and, in adapting those tools to their needs, became real producers of the moving image. The progressive perfection of the instruments, techniques, a growing versatility and the proliferation of computer devices all created the conditions for video to affirm itself as a channel for investigation and research. In response to certain technological and sociological drives, as the fundamental passages for stimulating interest in videos on architecture, the theoretic reflection set forth at the end of the same decade had a decisive role in that it focalised a number of important factors in the relationship between architecture and its tools of communication. Although they never explicitly dealt with the topic of video, the contributions of Beatriz Colomina ("Architectureproduction", 1988 and "Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media", 1994), and the more recent text by Kester Rattenbury ("This is not architecture", 2002), they took time to analyse the consequences of a gradual complementarity of the dimension of the project and the realm of media production. The video as a tool, according to this view, constitutes a noteworthy case in point to explain the development of certain directions in contemporary production. And over recent years a few distinct events have shown there to be a definite interest, which goes back to the first reflections on the topic: from the last two editions of the FIFARC, Biennale Internationale du Film d'Architecture et Environnement Urbain in Bordeaux, to the birth of Artimage, Medien und Architektur Biennale of Graz, one sees a progressive increased awareness regarding the passage from the use of video as an instrument, in which architecture is simply documented, to one where it becomes a real act of communication.

THE FLORENCE FESTIVAL. This is the environment in which the international festival of architecture and media, also known as BEYOND MEDIA, was born. Starting off in Florence in 1997, today it constitutes the opportunity for exchange and engaging encounters. From its beginning, the main objective of the festival has been to actively monitor the audio-visual realm in which architects have been operating. BEYOND MEDIA constituted the first significant occasion to provide visibility for video productions based on a discussion of architecture, which often remained confined to the private spheres and inner circles of their authors. This was paradoxical for documentation developed for its availability and potential as a medium that is generally more open to ample audiences. For that reason, BEYOND MEDIA was developed to give a voice to video projects and tell their stories, as an opportunity to show and share the pieces by putting them at the center of a reflection that is open to all who operate, with various roles, in the field of architecture. Over the eleven years of activity and with the eight editions of BEYOND MEDIA, Image has attentively followed the evolution of architecture's theory and expression.

THE ARCHIVE. Starting with the first edition of the festival put on by Image, what emerged was the necessity to give life to a permanent structure. There was need of an operative space for the collection

of audio-visual documents and their constant examination in order to gather and provide the necessary elements to present an updated photograph of what's effectively being produced by architects in the world of video media production. The Image ARCHIVE is a center for the compilation and collection of documents, which, for their specific characteristics, are oftentimes arranged in a dismembered, spread-out way in a number of different places, from the microcosms of architecture studios to the macrocosm of the web-platform and video sharing. The archive collects about 2,500 video works that were created by architects, artists, filmmakers, documentary directors and students. Each contributor elaborates a personal way of narrating architecture through video and gives their own product a vestige that is adapted to the objective for which it is realised. The videos are produced to investigate the characteristics and potential of a project, and its performance; or else to exhibit in exposition environments, to be communicated through media channels, in addition to participation in competitions, or to substantiate publication projects.

Therefore, the material collected in the archive is both varied and multifaceted. Any attempt to apply categories would diminish the polyhedric nature of the collected works, which is instead one of the strong features of the Image ARCHIVE collection. However, it may be useful, in order to offer an analytical key for better understanding the collected videos, to distinguish two lines of production, indicating two different main objectives of the audiovisual pieces. The first group collects the audiovisual documents that were used as tools of design investigation. The architects work with animation techniques developed during the stage of the project's elaboration, not only as an occasion for the verification of the structural qualities of architecture, but also as a means for clarifying the defining the language that translates the fundamental concepts of their research into architecture. Experiences that make use of geometric outlines and diagrams as structural guidelines are based on this approach. The second group comprises the audiovisual documents that are developed as means to communicate architecture projects. These works can narrate the architecture project design or the completed building; but that which allows for a comparison between the two is the intentionally communicative content of the final product. The video becomes an act of demonstration and showcase for communication and, in certain cases, it directly relates to forms of publicity production. The two types of video described do not run parallel, they are rather interchangeable, and at times even complementary: the first type of investigation does not cancel interest in the second type of production and vice versa. In all cases, however, one perceives the strong presence of a design dimension in each. The collection of the archive is therefore specifically concentrated on videos of architecture as acts of communication regarding architecture projects themselves. This particular point of observation, however, does not exclude the presence in the collection of a series of works that can be ascribed to the critical/documenting genre of video that is already significantly consolidated.

CONSERVATION. In virtue of the unique contents and awareness regarding the necessary attention for works that require being hosted for their more ample functions within the world of architectural production, Image ARCHIVE operates on the margins of the two ambits of architecture and audio-visual production; consequently the acquired tools for the management of the archive draw on models of a double nature. The more structured archives of audiovisual material, and especially those

connected to video-art, offer the guidelines for an effective management of possible technical problems. The more pressing necessity in this field is to limit the damage caused by the perishability of the support devices, in both analogical and digital formats, through a cyclical revision of new units of conservation, while also limiting the loss of information caused by the aging process of the various reading formats of the material. The archives of architecture are a point of reference regarding the aspects that are directly tied to the description of the architecture project. For purposes of documentation, each video piece is equipped, at the moment of its entrance into the archive, with standardised information data. There is also a third model that is much closer to the world of commercial publicity, which proposes interesting ideas about dynamic means for the circulation and distribution of the archive's material.

OBSERVATIONS. Architects, artists and videomakers are some of the professionals who operate in the creative process aimed at producing moving images. During years, Image ARCHIVE has been in contact with many of them, and has evaluated their interest for videos, and their cautiousness or confidence in showing video works. As holders of an archive, which is partially a digital archive and collects documents which are considerably perishable, easily reproducible, and often created for an immediate use, some questions have arisen during our daily activities in collecting and preserving videoworks. The first observation relates to the nature of the documents we gather, and concerns the validity of a collection made of materials which, in theory, are already preserved in their authors' archives which hopefully one day will all be collected in well-established archiving institutions. In this circumstances the specificity of the Image ARCHIVE's activities, while being interested in the conservation of each document, and thanks to the variety of the collected material, aims at a wider observation of architecture videos as an audiovisual phenomenon that has a relevant role in the observation of contemporary architectural culture and of its relations with the media. The second observation arises when we consider that a large part of contemporary architectural production tends to become part of a shared knowledge, one that is widespread in various ambits. The architect's documents, among which are videos, are more and more often dropped into the mediatic sphere, used to affect the public and shared in the Web. Given the public use of the architect's documents, the time gap between production and the use of those materials is ever more reduced, and if once upon a time the archive was something to be protected and secluded, and was often quite inaccessible, today these many documents -even videos- that describe the architectural project constitute a very large repository which many are encouraged to tap into. The Web is nurturing huge reservoirs of materials which are also endowed with classification tools, but the orderliness it provides does could not satisfy the need for a balanced and personal collection where one can find traces and information that go beyond that which is offered by a system of keywords and automatic relations. Due to all these reasons, for managing a current archive -which is the case of the Image ARCHIVE- it could turn out to be useful to complete the model of a long term preservation with the more immediate model of sharing.

AN ARCHIVE OF HYBRID FORMATION. The Image ARCHIVE, as any of the structured archive institutions, aims to convey documents of architecture in video while working for their conservation. In

addition to this function there is the added value of the archive's activities. Throughout its research on those intimate connections that demonstrate the effectiveness of architecture videos, it has been a part of Image's specific competence to create relations surrounding the collected videos in order to construct and stimulate discussions on architecture, while paying attention to the expressive content and form of the video format. Our structure is comparable to other existing models of architecture archives, but at the same time it maintains its own specificity as a result of the unique experiences that follow their own particular path. It is this path that today allows us to hold active discussion on a theme that continues to grow and transform on a daily basis. Image ARCHIVE carries out its role to increase awareness and incentives towards architects, their clients and institutions, with the purpose of generating effective practices in the qualified use of video as a medium. The close adherence that Image has developed with what is contemporary makes the material collected in our archive the main instrument for photographing an era and understanding how it describes itself. The specific skills acquired over time allow us, in interpreting the contents of the videos, to elaborate an open theoretic reflection regarding a daily confrontation with reality and a verification of its standing positions.

CONCLUSIONS.

Having comprehended the importance of architecture video as a major project of the contemporary culture of architecture, Image ARCHIVE operates, through an intense activity of circulation, so that these documents are adequately valued to become a real platform for discussion. That which animates our program is a cultural project aimed at circulating ideas and visions of architecture and generating a vehicle for debate, encounters and exchange regarding the themes of contemporary project design. With the strength of an archive base that bears witness to certain key lines of research in project design, set forth with the revolution in computer innovation, and with the vantage-point developed over more than ten years of observation and activity, we are today witnessing important evolutions in the field, such as the growth in popularity of the tools for sharing audio-visual documents over the web, or the affirmation of video communication as tools for projects of urban communications, and the renewed and complex consequences that can affect the ways architectural projects are exhibited to the public.