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# Phantom Theory: The gta Institute in Postmodernist Architectural Discourse

## Sylvia Claus

The unwieldy dualism of “History and Theory” with which the founders of the gta Institute prefaced the word Architecture was deliberate. The relationship between history and theory is a dialectical one: Theory needs the concretization of history if it is not to become a phantom, just as history without reflection on the inevitability of (re-)construction and hence theorizing loses its critical dimension. The gta Institute was to set itself apart from tendencies indicative of a concern solely with theory or solely with history by intertwining the two, wisely foregoing an exact definition of the relationship between them and contenting itself instead with that most noncommittal of connections: the simple conjunction and. The problem of theory’s perpetual elusiveness – it being easier to grasp in retrospect than in any analysis of what is happening in the present – was thus present from the start. <sup>1</sup>

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## The Founding of the gta Institute: Context, Strategies, Protagonists

The gta Institute commenced work on January 1, 1967, at a time of political, social, and architectural upheaval correlated with the first stirrings of postmodernism. Critical analysis of social problems across disciplines and across borders became a preoccupation of the first order in the “long summer of theory.” <sup>2</sup> The rage for reading and debate was fueled by revolutionary fervor. Institutes with a strong theoretical bias sprang up at many universities, and there was an observable shift of emphasis toward science in the teaching of architecture too: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, launched a “History, Theory and Criticism of Art, Architecture and Environmental Studies” program; the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia inaugurated a Dipartimento di Analisi, Critica e Storia dell’Architettura that bore the unmistakable stamp of Manfredo Tafuri; and the University of Stuttgart opened the Institut für Grundlagen moderner Architektur und Entwerfen, which from its founding in 1968 was headed by Jürgen Joedicke. The independent Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies founded by Peter Eisenman and his acolytes in New York City in 1967 was part of the same development. In that same year, students and research assistants at the University of Stuttgart with ties to the philosopher Max Bense launched the *Arch+* journal on architecture-related environmental research and planning. The programmatic plus sign stood for what architecture means above and beyond itself – that is, for what it means to society, to the environment, to ordinary people.

<sup>1</sup> This text summarizes the findings of the exhibition *Phantom Theorie: Das Institut gta im Architekturdiskurs seit 1967*, which students in the author’s Master of Advanced Studies program at the gta Institute at ETH Zurich created in collaboration with the gta Archives, gta Exhibitions, and the gta Verlag to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the gta Institute in the summer of 2017. See also Ruth Hanisch and Steven Spier, “History Is Not the Past but Another Mightier Presence: The Founding of the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) Zurich and Its Effects on Swiss Architecture,” *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 6 (2009): 655–86.

<sup>2</sup> Philipp Felsch, *Der lange Sommer der Theorie: Geschichte einer Revolte, 1960–1990* (Munich: Beck, 2015).

Art history was also swept up in these changes. The founding of the Ulmer Verein by students and middle-tier academics from Germany's art history faculties in the fall of 1968 signaled a striving for more social and political relevance.

Against this backdrop the developments at ETH do not seem particularly revolutionary – at least not at first glance. Yet the restructuring of the architecture department that went hand in hand with the consolidation of institutes such as the gta would have been inconceivable without the student protests that preceded it. The students found influential supporters for their cause in the art historian Paul Hofer and the design teacher Bernhard Hoesli, both of whom became key players in the gta's founding phase. An ETH Institut für Orts-, Regional- und Landesplanung (Institute for Local, Regional, and National Planning, ORL) that would engage in "research, consultancy, coordination, and training" had been in planning since 1958 and finally commenced work – at the recommendation of the Department of Architecture but independent of any one department initially – three years later.<sup>3</sup> The success of that institute might well have been what the founders of the gta had in mind when, in 1966, they applied to the Swiss School Council for permission to set up an institute for the history and theory of architecture.<sup>4</sup> Still more institutes were founded in the years following: the Institut für Hochbauforschung (Institute of Building Research) in 1969 (disbanded in 1985), the Institut für Hochbautechnik (Institute of Building Technology) in 1972 (renamed the Institute of Technology in Architecture in 2009), and the Institut für Denkmalpflege (Institute of Historic Preservation) in 1972 (now the Institute of Historic Building Research and Conservation).<sup>5</sup> The mid-1960s also saw the restructuring of the Department of Architecture itself as the number of design professors was almost tripled (from three to eight).<sup>6</sup> The appointment of Hofer as associate professor of the history of urban planning and conservation on October 1, 1964, and the simultaneous hiring of Albert Knoepfli, hitherto a monument conservationist for canton Thurgau, to lecture on the "Conservation of Historical Monuments with Excursions" placed the humanities on a broader footing. Hofer and Knoepfli may have been on the staff of the Department of Architecture, but they were expected to collaborate closely with two art historians, Erwin Gradmann and Adolf Max Vogt.<sup>7</sup>

Their appointment as associate professors of art history in 1961 had been motivated by the fact that, unlike their predecessor, Linus Birchler, both men possessed a "legitimate relationship with modern art and even more so with modern architecture." They were also deemed to have "the will and the temperament to

<sup>3</sup> Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1959, "Sitzung Nr. 6 vom 07.11.1959, Traktandum 161 und 162," ETH Library, Archives, SR2. The former ORL Institute was integrated into the Department of Architecture's Network City and Landscape in 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Board of the ETH Department of Architecture, "Antrag an den Praesidenten des Schweizerischen Schulrates betreffend die Errichtung eines Institutes für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur an der ETH," June 29, 1966, gta Archives, ETH Zurich; Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1966, "Sitzung Nr. 5 vom 08.07.1966, Traktandum 140," ETH Library, Archives, SR2.

<sup>5</sup> On the development of knowledge management generally during this period, see David Gugerli, "Kybernetisierung der Hochschule: Zur Genese des universitären Managements," in *Die Transformation des Humanen: Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Kybernetik*, eds. Michael Hagner and Erich Hörl (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 414–39.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Training of the Architect at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology* (Zurich: Architekturabteilung der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule, 1965); Heinz Ronner, "Ein neuer Lehrplan an der Architekturabteilung der ETH," *Schweizerische Bauzeitung* 83, no. 47 (1965): 863–64; Gaudenz Risch, "Aufbau der Studienpläne an der ETH," *Schweizerische Bauzeitung* 85, no. 12 (1967): 211–14.

<sup>7</sup> Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1964, "Sitzung Nr. 2 vom 21.03.1964, Traktandum 44, 182," ETH Library, Archives, SR2.

work together and to engage critically with professors of architecture," it having been agreed that "art history must become a living part of the architecture program." <sup>8</sup> The choice of Gradmann, a native of Vienna who had won acclaim as conservator of the ETH's Graphische Sammlung, and Vogt, a "stalwart" — if not to say pugnacious — art critic at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* prized for his analytical skills and acute powers of observation, thus represented a programmatic commitment to the present, since "only a lecturer who also loves the modern can open students' eyes to the historical." <sup>9</sup> Vogt and Gradmann were also thought capable of arousing in architecture students an interest in the history of both art and architecture. Their proximity to the Department of Architecture was thus a given and was explicitly desired from the start, even if both men technically belonged to the Department XII for Liberal Arts (now the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences). Viewed in this light, the history of the gta Institute is also a history of how art history came to be institutionally anchored in the Department of Architecture and of how its specialization in the history and theory of architecture came about.

Alongside Vogt as its chief initiator, the gta's founding members were Gradmann, Hofer, Knoepfli, and Hoesli, one of Switzerland's most influential teachers of architecture. An advisory board comprising architect Charles-Edouard Geisendorf, civil engineer Hans Heinrich Hauri (from 1968 to 1973 the president of ETH), and Alfred Roth

(one of the great champions of modern architecture in Switzerland) was soon enlarged to include other influential representatives of the Department of Architecture and so help embed the gta in that department. The application for permission to set up the gta Institute submitted to the Swiss School Council in June 1966 had emphasized the gta's role as a research center that would consolidate, intensify, and coordinate "all the currently uncoordinated scientific and critical work being done at ETH on the history and theory of architecture, urban planning, and conservation." Its proposed scope of

<sup>8</sup> Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1960, "Sitzung Nr. 7 vom 12.11.1960, Traktandum 195, 779," ETH Library, Archives, SR2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 782, 786.



**fig. 1** Hans-Rudolf Lutz, cover of the first volume in the gta series, 1968.

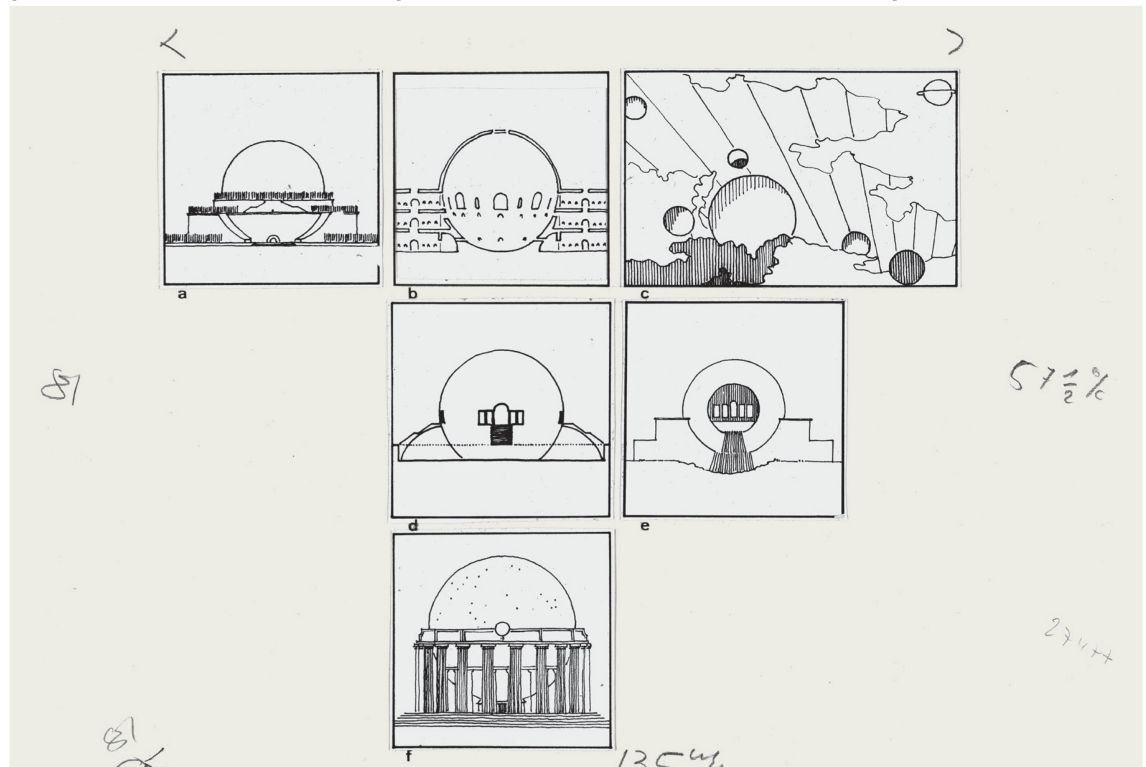
activities ranged from the joint acquisition of transparencies and books to ideas for advanced studies, the coordinated “supervision of dissertations,” the development of a postgraduate program, the “organization of excursions,” various art-historical and conservation projects, the “organization and attendance of guest lectures, exhibitions, and symposia in collaboration with the Department of Architecture,” and concerted publishing activities. 10

10 Board of the ETH Department of Architecture, “Antrag an den Praesidenten” (see note 4).

### The “Rainbow Series” as a Reflection of the Discourse

The gta Institute’s first four books were published in collaboration with Birkhäuser Verlag in what came to be known as the “Rainbow Series.” Like Willy Fleckhaus’s edition *suhrkamp designs*, the series owes its name to the dazzling array of colors produced when the monochrome books are lined up together. Until 1980, the typography was the work of graphic artist Hans-Rudolf Lutz, who thus defined the gta look. <sup>fig.1</sup> The first work in the series, *Reden und Vortrag zur Eröffnung*, was a compilation of the inaugural speeches made by Vogt, Hofer, and council president Jacob Burckhardt on June 23, 1967. The second, for which Klaus Lankheit, professor of art history and rector of the University of Karlsruhe,

fig.2 Martin Fröhlich, drawings after Étienne-Louis Boullée, ca. 1968.



procured hitherto unpublished drawings by Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–1799), provided strategic underpinning for the institute’s efforts to establish an international network – as well as revealing Vogt’s interest in revolutionary architecture. Vogt’s own book, *Boullée’s Newton-Denkmal: Sakralbau und Kugelidee*, was published as gta 3 in 1969, and Hoesli’s annotated German translation of Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky’s “Transparency” essay

appeared as gta 4. Hofer's *Palladios Erstling* was published as gta 5 in 1968, followed by Gradmann's *Aufsätze zur Architektur* on Francesco Borromini, Adolf Loos, and Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach later that same year. The seventh book in the series, a monographic study of the Swiss-American bridge builder Othmar H. Ammann, was the work of his erstwhile mentee, Fritz Stüssi, emeritus professor of structural engineering, architecture, and bridge building. Published in 1974, the volume can be read as a tribute to the civil engineer and departing ETH president Hans Hauri — the author having himself been ETH president from 1949 to 1951. Alfred Roth's *Begegnung mit Pionieren* came out as gta 8 in 1973.

As much as the wide-ranging subject matter reflected the specific research interests of the institute's directors, it also exposed the lack of any clear program or method, as Stanislaus von Moos observed in 1970:

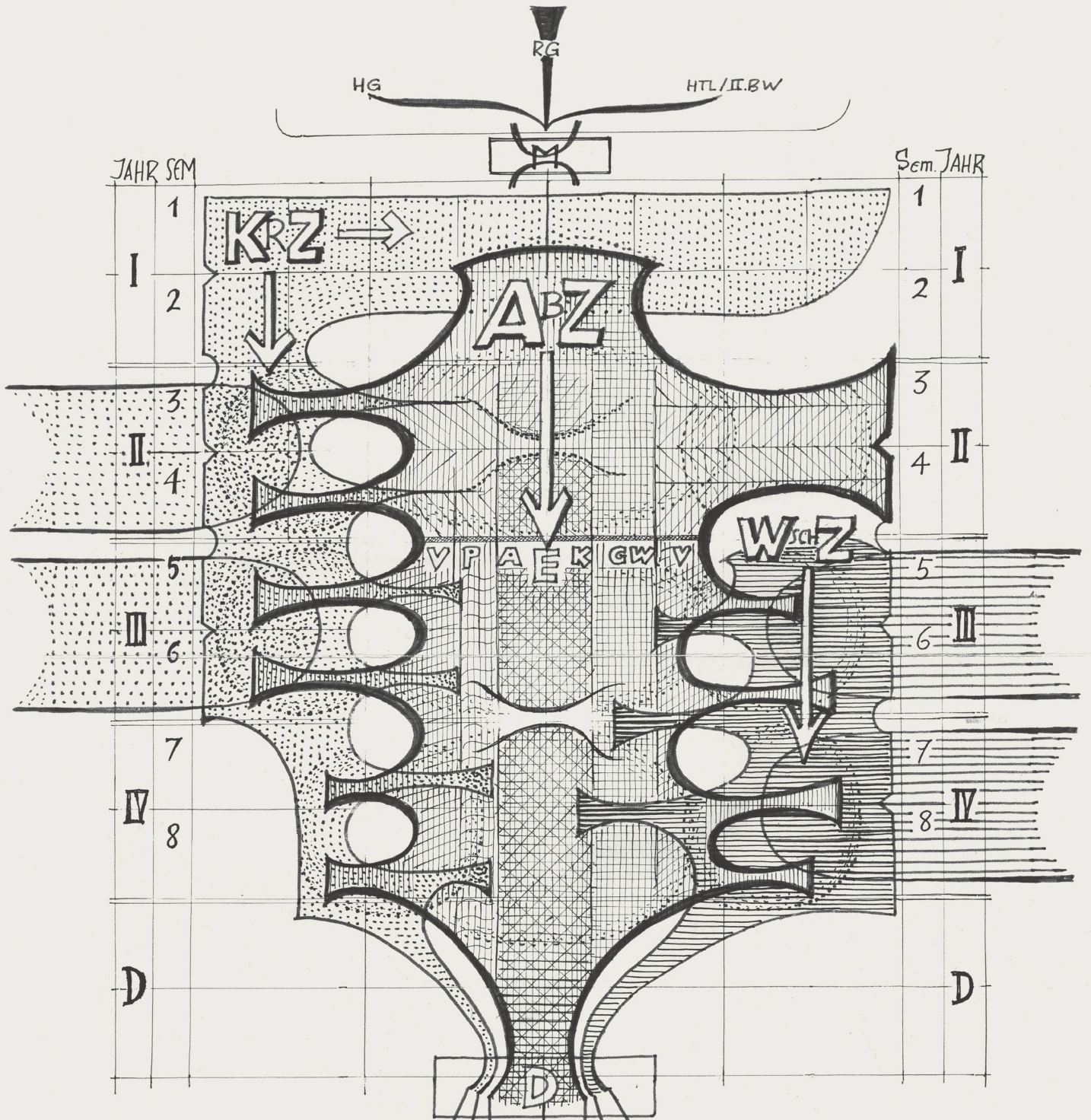
*"Every possible form of literary engagement with architecture is present here, from rigorous historical research work to the didactic comic strip, from the source edition to the essay, with all manner of texts in between. ... In certain instances, the somewhat coquettish presentation of these volumes might be read as symbolizing the late flowering of a science already in decline, or at least as evidence that the methods and academic style of these works are not quite on a par with the 'modernity' to which the typography so ostentatiously pretends."* <sup>11</sup>

Although von Moos ends on a conciliatory note, his critique is not easily refuted. So schematic are the illustrations that they risk excessive simplicity. On the dust jacket of the first work in the series, Vogt expressed his hope that it might "bridge the gulf between words and pictures so commonly found in books about architecture. The explaining should be done not by word alone, but also by drawing; the reader should always be a viewer, too, and hence able to verify the author's assertions in drawings and pictures." <sup>12</sup> How this might be achieved is exemplified by Vogt's own volume on Boullée's design for a cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton. The first chapter of *Boullées Newton-Denkmal* is followed by 120 pages of "illustrations divided into three groups: Boullée, Ledoux, comparative illustrations." Among these are reproductions of drawings by Boullée and Ledoux, as well as photographs of comparable structures. Vogt's line of argument in the remaining eleven chapters nevertheless relies heavily on schematic drawings by Martin Fröhlich, one of the gta Institute's first research assistants and Vogt's own teaching assistant. <sup>fig.2</sup> Presumably von Moos had in mind these greatly simplified, though not simplistic, renditions when he spoke of "comic strips." Their

<sup>11</sup> Stanislaus von Moos, "Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur an der ETH Zürich," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 27, no. 4 (1970): 236–43, here 236.

<sup>12</sup> Jakob Burckhardt, Adolf Max Vogt, and Paul Hofer, *Reden und Vortrag zur Eröffnung, gta 1* (Basel/Stuttgart: Birkhäuser, 1968), dust jacket text.

VORLÄUFIGE SKIZZE EINES MÖGLICHEN KONZEPTS FÜR DIE ARCHITEKTURABTEILUNG ETH-Z / zuhanden der Arbeitstagung vom 24.III.72



**KRZ** KRITISCHER ZUG

EXTERNE FACHLEUTE: WIRT. SCHAFT / POLITIK / SOZIALWIS. SCHAFTLER / PSYCHOLOGEN / PHILOSOPHEN [CASE STUDIES]  
 Interdisziplinär kombiniert Arbeitsgruppen

**ABZ** HAUPTZUG: AEK BERUFAUSBILDUNG

FACHRICHTUNGEN: P Planung und Städtebau / GW Geisteswissenschaften + DENKMALPFLEGE / V VARIA & SPEZIALDISZIPLINEN [INNENGEÜBUNG UNVERBINDLICH; vgl. KONZEPT SCHNEIDER]

I. VORDIPLOM: Nach 3. Sem. oder abzuschaufen?

ND

II. VORDIPLOM: Nach 6. Semester [Zulassung zum Diplom]

**WschZ** WISSENSCHAFTSZUG

MITARBEIT IN EXTERNEN FORSCHUNGSGESQUIPPIEN + ABTEILUNGSINTERNEN UNTERSUCHUNGEN (BAUFORSCHUNG / STÄDTETZAU) / GEISTESWISSENSCHAFTEN / ARCHÄOLOGIE ETC

\*LEERRÄUME: MUSSE · EIGENE STUDIEN · FREIFÄCHER · SPORT · WIE DERHOLTE KÜRZERE PRAKTIKA

purpose is to highlight certain aspects singled out by Vogt and so make his line of argument easier to understand. Most important, however, they support the ultimately ahistorical search for architecture's timeless principles and hence provide an aesthetic, referential basis for the design process. While Vogt was endeavoring to make art-historical inquiry an integral aspect of any theoretical engagement with architecture at the intellectual level, Hofer and Hoesli were busy furthering the integration of the gta Institute into the Department of Architecture both in their publications and even more so in their teaching.

fig. 3 Paul Hofer, sketch of an "école tentaculaire," March 1972.

### Urbanism Research and Design Theory

Hofer, the art historian who in 1964 was appointed ETH professor of the history of urban planning and conservation at the express wish of the Department of Architecture, with whose professors he was in "constant contact," according to the Council Minutes, had developed a student-focused style of teaching that was at once both nurturing and demanding and hence crucial to the gta's efforts to (re-)integrate history into the teaching of architecture. It was Hofer, for example, who in June 1967, shortly after the founding of the institute, organized an excursion to Lonedo in the Veneto so that the sixteen ETH architecture students and six photography students from the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich could draw and photograph the Villa Godi Valmarana. The gta Institute celebrated its first anniversary in 1968 with an exhibition of the results of that venture, and the students' works also featured in *Palladios Erstling*, published as gta 5 later that same year. This was Hofer's first programmatic call for the kind of interdisciplinary style of teaching driven by the spirit of inquiry that he himself would go on to implement to great acclaim, in part in response to the student protests of 1968. His answer to the rebellious students' demands was to initiate a reform of ETH Zurich's architecture program and to champion a broad curriculum steeped in theory.

Hofer's proposal for a future school of architecture, an "école tentaculaire," was put up for discussion in 1972. It was a spectacular concept that envisaged flanking the "main tract" of the architecture program – also known as the "professional training course" – with both a "critical wing," for which Hofer wanted to enlist the services of external specialists in economic policy, social sciences, psychology, and philosophy, and a "scientific wing," within which the more advanced students were to be entrusted with research projects of their own. <sup>fig. 3</sup> Remarkably, Hofer argued fervently in favor of "incorporating the humanities taught in the Architecture Faculty not merely as a minor, but as part of the



13 Paul Hofer, "Zum Entwurf 'L'École tentaculaire,'" typescript of March 20, 1972, 2, Burgerbibliothek, Bern.

14 Paul Hofer, "Die Dimension der Geschichte im Unterricht an Technischen Hochschulen: Gedanken zu den Fächern Geschichte und Theorie des Städtebaus, Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege (22.8.1963)," in *Paul Hofer an der Architekturschule: In der historischen Stadt das produktiv Lebendige, in der gegenwärtigen das Fortwirken des Vorausgegangenen* (Zurich: Institut gta, 1980), 52–55, here 53.

15 On the methodological differences between Hoesli and Rossi, see Judith Hopfengärtner, "Das 'Unternehmen Solothurn'" (MAS thesis, ETH Zurich, 2008); Judith Hopfengärtner, "Das 'Unternehmen Solothurn': Ein experimenteller Entwurfskurs mit Aldo Rossi, Paul Hofer und Bernhard Hoesli an der Architekturabteilung der ETH Zürich," in *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz: Architektonische Wechselwirkungen*, eds. Ákos Moravánszky and Judith Hopfengärtner (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2011), 77–95.

16 On the Texas Rangers, see Alexander Caragone, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995); Werner Oechslin, "Transparenz: Die Suche nach einer verlässlichen Entwurfsmethode nach den Prinzipien der modernen Architektur," in Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, *Transparenz*, gta 4, 4th enlarged ed. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997), 9–20.

main tract, as a course fully integrated into the central training process." <sup>13</sup> To his mind, the history of art, architecture, and urbanism was not part of the adjunct "scientific wing" but an essential component of the basic training course. Hofer wanted history to be taught not merely as "what happened in the past" but as "another, mightier presence" that impacted on each new object and design project. Central to his work was constant dialogue with the design professors with the aim of integrating historical architecture "as the living present in the teaching of design." <sup>14</sup>

The course Hofer taught together with Hoesli and Aldo Rossi in the winter semester 1977/78 is paradigmatic of this approach. As guest lecturer in the Department of Architecture, Rossi had already taught two, now legendary, design courses in the years 1972 to 1974, and two years later he began teaching under Hofer, a professor whom he revered. The experimental design course taught jointly by Hofer, Hoesli, and Rossi entailed an in-depth exploration of the notion of "dialogical urban planning." Dubbed "Unternehmen Solothurn," it required students to study morphological views of the Swiss city of Solothurn and, through a process of abstraction, derive a wide range of typological structures from what was already there. These then served as the basic forms for their own design work – besides coinciding nicely with Rossi's interest in a rational reduction of architecture to its geometric and timelessly autonomous basic forms, especially those exemplified by the city's monuments or "elementi primari."

### **Transparency at the gta**

Rossi's more artistic and pictorial ("typological") design method was very different from Hoesli's more structural, analytical approach. <sup>15</sup> Hoesli had spent the years 1951 to 1957 teaching at the University of Texas School of Architecture in Austin, which in the 1950s was a hotbed of young talent and unconventional teaching methods. <sup>16</sup> There, along with Rowe, Slutzky, John Hejduk, and Werner Seligmann, he belonged to a group known as the "Texas Rangers" whose primary concern was with the teachability of modernist principles and whose experimental

**FORMELEMENTE  
FORMSYSTEME**

**VILLA ADRIANA  
COPÂN  
FLORIDA SOUTHERN  
COLLEGE**

**THEMA  
SCHIEFWINKLIGE  
ACHSEN**

<b>1</b>	ÜBUNG PROF. B. HOESLI ETH ARCH. ABT. 8. SEM. 66	1315166 HU. JÖRG
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**TOPOGRAFIE**

**3**

JÖRG

IM GELÄNDE:  
- HIERARCHISCH GEGLEDERTE RICHTUNGEN  
- GELÄNDEKANTEN  
- TRICHTER - RÜCKEN  
- CHARAKTERISTISCHE PUNKTE  
- EBENEN, PLATEAU

TYPISCH:  
- VOM EINER GELÄNDEKANTE HINUNTERSIEHEN AUF NÄCHSTES PLATEAU  
- VERBUNDENEN UND AUSDEHNUNGEN.

**figs.4 a-d** Hu. Jorg, 8th semester, project on "Form Elements, Form Systems" by a student in Bernhard Hoesli's class at ETH Zurich, 1966.

**ACHSSYSTEM**  
ES EXISTIEREN KEINE EIGENTLICHEN ACHSEN.  
EINE BESTIMMTE HAUPTRICHTUNG WIRD DURCH EINE VERDICHTUNG AUSGEZEICHNET.  
1. GRUPPIERUNG DER MASSES LÄNGS EINER RICHTUNG:

2. AUSZEICHNUNG EINER RICHTUNG MIT PLATEAU, PLATTFORM  
3. TEILSYMMETRIEN.  
1. RAUMFOLGEN LÄNGS EINER RICHTUNG.

**5**

JÖRG

**NEGATIVRÄUME**

1. DURCH RAND BEGRENZTE INNEN-HÖFE - DURCHBLICKE !!  
2. NEGATIVRÄUME ZWISCHEN MEHREREN MASSES MIT DURCHBLICKE NACH AUSSEN  
3. AUSSENRAUM: TYPISCH: RÜCKGRAT -> LANDSCHAFT. ORT MIT PLATTFORM BEGRENZT GEGEN LANDSCHAFT:  
-> ZWISCHENZEONE; ÜBERGANG VILLA - LANDSCHAFT.  
-> MAN STEHT IN EINEM AUSSEN-RAUM, NICHT VOR EINER MAUER !!

**8**

JÖRG

**17** Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1959, "Sitzung Nr. 1 vom 07.02.1959, Traktandum 12, 95," ETH Library, Archives, SR2; Presidential Decrees 1960, *Präsidentialverfügung Nr. 849 vom 02.04.1960, 849*, ETH Library, Archives, SR2. The course was initially taught by Hoesli together with Hans Ess, from 1960 to 1973 associate professor of graphic and color design and from 1973 to 1977 full professor in the same field. Max Uli Schoop, a sculptor known mainly for his animal sculptures who had been teaching figural drawing at ETH since 1957, was initially considered as sculptor but in the end was replaced by Heinz Ronner, who taught constructive design as part of the foundation course, while architectural design fell to Hoesli. See Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1959, "Sitzung Nr. 5 vom 03.10.1959, Traktandum 149, 558," ETH Library, Archives, SR2.

didactics focused heavily on space and on the design process itself. Hoesli first came to ETH in 1958 as a research assistant of Werner Max Moser, a major exponent of modern Swiss architecture. Appointed associate professor in 1960, he was instrumental in devising and developing the foundation course first taught in the winter semester of 1959/60, which, following the Austin model, was premised on intensive, ongoing dialogue with the students and was taught by an architect, a painter, and a sculptor. 17

**fig. 5** Title page layout for *Louis I. Kahn: Complete Works 1935–74* (1977), with stamp of the “Louis I. Kahn Archiv/ETH Zürich/gta Archiv.”



Meanwhile, the exchange of ideas with the former Texas Rangers continued unabated, as is evident from the gta’s list of publications, which, thanks to Hoesli, included German editions of the two most influential works produced by that circle: *Transparency* and *Collage City*. The concept of transparency was fundamental to the Texas Rangers’ experimental teaching. Hoesli himself had made the artful layering and organization of space an integral part of his approach to design while still in the United States, and he was eager to incorporate it into his foundation course at ETH too. When he translated Rowe and Slutzky’s 1963 work *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal* into German in 1968, he enlarged it by adding his own notes and commentary. The third edition of 1984 also featured an addendum by Hoesli. To judge by the prominence he gave his own name, Hoesli regarded his contributions to the work as on a par with that of

the authors – and not without justification, given that the visual comparisons provided in his commentary lent plausibility to the authors’ concept of transparency, just as his activities as a teacher took that concept a stage further, elevating it to a kind of theory of design. This effort to fathom the notion of transparency, in all its complexity and historicity, and to ascertain its relevance to Swiss architectural discourse would remain a key focus of the gta’s research activities until well into the 1990s. 18/figs. 4 a–d

The second text, “Collage City,” by Rowe and the architect Fred Koetter – first published in *Architectural Review* in 1974 and translated into German by Hoesli as gta 27 ten years later – belongs to the context of Hoesli’s own work on urbanism. The complex concept of the city espoused in the essay casts doubt on modernism’s *tabula rasa* approach to planning, including that of the young Le Corbusier. For his translation of the essay Hoesli dispensed with any detailed commentary of his own but elaborated on the illustrations in such an inspired and illuminating way that Rowe hailed the translation “as superior to the English original, so that all in all, this edition, in my view, is the *editio princeps*.” 19 Hoesli’s work on the text trickled down into his teaching:

**18** *Transparence réelle et virtuelle*, an enlarged French edition of the same work with a foreword by Werner Oechslin, was published in 1992. A fourth German edition, enlarged to include an introduction by Oechslin, was published in 1997, followed by an English, and now a Chinese, edition.

**19** Colin Rowe to Isabelle Rucki, Birkhäuser Verlag, copy of a letter dated September 18, 1996, Bibliothek Werner Oechslin, Einsiedeln. When Birkhäuser announced it was planning a new edition of *Collage City*, Rowe submitted a commentary on Hoesli’s edition of 1984, enclosing with his letter a text about Hoesli, the German translation of which was included as an afterword in the edition of 1997: “Colin Rowe, Nachwort,” in Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter *Collage City*, gta 27, 5th enlarged. ed. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997), 275–78, here 275.

*"The tenets of Aldo Rossi's theory of architecture were discussed in my elective in the winter of 1975/76, and I acquainted my students with the ideas of the 'Collage City' in the elective 'Città analoga and Collage City' of the summer of 1976. This course was followed by the elective lectures 'bricolage [sic] – between memory and inventory' in the winter of 1976/77 and 'Collision City' in the summer of 1977. Paul Hofer and I together supervised the works of a design class that formed part of the Department of Architecture's fourth-year course 'On the city of complementary interlocking parts' in 1978/79. Our aim was to teach a forgotten language: the dialogical composition of buildings and space. Paul Hofer's works on the history and theory of urban planning together with 'Collage City' provided the basis of our teaching."* <sup>20</sup>

As is evident from the work of both Hofer and Hoesli as well as Vogt's research, the research work being done at the gta was inseparable from the teaching being done in the Department of Architecture. Although the gta did not have any teaching obligations at first and was housed separately from the Department of Architecture, its history is also a history of its ever closer integration into that department.

### **Foundation: gta Archives, gta Verlag, gta Exhibitions**

In January 1967, Vogt penned the following note in his diary: "Organization GTA: ... Began copying Semper's Style III. This is my chance – of an edition almost as worthwhile as Boullée's 'Essai sur l'Art.' The chance of a source edition with commentary." <sup>21</sup> Vogt did indeed demonstrate extraordinary negotiating skills and far-sightedness when he took over the "further study of the Semper Archive" from the ETH Library. According to the Council Minutes, the "members" of the new gta Institute were especially interested in the Semper Archive "because the new institute was to concern itself primarily with the history of the nineteenth century." <sup>22</sup> While the cataloging and administration of the archive were still incumbent on the Main Library, a line of credit of 46,400 Swiss francs "for further work on the Semper Archive" was now at the disposal of "both the Main Library and the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, including for the editing and publishing of works on or from the Semper Archive." <sup>23</sup> Vogt's acceptance of the Semper Archive assured the gta Institute not only of material on which to work but of a means of financing that work, which would not have been covered by the 18,000 Swiss francs granted to meet its annual running costs (one research assistant, one secretary, one draftsperson), the one-off sum of 15,000 Swiss francs to be spent on furnishings, and the 50,000 Swiss francs to be used to finance publications. The result was two Semper catalogs:

<sup>20</sup> Bernhard Hoesli, "Kommentar zur deutschen Ausgabe," in Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1984), 267–74, here 267.

<sup>21</sup> Adolf Max Vogt, *Notizbuch*, 1967, gta Archives, ETH Zurich.

<sup>22</sup> Schulratsprotokolle (Council Minutes) 1966, "Sitzung Nr. 7 vom 12.10.1966, Traktandum 223, 892," ETH Library, Archives, SR2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 893.

**fig. 6** Giovannella Bianchi, Ebe Gianotti, Paola Giuliani, Werner Oechslin, and Luca Ortelli, "Berlin MCMLXXXIV," site plan of the International Building Exhibition in Berlin, with views of individual projects, 1984. → 132/133



BERLIN  
MCMLXXXIV

Fröhlich's of the drawings and Wolfgang Herrmann's of the theoretical writings, which were published as part of the gta series in 1974 and 1981 respectively.

One after another, the archives of Gustav Gull, Ernst Gladbach, Karl Moder, and Otto Rudolf Salvisberg were transferred to the gta Archive from the Main Library's "Architects' Archive."<sup>24</sup> The gta also set up an Archiv für moderne Schweizer Architektur (Archive of Modern Swiss Architecture) and acquired estates and collections with which to fill it — proactively until well into the 1970s and since then passively — including those of Hans Schmidt, Hannes Meyer, and Hans Brechbühler. The archive of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), which like the Semper Archive is, strictly speaking, a collection rather than an archive, was installed at the gta at the instigation of Alfred Roth, with the estate of CIAM Secretary-General Sigfried Giedion at its core. Yet the gta Archive was never intended to be an end in itself. As a research facility and center of scholarship, it was there to provide a solid basis for the gta Institute's research and teaching activities. Its profile was thus molded by the institute's own research interests as well as those of its members. Publications like those on Semper, Martin Steinmann's on CIAM (gta 11), and the *Dokumente zur modernen Schweizer Architektur* (Documents on Modern Swiss Architecture) series attest to this, inasmuch as they are all based on the holdings of the gta Archives but at the same time supply a weighty argument for the acquisition of still more new material.

The *Dokumente zur modernen Schweizer Architektur* played an important role in establishing the gta Verlag. The collaboration with Birkhäuser Verlag had been terminated in the mid-1980s, and the last volume in the "Rainbow Series" to be published was the *Festschrift* for Vogt. After a brief collaboration with Ammann Verlag, which resulted in the publication of two major books to mark the centenary of the birth of Le Corbusier and Giedion in 1987 and 1988 respectively, the first *Dokumente* were published in 1985 by the new gta Verlag. Explaining the necessity of this step to the school administration, the then head of the gta Institute, Heinz Ronner, cited the growing, "postmodernist" interest in "historical themes" on the part of "researchers, practicing architects, and hence the ETH itself," to which the gta Institute should be in a position to respond more flexibly.<sup>25</sup>

Ronner, who taught construction and design at ETH from 1963 to 1991, had founded the Department of Architecture's Organisationsstelle für Architekturausstellungen (Office for the Organization of Architectural Exhibitions, OAA) in 1966. Like Hoesli, his aim was to "uphold the best traditions of modernism and to teach

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 891.

<sup>25</sup> Heinz Ronner to the ETH Executive, March 27, 1985, gta Archives, ETH Zurich.

methodical and systematic thinking in architecture with logical, learnable steps, exercises, and teaching materials.”<sup>26</sup> Several pioneering exhibitions were organized under his aegis, among them the 1969 exhibition on Louis Kahn, which was still doing the rounds ten years later and whose catalog remains the authoritative work on Kahn’s architectural oeuvre to this day. <sup>fig.5</sup> Shows on Rossi and Hejduk followed, along with the *Tendenzen* exhibition on Ticinese architecture by Steinmann and Thomas Boga. The OAA was affiliated to the gta Institute in 1975, and with it Ronner himself, who from 1983 to 1985 would also lead the gta. This was a time of upheaval for the gta Institute, however, which despite the launch of its publishing arm was in the throes of a crisis that threatened its very existence.

<sup>26</sup> Ueli Pfammatter, “Entwerfen mit Methode und Argumenten,” *Werk, Bauen und Wohnen* 78, no. 12 (1991): 76.

One founding member after another stepped down: Hofer retired in 1980 and was succeeded by the jurist André Corboz, who from 1967 to 1980 had taught history of architecture at the University of Montreal and had made a name for himself with his work on the interrelationship of town and country; Hoesli died unexpectedly in 1984; and Vogt retired in 1985. So grave was the situation that there was even talk of the gta being disbanded or reintegrated into Department XII, the ETH administration having long regarded it as too expensive, especially given all those cash-devouring exhibitions and publications. That the gta Institute still exists alongside the Department of Architecture today is essentially thanks to two men: Heinrich Ursprung, ETH president from 1973 to 1987, and Werner Oechslin, who first came to the school in 1987 and succeeded Vogt as professor of art history. Oechslin remained head of the gta Institute – with only a brief interruption – until 2006, and it was he, as Benedikt Loderer wrote in an article for the *Tages-Anzeiger*, who “taught the gta to walk again.”<sup>27</sup> But the tide had turned, nonetheless. Vogt, whom Hoesli in a letter once named an honorary citizen of *Collage City*, Hofer, and, above all, Hoesli himself stood for an approach to history and theory that, as Oechslin rightly noted, “sought architects – and not first and foremost fellow art historians – as readers.”<sup>28</sup> Oechslin for his part countered the narrowing of history to how it might be taught and its usefulness to design that had characterized the early days of the gta Institute with the historical (re-)construction in all its complexity and with all its many contradictions – and without ever turning away from the present. <sup>fig.6</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Benedikt Loderer, “Bilder aus dem Fundus,” *Tages-Anzeiger*, February 10, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Werner Oechslin, “Das Verbindliche und das Schlackenlose: zu Adolf Max Vogts modernen kunstgeschichtlichen Linien und Überzeugungen,” in *Die Hunde bellen, die Karawane zieht weiter: Adolf Max Vogt Schriften* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2006), 7–9, here 9.