

Built in USA: Post-War Architecture Midcentury Architecture as a Vehicle for American Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the 1953 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture* in relation to American diplomacy in the 1950s. By examining the international circulation of *Built in USA* by governmental and cultural sector institutions, we situate American postwar architecture within the broader ideological struggles of the Cold War and Latin American democracy movements. We examine informational programs supporting American political and economic interests through their operations in the mass media of exhibitions and print. The Architecture exhibited in *Built in USA*, we argue, maintained a recursive relationship to these media networks by both performing and interrogating its role within American imperialism and late capital.

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In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, Blanchette H. Rockefeller, wife of John D. Rockefeller III, described the internationalist ambitions of the Museum of Modern Art in a pamphlet for the Program of International Exchange: "The Museum of Modern Art has always been international in scope. Founded upon the principle that art should have no boundaries, it has sought the best both in its own country and abroad, and its collections, exhibitions, publications and other educational activities reflect this spirit of internationalism."¹ MoMA's 1953 exhibition, *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture* (Exhibition #528), serves as a unique lens through which to view the Museum's international scope in relation to the United States government's foreign policy priorities. On its surface, postwar modernist architecture was the solidification of the utopian aims of "International Style" architecture, but by studying the debates surrounding this updated modernism and the political and corporate admixture in which it was born, we can discern a project whose stakes were in the global conflicts and exchanges of the Cold War.

In his preface to the *Built in USA* catalog, Phillip Johnson declared, "The battle for modern architecture has been won."² Twenty years prior Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock were struggling to legitimate a European modernist architecture to an American audience. By 1953, they argued, the United States had become the inheritor of this style and the site of its further development. The third installment of the Museum's endeavor to define modern architecture, *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture* [henceforth *Built in USA*] distinguished itself through three selection criteria from the 1934 *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* Curated by Johnson and Hitchcock and the 1944 *Built in USA: 1932-44* curated by Elizabeth Mock. First was a generation of architects trained in schools that no longer taught the traditional styles; second, architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe finally finding commissions deemed worthy of their talents; and third, American government and industry becoming patrons of modern architecture.³ "American architecture is not an isolated phenomenon," Hitchcock argued in his introduction, "in architecture, as in many other things, we are the heirs of Western civilization."⁴

The exhibition included 43 buildings by 32 architects, chosen by Hitchcock as the most significant examples of architecture erected in the U.S. since 1945. Curated in collaboration with Arthur Drexler and Johnson, *Built in USA* was on view in New York from 20 January to 15 March, 1953. It was displayed in the third floor galleries of MoMA's 53rd Street building and was composed of 20' x 14' photomurals accompanied by wall labels illustrated with small photographs and plans, scale models, and stereoscopic slides. Prominent displays included Frank Lloyd Wright's laboratory tower for Johnson Wax, Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive

1. The Museum of Modern Art, "The Museum of Modern Art and Its Program of International Exchange in the Arts," 1961, MoMA Archives.

2. Phillip Johnson, "Preface," in *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture*, ed. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler (New York: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952), 8.

3. Museum of Modern Art, "'Built in U.S.A.: Post-War Architecture' to Be Shown at Museum," Press Release New York, NY, January 18, 1953. Press Release Archive, Museum of Modern Art.

4. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "Introduction," in *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture*, ed. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler (New York: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952), 10.

Apartments, Harrison's United Nations Building, Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center, and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrell's Lever House [Figs. 1-2].⁵

Following its New York exhibition, MoMA coordinated with the United States Information Agency [USIA] to organize four versions of *Built in USA* for circulation. Beginning with the United States' representation in the 1953 Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo, it was shown in over 40 international venues across Central and South America and Europe. An informational campaign in which modern architecture was employed to contrast American values to the Soviet sphere would draw upon this vision of American corporate and domestic life. *Built in USA* would offer an alternative to the centralized socialist state, presenting free workers working to build a better society while retaining their individualities while framing American postwar modernism as an alternative to soviet Socialist Realism for the claim to a cultural avant-garde.⁶ MoMA and the USIA achieved this through the construction of a transnational media apparatus that extended from the curatorial operations of the Museum of Modern Art to the circulation and administration of images in the form of photographs, museum displays, and printed material to the operations of the USIA in building analytics around their dissemination and reception. All of these had their basis in an architecture that was beginning to realize its own capacity as media – breaking its envelope to operate in the world of image and information. This article considers the circuits – representational and administrative – through which architecture both travelled and formed the American informational campaigns of the cultural cold war.

The new American architecture represented in *Built in USA* placed an emphasis on image and identity over economy and efficiency. Corporate buildings were no longer thought of in terms of the organization of the labor force, but sought to occupy a space in the public imagination. Architecture had begun to take a new stance on the purpose of building, seeking not just its economy, but also its market value as both real estate as well as corporate iconology. As Hitchcock noted:

As building costs rose, architects prated only of economy, and it was assumed that a hypothetical businessman's attitude of strict accountancy and budget paring was the only proper one for a serious professional practitioner. Yet actually it has been business, interested in the advertising value of striking architecture, which has sponsored many of the more luxurious – and not to balk at a word – beautiful buildings of the last few years.⁷

Rejecting the universalities of interwar modernism, the new architecture was eclectic, with recognition that, as Hitchcock said, "what applies to New York or Chicago skyscrapers may not apply to all Florida or Connecticut houses."⁸ Rather than the totalizing gestures and mass

5. David E. Scherman, "Installation Views of the Exhibition, 'Built in U.S.A.'" 1953, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Photographic Archive, IN528.

6. For a discussion of the political struggle between Abstract Expressionism and Socialist Realism during the Cold War: Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999).

7. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler, eds., *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture* (New York: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952), 17.

8. Hitchcock and Drexler, 15.

interventions of a utopian strain of European architecture, which explicitly paired design with social engineering, the American architecture emphasized a liberal-democratic idea of free enterprise.

Three discreet groups of architects comprise the bulk of the *Built in USA* selection (excepting, of course, the autodidactic Wright). First were the Émigré architects who brought to the United States the experience and expertise of the European avant-garde as they resettled in the wake of World War II. These included Eric Mendelsohn, Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – the latter two formalizing this didactic role in establishing key American architectural programs. Second were the smaller firms adapting this modernism to regional styles across the country, proving the compatibility of the modernism with the cultural and territorial diversity of the United States. Johnson dispatched Drexler to the west coast to survey architects that were not widely known to the group of northeast-based curators. “One may properly speak of a Boston or Bay Region *group* of architects,” Hitchcock noted in his introduction, “but in many ways, considering – as compared to European countries – the enormous distances between one region and another and their disparate climates and available building materials – it is the homogeneity of American production that is surprising.”⁹ Representation in this group included Johnson himself, Ralph Twitchell and Paul Rudolph, Charles Eames (there was no mention of Ray Eames in either the exhibition or the catalog), and Harwell Hamilton Harris. Lastly, the large corporate firms synthesized these two strands into a uniquely American architecture – the Émigrés Mies and Gropius (with TAC) as well as Harrison and Abramovitz, Pietro Belluschi, Eero Saarinen, and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. This group is given the greatest critical attention in *Built in USA*, and in this collection of works we can find the terms and stakes of this construal of an American Postwar architecture most clearly articulated.

Hitchcock theorized this particular current in postwar architecture in his 1947 article published in *The Architectural Review*, “The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius.”¹⁰ He argued that the conceptual gains of the 1920’s avant-garde had reached a point where they should be consolidated and codified into a more sensible program for building. The continuous experimentation had run its course, and produced the innovative forms necessary for the new architectural programs; the work of a new generation of architects should be to consolidate these innovations. He thus differentiated between two modes of creation in architecture, the architecture of “genius” – being the innovative design made by the lone architect, with Le Corbusier and Wright models – and the architecture of “bureaucracy” – the product of corporate firms whose architects worked anonymously to solidify those innovations into practicable architectural systems. Hitchcock pointed to the work of Albert Kahn Inc. as idiomatic of this architecture of bureaucracy. Hitchcock considered Kahn – as an

9. Hitchcock, “Introduction,” 12.

10. Henry Russell Hitchcock, “The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius,” *Architectural Review* 101 (January 1947): 3–6.

individual architect – to be generally mediocre, but nevertheless someone whose organizational genius could “establish a fool-proof system of rapid and complete plan production.”¹¹ Kahn himself had died six years prior to Hitchcock’s essay, making it clear that the success of firm did not require its titular head. The architect was not to provide a singular solution to a given problem, but would prompt a managerial intelligence to design the methods of coming to solutions. “Genius” is not scalable, it is a singular expression unique to the individual building. In privileging the organizational logic of the office and the coordination of components in the field, bureaucracy can be repeated and extended. Hitchcock praised the “straightforwardness, and cleanliness both actual and symbolic,” of the architecture of Bureaucracy “which is the proper generalized expression of an efficient workspace ... rather parallel to the quality of a finely designed and skillfully assembled machine.”¹² These were not the architectural machines of modernism’s industrial metropolis that situated the building within the logic of Taylorized efficiency. Drexler noted in his catalog essay for *Built in USA*, “It was desirable to recognize that these employees are, in a practical sense, the machinery of the organization, even if one might prefer a more spiritualized symbol of constructive international accord.”¹³ As Michel Crozier has shown, the bureaucratic model was to maintain a diversity of skills throughout an organization – imbuing the worker with a nominal agency – while each individual’s local power over one another prevented anyone from gaining any real power within the greater system.¹⁴ Hitchcock’s actual and symbolic cleanliness refers to the logistical apparatus whose machinations are in the administration of knowledge.¹⁵

Drexler framed his survey of postwar American architecture in his catalog essay “Post-war Architecture” around the rather nebulous concept of “conspicuous space,” his opening sentence stating,

Architecture, even before it is sound planning or adequate plumbing, is conspicuous space. The methods by which architects today habitually organize space to make it conspicuous are largely derived from the work of three men: Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Charles Le Corbusier.¹⁶

Drexler’s notes in the Museum of Modern Art archives offer some elaboration of the concept. Under the heading “arch. as conspicuous space” he writes “arch is ‘will of epoch translated into space’: makes particular style of a time,” and “Our style result of preoccupations with abstract form – geometric form, isolation of single motivating ideas, or simultaneous statement of several ideas of structure.”¹⁷ Wright and Mies van der Rohe provide the best exemplars of conspicuous space through contrasting approaches. For Wright, style is an “elaboration of means”:

Wright himself, for example, invents new forms for each experience of space his buildings are designed to offer. His architecture

11. Hitchcock, 4.

12. Hitchcock, 5.

13. Arthur Drexler, “Post-War Architecture,” in *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture*, ed. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler (New York: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952), 23.

14. Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 163.

15. Reinhold Martin refers to this as the “Organizational Complex.” Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

16. Drexler, “Post-War Architecture,” 20.

17. Arthur Drexler. Handwritten notes pertaining to *Built in USA*. C. 1952. 3 leaves, located at: Museum of Modern art, New York, NY; CUR Exh #528, Box 28.

is an exuberant elaboration —a three-dimensional commentary on a building's function or on its particular structural form.

For Mies, style is an "isolation of means":

Mies van der Rohe, excluding from his architecture whatever is not directly related to structure, makes structural clarity a value independent of the specific buildings that occasion it.

One aspect of conspicuous space was programmatically driven. "Integration of programs on style" he noted "produces adaptations of style which then often go on by themselves" He saw, for instance, in Eames and Soriano a project of elemental clarification of program and in Fuller's domes a redefinition of the scope of program. The larger part of this concept offers a formalistic interpretation of postwar architecture. Through thoughtful detailing, the floor and ceiling plates of the Farnsworth House seem to hover past their supporting columns, activating the space within. The marble walls of the secretariat tower of the United Nations building encase the uniform glazed slab "rising directly from the ground." The Lever House is elevated such that its tower appears to begin three stories off the ground, to "make a great gift of air and light to the streets around it" while from the interior, the floor to ceiling windows allow the impression of being "in an airplane hovering directly above park avenue." The precision of detail in the school buildings of Maynard Lyndon create the illusion of an architecture without detail that seems to be "cut and folded out of the same imaginary sheet of cardboard" rather than assembled form different elements.¹⁸

18. Drexler, "Post-War Architecture," 33.

Throughout this interpretation of a formally autonomous late-modern abstraction, Drexler hints at another possible mode of interpretation that situates these buildings within the burgeoning postwar media and logistical apparatuses. The larger part of his text considers a new postwar paradigm of the curtain wall – large surfaces of glass that despite their planarity, somehow elude the "conspicuous space" paradigm of Greenburgian flatness. Remarking upon the Mies's use of vertical steel I-beams that serve as window mullions the Lake Shore Drive Apartments, Drexler takes their importance to be representational rather than formal.

In an architecture based on the logic of construction Mies has used structural elements primarily for a non-structural purpose. The importance of these steel appliques is that they suggest a vocabulary of ornament inherent in the concept of the steel cage. Like those Gothic cathedrals – structural webs of stone filled with colored glass – which transcend the decoration of structure by becoming themselves pure decoration, Mies' decorative steel indicates a potential development of what is now the most refined style of our time.¹⁹

19. Drexler, 22.

The I-beam mullions running up Mies's curtain wall resituate the material of the industrial city into the logistical apparatuses of the managerial complex under late capital. By transforming structural elements into decorative motif, Mies exceeds the merely formal qualities of conspicuous space to find in it a symbolic content that speaks specifically to the contemporary moment.

Other examples abound throughout the text. Drexler doesn't quite know what to do with uniform surfaces that break the modernist paradigm by veiling – rather than articulating – the functions that lie within. But these autonomous glass envelopes reveal as they obscure. Drexler continuously sees the logistical, commercial, and mediatic functions of these buildings projected onto their surfaces. The elevations of Sarrinen's General Motors Technical Center always recede in perspective due to the horizontal expanse of the building, exaggerating the serial repetition of its modular steel and tinted glass panels to suggest "a façade turned out mechanically by the yard" (30). The serial repetition of the curtain wall imagines the space of this logistical complex extending in all directions towards a receding horizon; the scope of the operations within far exceeding the proper delineations of the building. The stamped aluminum panels of Harrison and Abramovitz's Alcoa Building with their rounded-corner windows resemble "several thousand television sets" encasing the structure (26). The punched apertures of the curtain wall are countless screens in countless living rooms, all transmitting the same content. Harrison's United Nations Secretariat tower stands apart from midtown Manhattan, transforming the jumble of its buildings into "harmless decoration" by splaying them across the taut glass mirror of its elevation (23). The mirrored surface of the curtain wall transforms the towers of the existing metropolis into detached representation, turning the old industrial city into pure image, autonomous of the economics and politics of late capital.²⁰ Lastly, Drexler imagines the glass and steel envelope of SOM and Gordon Bunshaft's Lever House – the headquarters of a multinational soap company – lathered in soapsuds left by the window washers (25). The curtain wall becomes a billboard to display its product, dissolving the demarcation between formal autonomy and commercial image. The entire envelope is transformed into a giant billboard; its blank surface fully integrated into the circuits of commercial imagery.

In each case, the flat surface of the curtain wall belies the ambitions of "conspicuous space" – a space in which Drexler seeks to maintain architecture's formal autonomy at the moment of its integration into late capital. As Reinhold Martin points out, the austere and abstract formalism of this modernism fashions a space for the integration of architectural representation into the media apparatuses and commercial image production of the postwar period – the moment when "architecture recognized itself, reflected in the curtain wall, as *one among many media*."²¹

20. This anticipates Tafuri and Dal Co's later inversion of that mirror in Mies's Federal Court Building in Chicago that "obliges the American metropolis to look at itself reflected ... in a neutral mirror that breaks the cities web." Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1986), 314.

21. Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 39.

In its integration within the circuits of media, logistics, and mass-circulating commercial image – the circuits being configured just behind (or, for Martin, upon) the surfaces of these curtain walls – we can locate the place of *Built in USA* within the global ideological struggle of the Cold War.

Through two new cold-war era informational programs – the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1952, and the United States Information Agency, founded in 1953 – *Built in USA* would become a vehicle for the spread of American corporate hegemony and western liberal ideology in Central and South America and Western and Eastern Europe. Both of these programs were the brainchild of Nelson Rockefeller, who operated at the highest levels of the corporate, governmental, and cultural spheres to bring postwar artistic and informational cultures into the service of Cold War political campaigns.

Nelson Rockefeller was early on an avid proponent of modern architecture. In a letter to his parents on his 21st birthday he wrote “I’ve been thinking very seriously of becoming an architect – probably a very fine one.”²² While Rockefeller never became an architect, he did play an integral role creating and promoting modern architecture through commissions, exhibitions, and international collaboration. He commissioned governmental and private projects that promoted modern architecture. Many of the ideals attributed to postwar modernism, and *Built in USA* in particular, are to be found in his eponymous Rockefeller Republicanism that espoused a combination of free-market economics, liberal social values, and support for social programs.

The Museum of Modern Art was very much a Rockefeller family institution and Nelson held numerous posts in its administration from joining the Junior Advisory Council in 1930 to becoming President of the Museum in 1939 – a position he held until 1950 (with a brief hiatus during the war). Throughout this period he held a number of parallel appointments in the United States Foreign Service aimed at American interests overseas. He served as head of the International Development Advisory Board; Chairman of the Inter-American Development Commission and Corporation; Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs in the Office of Inter-American Affairs; Special Assistant to President Eisenhower for Foreign Affairs; head of the Operations Coordinating Board, a group responsible for coordinating and implementing the National Security Council in all aspects of the national security policy. After his tenure at MoMA he served as Special Assistant to President Eisenhower for Cold War Strategy.²³ Lastly, of course, he served as Governor of New York from 1953 to 1973 and Vice President of the United States from 1974 to 1977.

In 1938 Rockefeller was appointed president of the Creole Petroleum Company, the Venezuelan subsidiary of Standard Oil. In 1937, after lead-

22. Samuel E. Bleecker, *The Politics of Architecture: A Perspective on Nelson A. Rockefeller* (New York: Rutledge Press, 1981).

23. Helen M. Franc, “The Early Years of the International Program and Council,” in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, ed. John Szarkowski et al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1994), 110.

ing a group of business associates on a 27-nation tour of Latin America, he became alarmed at the degree of social unrest that might provide instability in the region, and thus threaten his family's foreign holdings. After raising his concerns with Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president formed the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs [CIAA] in 1940 charged with the dissemination of American cultural material to Latin America, with Rockefeller at its head.²⁴ This role in the CIAA directly tied his interest in American foreign relations to the operations of MoMA. Through the figure of Rockefeller, we can link the cultural politics of the CIAA in its aim to promote American values in Latin America to Standard Oil's desire to quell anti-American sentiment in the regions where the company had business interests. In his position as head of CIAA and president of MoMA, Rockefeller was uniquely positioned to bring museum resources into the project of cultural exchange.

Beginning in the late 1940's American cultural conservatism spawned significant opposition to freedoms of expression that did not leave modern art unscathed. Missouri Congressman George Dondero publicly declared, "All modern art is Communistic and part of a worldwide conspiracy to weaken American resolve." Initially, the most vulnerable were the Abstract Expressionists. Secretary of State George C. Marshall best condensed the official feelings of the time in 1947, when he pulled a traveling exhibition "Advancing American Art," based on the various shades of communism of "more than 20 of its 45 artists," and dictated that there would be "no more taxpayers money for modern art."²⁵

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund was founded in 1940 as the vehicle through which the six children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. could share advice and research on charitable activities and combine some of their philanthropies to better effect.²⁶ Nelson Rockefeller encouraged Porter McCray – then head of MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions – to apply for a Rockefeller Brothers Fund to found a Program of International Exhibitions. On 12 June 1952 MoMA presented their application to "present in foreign countries and the United States the most significant achievements of the art of our time." It specifically noted the failure of the government to take on this role and the need for private institutions to fill that gap.²⁷ A five-year \$625,000 grant was approved thirteen days later to establish the International Program.

Separately, on 24 January 1953 President Dwight Eisenhower called upon Rockefeller to chair the new President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization, or the Rockefeller Committee, to explore the role of information and propaganda in American foreign policy. Foreign information services under the State Department – the Voice of America and the Overseas Library Program – were suffering prolonged attacks by the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations headed by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who sought to fabricate communist conspiracies

24. Franc, 110.

25. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*.

26. Rockefeller's Latin American focus was also privately buoyed by Rockefeller family oil interests in Venezuela: Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela, The Luther Hartwell Hodges Series on Business, Society, and the State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

27. *The Museum of Modern Art. A Proposed Five-Year Program of International Exhibitions. 12 June 1952. 4 leaves. Located at: Museum of Modern art, New York, NY; Reports & Pamphlets, Box 18.2.*

in American government and culture. The Rockefeller Committee made its recommendation on 3 April 1953 to form a new United States Information Agency that would take over all foreign information services.²⁸ Information services previously under the diplomatic rubric of the State Department would become part of the national intelligence operations – freeing them from political interference. Eisenhower ordered, “The director of the United States Information Agency shall report to and receive instructions from me through the National Security Council or as I may otherwise direct.”²⁹

In 1954 the American Federation of Artists [AFA] organized and exhibition of four American artists for the XXVI Venice Biennale, one of whom was Ben Shahn. Under pressure from the USIA, the AFA was forced to remove Shahn due to his suspected communist leanings. Later that year the USIA cancelled an AFA exhibition of one hundred paintings by seventy-five artists, claiming ten of the artists were communists. The USIA then formed a policy effectively prohibiting the overseas exhibition of Abstract Expressionism by declaring that no art produced after 1917 (the year of the Russian Revolution, as Helen M. Franc points out) would be shown.³⁰

Two years later the Rockefeller Brothers Fund offered the International Program a five-year \$460,000 continuation of their initial grant to establish the Program as a corporation that would eventually separate from MoMA to develop its own institutional standing at the national level.³¹ McCray recalled Rockefeller’s sentiment in this approach, “He said, ‘I want you to be independent, and I don’t want anyone to block this program.’” McCray recalled that this independence allowed the International Program to not only exhibit works of Abstract Expressionism prohibited from USIA support, but also to display artists such as Ben Shahn who had been targets of anti-communist intrigue.³²

These informational campaigns faced a unique set of challenges. Along with efforts by McCarthy to dismantle expertise in foreign relations, the situation in the Soviet sphere was rapidly evolving. For years the American informational campaign had subsisted in contrasting its position that there were multiple models of a free society to the Soviet position that demanded a uniform model of the Soviet state for all of its satellites. The death of Stalin and the loosening of the Soviet Union’s grip upon its satellites allowed a diversity of models for the communist state to flourish across Warsaw Pact nations. This enabled the Soviet Union to make significant headway through the exploitation of postcolonial animosities toward the west. With these developments, the United States became worried about the tenability of their own ideological positions before an international audience.

Under these pressures, the United States foreign policy came to a moment of crisis with the 1955 Geneva Summit, a meeting of “The Big Four”

28. For a history of the USIA in the Cold War: Nicholas John Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); For a collection of letters and documents relating to this period: Herbert A. Fine, Ruth Harris, and William F. Sanford, Jr., eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957. Foreign Economic Policy; Foreign Information Program, vol. IX* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1987).

29. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, 91, fn.43.

30. Franc, “The Early Years of the International Program and Council,” 116–17.

31. Patricio del Real, “Building a Continent: The Museum of Modern Art and the Politics of Circulating Images,” Research report, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, 2010. The International Program remains within of the Museum of Modern Art.

32. Porter A. McCray, interview by Sharon Zane, April 18, 1991 - September 22, 1993, transcript, Oral History Program, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

powers, the United States, The United Kingdom, The Soviet Union, and France. The Summit sought to open up a discourse to that would ease tensions after the Stalin era. As this cooling off decreasing the likelihood of all out war, the State Department had to transition its strategy from military to informational operations in order to continue its ideological struggle within a new set of terms. The propaganda mission was much more than an effort to articulate the benefits of American style democracy; it was moreover an extension of military aims, “an attack on the minds of men who will make war.”³³

In a 1955 circular to all USIA posts, director Abbott Washburn described the shift in strategy that was to take place in the wake of the Geneva Summit. The United States consistently viewed the easing of cold war tension with the Geneva summit as the opening of another front in the cold war that Kennedy would coin the “peace race,” and the USIA, as the center of informational efforts, was set to the task of countering the aggression of soviet diplomacy. Washburn thus laid out the difficulties of dealing with an enemy who was no longer openly hostile. Quoting a USIA bulletin:

In the past our task was often rendered easier by the bellicose actions and statements of Stalin and his cohorts. Questions of international right and wrong were reasonably well defined. But the Soviet leaders’ recent dramatization of peaceful co-existence via “garden party diplomacy,” state visits to other countries, and the partial relaxation of press and travel restrictions are serving to blur the basic moral and political issues in many people’s minds. This makes our job both more difficult and more necessary.³⁴

The Soviet desire for a Peaceful coexistence stated in the Geneva Summit reframed the Cold War as two differing spheres of influence, each with their own basic right to exist. The United States would not accept these terms and sought to define peace quite differently – as a complete and total victory in the cold war. Washburn continued:

What the U.S. means by peace, [...] is a peace by *Change* – a free Germany, reunified in the context of NATO and threatening neither East nor West; eventual liberation of the satellites; a world freed from the violence and subversion of international communism; and a free and expanding world economy. This is peace with justice and freedom, not between rival blocs but between nations acting in the hue interest of all peoples. Our information program must clarify this distinction and make it stick.³⁵

It was becoming increasingly difficult to make the case Western Europe for the continued isolation of the Soviet Union. The greatest trouble that this posed for the State Department was that with the new discourse of openness they were not destroying the Soviet will to fight, but that the Soviet Union was instead destroying the will of The United States’ Euro-

33. “Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State. Washington, May 24, 1955, 10:20am. Fine, Harris, and Sanford, Jr., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, IX:524.

34. “Circular Letter from the Acting Director of the United States Information Agency (Washburn) to all USIS Posts. Washington, August 24, 1955. Fine, Harris, and Sanford, Jr., IX:527.

35. Fine, Harris, and Sanford, Jr., IX:528.

pean allies to fight. The American message was not just for people of Soviet “captive nations,” but also for the people of Western Europe who needed to be reminded of the Soviet threat and of their reliance upon the United States to counter it. The project of postwar modernist architecture projected by *Built in USA* adheres to Historian Odd Arne Westad’s description of American foreign policy aims, “a globalist vision that fitted the ideology and the power of the United States in the late twentieth century, while being symmetrical with the character of its communist enemy, an enemy that also portrayed itself as *popular, modern, and international*.”³⁶

Modern architecture could project many of the ideals of Abstract Expressionism – liberal values, diversity of positions, and empowerment of the individual – while maintaining its status as functional object so as to not violate prohibitions on the display of contemporary art. Secondly, as opposed to paintings and sculptures, which were fragile and expensive to transport, architecture circulated through the photographic image – multiple copies of an architectural exhibition could appear in different places at once. The International Program assembled four copies of *Built in USA* for distribution in Europe and Latin America between 1953 and 1960. Two of these travelled under the auspices of the Program, the USIA directly commissioned the two others. The first copy to travel was part of the American representation at the *Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo* in December of 1953, and was sent to the American Embassy in Rio de Janeiro in May of 1954. It was then returned to New York and translated into Spanish for a Latin American tour in September of 1956, beginning a tour of Mexico in Mexico City, continuing on to cities Puerto Rico, Peru and Argentina, and dispersed in November of 1958 [Fig. 3]. A copy for a Northern European tour began in London in October of 1956, visiting cities in England, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland and donated to the *Rakennustraitteen Museo* (Finnish Architecture Museum) in Helsinki in June of 1958. The United States Information Service [USIS], the Foreign Service branch of the USIA, coordinated a number of these exhibitions. The other two copies were directly commissioned from the International Program by the USIA for circulation in Southern and Eastern Europe. A copy for an Italian tour began at *Palazzo Barberini* in Rome in February 1956 and traveled throughout Italy, the USIA then translated it into Polish for a tour of four cities in Poland. It was deposited at the University of Warsaw in 1957. The final copy began in Bucharest in January of 1958, traveled throughout Rumania, followed by Greece, Yugoslavia to end in Brussels in October of 1960. It was dispersed in December of that year.³⁷

Exhibition pamphlets were produced for each location and major arts publishers in Italy, Argentina, and Yugoslavia printed full translations of the *Built in USA* catalog. De Luca Editore – a hub of the Roman postwar arts scene – published an Italian version, *Architettura americana d’oggi*,

36. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.

37. Itineraries of Traveling Exhibitions: Located at: Museum of Modern art, New York, NY; Exh #528: Sao Paulo...Rio de Janeiro, V. ICE-F-19-53.17, V.16.17; Mexico City...Buenos Aires, V. ICE-F-27-55-19, V16.19; London...Helsinki, V. ICE-F-10-53.1, V11.1; Rome...Warsaw, V.SP-ICE-9-55.22, V16.22; Bucharest...Brussels, V.SP-ICE-20-57.24, V16.24. 3 leafs, located at: Museum of Modern art, New York, NY; International Council and International Program Records Subseries I.A: International Program ICE-F Exhibition Files.

in 1954; Gradevinska knjiga published the Serbian language *Posleratna arhitektura u SAD* in Belgrade in 1956; and Editorial Victor Leru published the Spanish language *Arquitectura moderna en los Estados Unidos* in Buenos Aires in 1957 [Figs. 5-6]. Long after the exhibitions had moved on, its images and representations would remain in the libraries of universities and professional associations.

The selection of locations at which *Built in USA* was exhibited speaks to the cultural politics of different contact zones of the Cold War. The Latin American exhibitions, the only ones wholly organized and operated by the International Program, are closely related to the interests of the Rockefeller Family who wanted to project American values to a restive South American population. There, the promise of cultural development was intended to assuage anger about natural resource exploitation by a foreign company. McCray and René d'Harnoncourt, director of MoMA from 1949-1967, both came to MoMA from Rockefeller's CIAA and had built networks of cultural exchange across Central and South America. The International Council proved adept in recruiting key cultural actors to its project. The *Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos* and the journal *Artes de Mexico* hosted the Mexico City exhibition at the *Galerias del Chapultepec*. Miguel Salas Anzures, editor of *Artes de Mexico* who would found Mexico City's *Museo del Arte Moderno*, wrote the introduction for the eight-page exhibition catalog. The faculty of the *Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería* and the "Patronato de las Artes" group – an association of artists and writers who would found the *Museo de Arte Lima* in 1959 – hosted the Lima exhibition at the *Palacio del Artes*. The Bauhaus-trained Peruvian architect Paul Linder wrote the introduction for the ten-page catalog. Rodolfo Möller of *Universidad de Buenos Aires* and founder of the journal *Canon* translated the Spanish edition of the *Built in USA* catalog. The International Program was keen on tracking the outcomes of these efforts in the public sphere. They produced detailed documents describing the exhibitions' press reception with consideration to circulation numbers and the political leanings of the outlets.

The USIA largely organized the European exhibitions, many of which were key strategic points in the Cold War. A map of the paths of the exhibitions plots the western boundary of the Soviet Union and covers the range of conditions in the Cold War [Fig. 4]. In Western Europe, Italy and Greece both had US supported center right governments with significant communist party opposition; Greece had recently fought a civil war pitting communists against the government – anticipating the conflicts of the Cold War. Many of the Warsaw Pact countries were exploring alternatives to Soviet-style governance. The 1956 Polish October uprising brought reforms that distanced Poland from the Soviet model. In Yugoslavia, Tito was accepting American aid over Soviet objections and formulating an

internationalist non-aligned movement. Rumania, on the other hand, was firmly in the grip of the Soviet Union.

Democratic governments fully embraced the message of the *Built in USA* show, and its position in the cold war as the promise of the American way of life. A Foreign Services dispatch from December 1958 quotes the remarks of Avgoustis Theologitis, minister of Northern Greece:

The people of the United States, composed of many people from many parts of the world, occupy a leading position in both the material and cultural fields. This is a reassurance for all of us, because this material, technological and cultural progress contributes in repelling forces which menace the world with indescribable consequences for humanity.³⁸

38. Thompson, Clary (Public Affairs Officer, United States Information Service, Athens, Greece). Foreign Service Dispatch. 19 December 1958. 2 leafs. Located at: National Archives, College Park, Md.

Materials charting the reception of the Rumanian exhibitions offer a window into the operation and reception of the exhibition in Eastern Europe. Correspondences between John Crockett, the exhibit officer for the American Legation in Bucharest, Paul Child, exhibition Director of the USIA, and McCray describe their success in carrying the US message into Eastern Europe. In a letter from Crockett to McCray:

The exhibit, in short, was the first window permitted under official Rumanian sponsorship to enable its citizenry to look in on an aspect of American life – an aspect that was wholly American itself and not through the propagandistic interpretation of the party press that distorts every other aspect of America. As such it contributed to making quite a chink in the Rumanian curtain.³⁹

39. Crockett, John (American Legation, Foreign Service of the United States of America, Bucharest, Rumania). Letter to Porter McCray (Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY). 1958 April 12. 2 leafs. Located at: museum of Modern art, New York, NY; Exh #528, V.SP-ICE-20-57.24, V16.24

Similarly, a dispatch from Child to McCray described the exhibition's reception in the Rumanian press:

A Rumanian weekly, *Contemporanul*, called the exhibit "a demonstration of a new aesthetic vision" and, in our opinion, there is no doubt that the display gave those who saw it their first sight, in a long time, of an important side of American culture.⁴⁰

40. Child, Paul (Information Center Service, United States Information Agency, Washington, DC). Letter to Porter McCray (Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY). 1958 May 8. 1 leaf. Located at: museum of Modern art, New York, NY; Exh #528, V.SP-ICE-20-57.24, V16.24

Elie Abel reiterated this point in his review of the Bucharest showing for the *New York Times*, remarking upon the popular draw of the exhibition with "the outpouring of fur-hatted peasants, factory workers, housewives, school children, even gypsies to see an exhibition that is somewhat technical in nature." This Rumanian audience could see first hand the contrasts between American modernism and soviet-sphere realism, distinguishing the "clean lines of a building by Mies van der Rohe" from the "fussy, colonnaded style of Soviet Architecture to which the Rumanian public has become accustomed."⁴¹

41. Elie Abel, "Rumanians Flock to U.S. Exhibition," *New York Times*, February 16, 1958.

The international circulation of *Built in USA* took place through a number of interlocking media environments. Photographic, model, and stereoscopic image brought architecture into the museum while the exhi-

bition catalog dispersed this media among a wider public sphere. These media were reproduced for the international circulation of architectural image. Translations of the catalog and pamphlets composed by regional experts to contextualize these images for local audiences enlarged the public sphere of this architecture beyond the gallery. These iterative media reproductions had first to pass through administrative organizations. Hitchcock – aided by Johnson, Drexler and a throng of experts – built a canon of postwar architecture from the diverse production of American works. Governmental and non-governmental bodies – the International Program and the USIA – administered the circulation of this production by building a network of local cultural institutions, professional associations, and diplomatic outposts. These institutions built systems to process information regarding circulation and reception of these exhibitions. Lastly, geopolitical shifts that transformed the Cold War from military standoff to informational détente built the context in which the circulation of images became the site for strategic engagement with both Western Europe and Warsaw Pact nations.

In the last instance, though, the objects at the center of these exchanges – the architecture presented in *Built in USA* – was itself media. Its modulated cubicle interiors furnished the bureaucratic organs and logistical circuitry through which information moved. The General Motor's Technical Center did research and development for the automotive industry; the Seagram's Building managed American production and sales of mass-market Canadian booze; the Lever House did the same for detergents; the Alcoa Building administered the extraction of aluminum ore from South American nations and its refinement and distribution to western manufacturing outfits; lastly, the United Nations administered the set of global rules and standards that made these exchanges possible. These curtain walls became screens upon which the desires of a burgeoning globalist late capital were projected. Which is to say, in the last instance its media surfaces were recursive with the network within which they traveled. They did not simply pass through systems of media; they constructed and configured them. At each of the media environments though which *Built in USA* traveled – image and the public sphere, administrative organization, geopolitical relations – at every register, we find the media always already mediated by its own message, building out transnational networks that it passed through.



FIG. 1 Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. Museum of Modern Art, 20 January - 15 March, 1953. Installation View. Photograph: David E. Scherman.



FIG. 2 Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. Museum of Modern Art, 20 January - 15 March, 1953. Installation View. Photograph: David E. Scherman..



FIG. 3 Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. Installation View. Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1957..

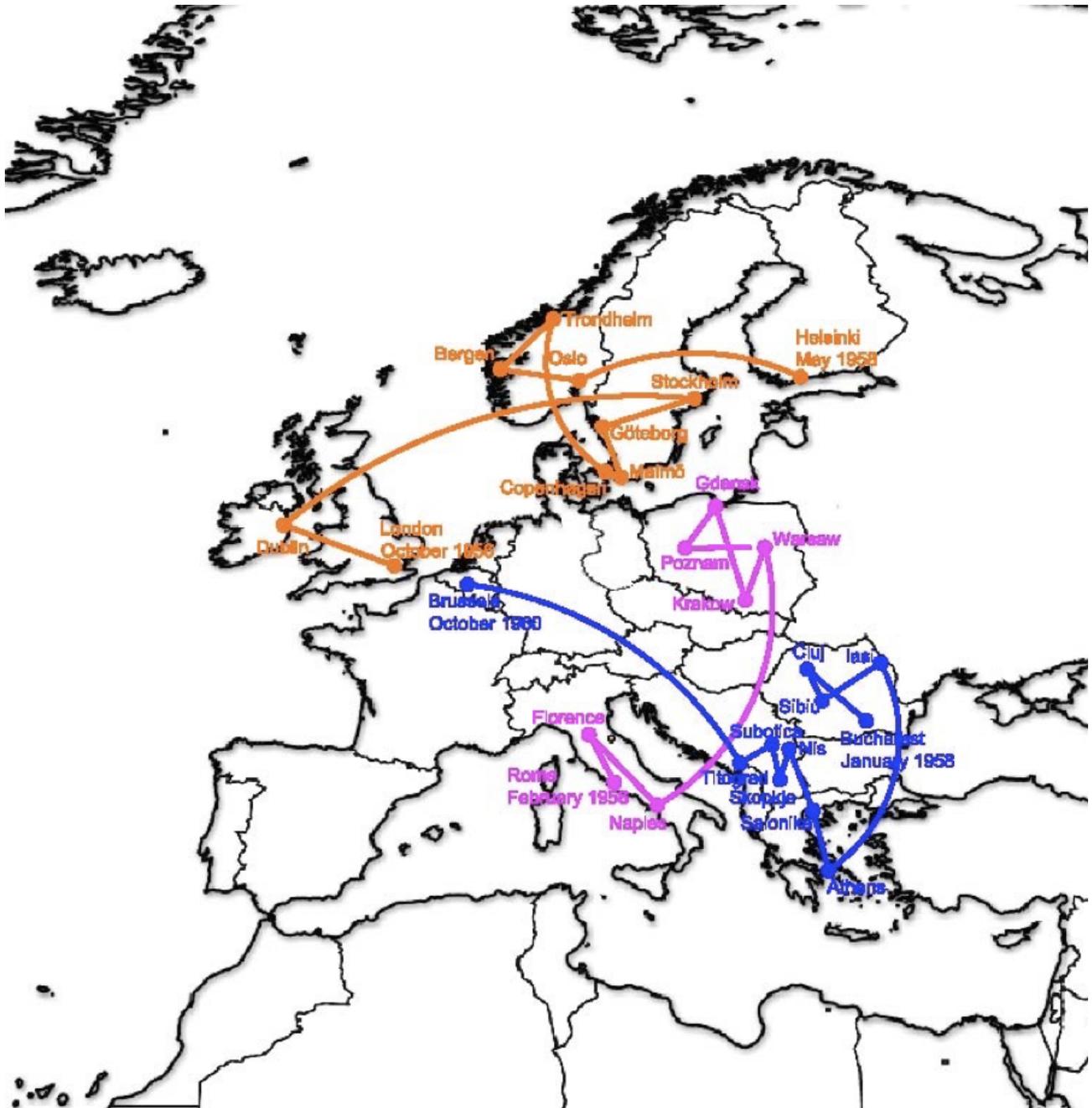


FIG. 4 Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. Exhibition paths through Europe, 1956 - 1960. Image by author.

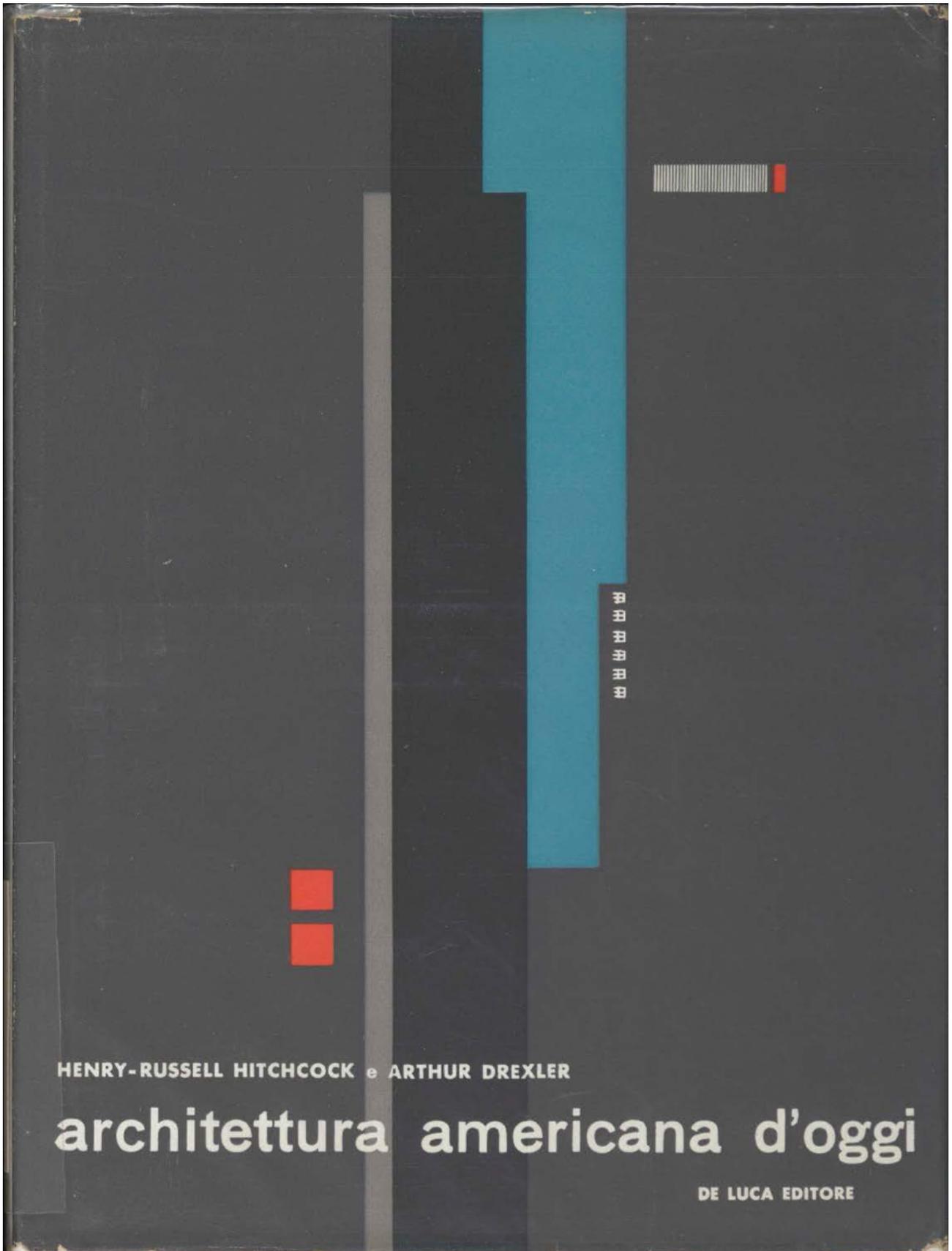


FIG. 5 Architettura americana d'oggi, Italian edition of Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. De Luca Editore, Rome, 1954. Cover: Valeria Sissa.



FIG. 6 Arquitectura moderna en los Estados Unidos. Spanish language edition of Built in USA: Post-War Architecture. Editorial Victor Leru, Buenos Aires, 1957. Cover: Jean Giné.