

Modern + Architecture = Democracy: Laundering Dictatorship's Cultural Capital at MoMA

Modernismo + Arquitetura = Democracia: o apagamento da ditadura do Capital Cultural no MoMa

Patricio del Real*

*Patricio del Real teaches at Harvard's History of Art and Architecture department. Ph.D. from Columbia University and Ms. Harvard's Graduate School of Design. Co-curated the exhibition Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980 (Philip Johnson Exhibition Catalog Award), pdreal@gmail.com / delreal@fas.harvard.edu.

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Abstract

As cultural artefacts, architectural exhibitions have fostered dominant political imaginaries. In the mid-20th Century, New York's Museum of Modern Art and its Department of Architecture and Design presented modern architecture as a symbol of liberty and democracy under the egis of the United States. Modern architecture in Latin America played an important role in this worldview. Starting with the exhibition *Brazil Builds*, MoMA deployed a strong curatorial agenda to stage this message and used its exhibitions as cultural weapons to manage dictatorships in the region and to explain to U.S. audiences how "democracy" worked in Latin America.

Resumo

Como artefatos culturais, as mostras de arquitetura fomentaram imaginários políticos dominantes. Em meados da metade do século 20, o Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova York e seu Departamento de Arquitetura e Design apresentaram a arquitetura moderna como um símbolo de liberdade e democracia sob incentivo governo dos Estados Unidos. A arquitetura moderna na América Latina desempenhou um papel importante nessa visão de mundo. Começando com a exposição *Brazil Builds*, o MoMA (Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova York) implantou uma forte agenda curatorial sendo palco para essa mensagem, usando suas exposições como armas culturais para gerir ditaduras América Latina e para explicar ao público americano como a "democracia" funcionava nessa região.

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Figure 1. Estadio Mendoza model being hung for *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980*. Photo by author.

A wood crate arrived at the galleries, wheeled in by several art-handlers. We all stood in conversation around the low square box, eagerly waiting to see what was inside. The handlers opened the crate and there it was: the model of the Estadio Mendoza in Argentina (1976-78). Its grey body was both striking and dull. The light wood-color of the crate and the white protective Styrofoam surrounding the inside edges of the box accentuated the contrast, not to mention the spotlights that somehow flattened the reliefs and the sinuous shape of the stadium seating. The model was carefully lifted out of the crate and, in a series of well-coordinated steps with the help of a hydraulic mobile scissor-lift, it was hung on a gallery wall. The process brought the model to life, with shifting shadows that revealed why this work of architecture was chosen as part of the the 2015 exhibition *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980* at the Museum of Modern Art.

The stadium is a large work that negotiates a monumental and symbolic topography in Mendoza, Argentina. It is located on the Parque General San Martín, a late 19th century urban park by French-Argentine landscape architect Carlos Thays that honors the Argentine Libertador José de San Martín and services the city of Mendoza, a key regional center that serves as a gateway to the monumental Andes mountain range. The sporting complex sits on a natural hollow next to the Cerro de la Gloria and the monument to the Ejército de Los Andes that commemorates the crossing — one of many — of the mountain range in the wars to gain independence from Spain. The verdant site was charged with national and transnational “Latin” American symbolism, and, in 1978, it was woven into international sporting imaginaries when the stadium hosted the FIFA World Cup. By then, nearly two years had passed since the military coup that, in March 24, 1976, initiated what was officially termed the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganization Process).

The Estadio Mendoza is associated with a military dictatorship that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983. This “original sin” is inescapable and emerged as a pointed criticism of the MoMA exhibition causing, moral indignation among a vocal contingent. The sign of dictatorial rule marked many of the works presented in *Latin America in Construction*; which is no minor issue as it is more than just “guilt by association.” How did we, as curators of the show, manage this sign? Can architecture as a cultural object survive state terror? We enter dangerous territories. Visitors with a “moral eye” called into question the inclusion of the model of the stadium and other works in the exhibition. Should dictatorship or its taint in the building of significant works be a criterion of curatorial selection?

The moral indignation that emerged with the Estadio model has sound historical roots in exhibitions that not only altogether dismissed anti-democratic practices but also, and more importantly, went so far as to transform authoritarian regimes into democratic ones. There were diverse reasons for such willful silences and manipulations; yet, these all converged in the equation: *modernism = democracy*, a principle that underwrote most, if not all, exhibitions produced by the Department of Architecture and Design (A&D) of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The groundbreaking 1943 exhibition *Brazil Builds* is paradigmatic of such acts of political transubstantiation. Without irony, its curator, Philip L. Goodwin, and those in-

volved in the exhibition presented modern architecture in Brazil as the vanguard of International modernism:

Other capitals of the world lag far behind Rio de Janeiro in architectural design. While Federal classic in Washington, Royal Academy archeology in London, Nazi classic in Munich, and neo-imperial in Moscow are still triumphant, Brazil has had the courage to break away from safe and easy conservatism. Its fearless departure from the slavery of traditionalism has put a depth charge under the antiquated routine of governmental thought and has set free the spirit of creative design. The capitals of the world that will need rebuilding after the war can look to no finer models than the modern buildings of the capital city of Brazil.¹



Figure 2. Installation view of *Brazil Builds* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Jan. 13-Feb. 28, 1943). Photo by Soichi Sunami.

Such panegyrics equated modern architecture with enlightened government, and helped veil the fact that the United States had enlisted the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas in the United Nations fight against fascism. This did not go unnoticed; yet, in the context of the Second World War, any criticism on political grounds was to be summarily dismissed. After all, everyone involved was fighting the “good fight.”

¹Philip Goodwin cited in MoMA press release: “Brazilian Government Leads Western Hemisphere in Encouraging Modern Architecture Exhibit of Brazilian Architecture Opens at Museum of Modern Art,” January 12, 1943. Exh. 213, Curatorial Exhibitions Files (CUR), The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

The struggle against authoritarianism, however, didn't extend to Latin America. It was enough to focus on the extraordinary building and the construction boom caused by the war as a gesture of creative freedom that would someday transform into political liberation.

The Modern was not alone in cleansing the image of the Vargas dictatorship.² The museum participated in a vast transnational information network that under the Pan-Americanism of Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) employed every possible means to wage “psychological warfare” in the Americas. The war transformed architecture into propaganda. Many worried about this newfound activist ground of architecture culture, as accusations of propaganda, cast doubt on the formula that equated aesthetic modernism with political democracy. A careful reader of the exhibition catalogue can identify the two key institutional grounds that enabled MoMA's project in Brazil: the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Historic, Artistic and Patrimony Service, SPAHN) and the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (Press and Propaganda Department, DIP), the Vargas's regime censorship machine. The exhibition consolidated the image of Gustavo Capanema as a progressive minister, serving the nation rather than an authoritarian regime.³ Capanema's image, along with SPHAN Director Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, accompanied those of modern architects at the end of Goodwin's catalogue. Missing was that of the Minister of propaganda and fascist sympathizer, Lourival Fontes. The Vargas regime had no overarching official stylistic policy and each ministry advanced its own cultural imaginary. Yet, cultural management, especially the projection of Brazil's image abroad, could not escape Fontes's powerful DIP.

The Brazilian architecture show was a collaborative endeavor. This explains how Goodwin, who knew no Portuguese and whose trip “was taken on the spur of the moment [...] partly on a good will mission and partly to investigate the advanced modern architecture,” as he himself argued, was able to produce such a satisfacto-

² On the many initiatives see: Antonio Pedro Tota, *O impeliasmo sedutor: A americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras/Editora Schwarz Ltd., 2000). Darlene Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

³ On Capanema as linchpin of progressiveness and the complex dynamics of cultural management: Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001), 79-88.

ry and convincing message.⁴ Crafted to shape U.S. public opinion, it reversed the hegemonic circulation of information and cultural values, now flowing south to north, violating the most important CIAA rule: to demonstrate U.S. leadership in all matters. The MoMA exhibition made clear that architects in the U.S. and the world needed to pay attention to what was happening in Brazil. "We can learn a great deal from the courageous architects of Brazil," Elizabeth Mock argued.⁵ This was unprecedented and tantamount to the decentering of International modernism, at the time still fastened to north Atlantic exchanges. There is much to be said about this groundbreaking exhibition and its particular synthesis of modernity and tradition as an image of postwar democracy. It is productive to disentangle the knot of ideological complicities and reveal how MoMA was not alone in cleansing the image of Brazil's authoritarian government. The project was crafted as a private-public partnership. Although approved by the U.S. State Department — as all projects had to be — the museum's friends were select and few. Not everyone — in Washington, D.C. or Rio de Janeiro — shared its faith in the aesthetic message of modernism. The CIAA funded only the catalogue. This underscores the perceived limits of exhibitions and the government's doubts on their ability and effectiveness in carrying the desired image of Brazil. The exhibition, Alfred Barr noted with irony, was "a kind of magnificent poster for the book."⁶ However, it would be an error to simply dismiss *Brazil Builds* as a propaganda tool. Such reductive instrumentality shows profound disdain for the optimism that still — to this day — illuminates its core and is the reason why we return again and again to this exhibition and the works in it. We remain fascinated and enchanted by its images and message; this eternal return signals an unfinished project.

The Modern's involvement with the war effort was no hidden agenda. The Second World War provided the grounds and context for all museum exhibitions of this

⁴ Philip L. Goodwin, "Modern Architecture in Brazil," in *Studies in Latin American Art; Proceedings of a Conference Held in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 28-31 May 1945, under the Auspices of the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council*, ed. Elizabeth Wilder Weismann (Washington, : American Council of Learned Societies, 1949), 89. On Goodwin see also: Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern; an Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art*, [1st ed. (New York, : Atheneum, 1973).], 190-195

⁵Elizabeth B. Mock, "Building for Tomorrow," *Travel* 81 (1943), 39.

⁶Alfred Barr to Philip Goodwin, October 7, 1942. Correspondence, Alfred H. Barr Papers (AHB), mf 2167: 345. Archives of American Art (AAA), Washington D.C.

moment, including *Brazil Builds*. This was not the case with the 1955 exhibition, *Latin American Architecture since 1945*, which — although elaborated in the context of the Cold War — presented the region as if immune to its politics. There are significant differences between both exhibitions; nonetheless, the Latin American Architecture show built on the 1943 exhibition by advancing the equation: modernism = democracy, now unashamedly framed within U.S. liberal democracy. In 1955, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler enlisted architecture in another "good fight," one that, in their view, did not extend to Latin America or the decolonizing world. Covert operations by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Iran and Guatemala, just to mention two examples from the early 1950s, make clear that the "good fight" had become a "dirty war." Exhibitions were enlisted in this dirty war as they could help direct public conversation, as the planned visit by Guatemala's Carlos Castillo Armas and his wife Odilia to MoMA's Latin American architecture show suggests. Castillo Armas had deposed the democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz with the help of the CIA in 1954. The museum's invitation was part of a well-orchestrated "psychological action program" organized by the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), a U.S. government committee responsive to the Executive Branch that oversaw all covert operations.⁷ The aim of the Guatemala "action program" was to transform the violation of democratic law into a heroic anti-communist act, remaking Castillo Armas into a Cold War warrior. The OCB assembled a plethora of established cultural, educational, and political institutions, including the United Nations, in a mosaic of deceit. The visit to MoMA was unexpectedly cancelled at the last moment due to Castillo Armas' sudden illness. The apparatus of deceit, which posited the dictator as a champion of "human dignity," however, was not seriously affected.⁸

The 1955 exhibition could be used as a cultural weapon publically brandished to explain how "democracy" worked in Latin America. The impetus of the exhibition, however, is not altogether clear. The show effectively brought the modern architec-

⁷Memorandum for the Operations Coordinating Board, by JW Lydman: EMU. Subject: Some Psychological Factors in the Guatemalan Situation, SECRET, DRAFT. September 30, 1955. Folder 91, Box 3, Sub Series 9, Recently Declassified, Series O, Record Group 4, Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York.

⁸"Guatemala Chief Gets Two Degrees," *The New York Times*, November 6 1955. "Text of Address to Un Assembly by Guatemalan President," *The New York Times*, November 4 1955. Edith Evans Asbury, "City Parade Salutes Castillo on His 41st Birthday," *ibid.*, November 5.

ture of the region to a U.S. public, presenting its evolution from 1943 to 1955. As Drexler noted, the show was the museum's second survey, fastening it to *Brazil Builds* and to a project that can be traced back to 1939, when John McAndrew was curator of MoMA's architecture department. Yet, in 1955, the context of this long, drawn out project had radically changed. Cultural Pan-Americanism was on the wane, to say the least, and the museum's relationship with the U.S. government had seriously deteriorated. As early as 1946, conservative ideologues had accused MoMA of being a site of communist infiltration. Growing "red hysteria" advanced a traditionalist aesthetic predicated on anti-urban and anti-cosmopolitan values, prompting Alfred Barr to go public and explain why modern art was not "Communistic."⁹ Modern architecture was not without controversy, since it offered significant grounds with which to advance official statements on liberal democracy, as A&D's "Architecture for the State Department" (October 6-November 22, 1953) made clear. But modern architecture had staunch critics in the U.S. government.¹⁰ This exhibition, which presented a very public defense of the equation: modern architecture = democracy, helped veil the conservative turn in the U.S. government that questioned the equation and went so far as to dismantle cultural exchange programs. In the context of this ongoing battle against reactionary forces — to the point that President Dwight D. Eisenhower himself was called upon to defend the work of the museum — one has to wonder: Why did MoMA's A&D department call on Latin American architecture at this time?¹¹ Unlike *Brazil Builds*, there was no evident and direct political gain. Commissioned by MoMA's International Program, the Latin American architecture show came into being amid cultural tensions in the United States. Created in 1952, the International Program crystallized the museum's war experience and enabled its postwar global projection. Run by Porter McCray, who had gained experience in Rockefeller's CIAA, it was the logical development of MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions, masterfully run by

Elodie Courter since 1932. The International Program underscored the private management of culture that underwrote most cultural programs in the United States; not absent of shady alliances with government and various economic interests, as made clear by the scholarship on the cultural Cold War.¹² McCray's program, however, did not only export U.S. culture abroad, it also imported select cultural "statements," such as Latin American architecture, for U.S. consumption.

At the time McCray turned his attention to Latin America, Venezuela had become a "New Latin Boom Land." In this country, however, a dictator also sponsored modern architecture. Readers of *Life* magazine, for example, learned that U.S. businesses, industry and capital all went south like moths to light, made brighter and seemingly eternal by the country's oil wealth and safe by strongman Marcos Pérez Jiménez. "Under a firm rule, freedom to spend" was the maxim *Life* trumpeted as it revealed the secrets of Venezuela's success. Hotels, resorts, luxury apartments, and high-end homes, all in modernist style, received top billing. The article celebrated U.S. consumerism, which had overtaken Venezuela; penetrating even squatter settlements: A the full page color photo by Cornell Capa showing three men carrying the latest G.E. television set into the Planicie rancho, or favela, carried the point across. The U.S. was penetrating Venezuela from the ground up. At the same time, socially minded readers did not need to fret, since oil and iron royalties provided poorer Venezuelans "with one of the fanciest public works programs in South America."¹³ The magazine chose not to illustrate these wondrous projects; they found a home at MoMA.

⁹George Dondero, "Americans Take Notice—School of Political Action Techniques," in *92 Congress Record (79th Congress 2nd Session, House of Representatives, Tuesday, June 11, 1946)* (Washington D.C.: 1946), 6701. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Is Modern Art Communistic?," *The New York Times*, December 14 1952.

¹⁰Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), Chapter 5. The 1953 exhibition, as Loeffler's study suggests, coincided with the first wave of critique, 115-120.

¹¹Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Freedom of the Arts," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 22, no. 1/2 (1954).

¹²There are too many to list. The classic being: Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art : Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Also: Michael Kimmelman, "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid Century at Home and Abroad*, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994).

¹³"New Latin Boom Land," *Life*, September 13, 1954: 122-33. (Photos Cornell Capa)



Figure 3. Installation view of *Latin American Architecture since 1945* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Nov. 23, 1955-Feb. 19, 1956). Photo by Ben Schnell.

Public works, which received only passing notice in *Life's* coverage, could be found in *Latin American Architecture since 1945*. Among these were the mammoth Cerro Piloto housing project. Drexler and Hitchcock highlighted this work with a magnificent panoramic view by photographer Rollie McKenna that bookended the main exhibition space known as “the Corridor.” Public housing emerged as a central concern in Latin America that manifested, in the views of Lewis Mumford, a “freshly awakened social consciousness.”¹⁴ Opposite Cerro Piloto, and next to the entrance of the exhibition, was an equally large photomural of Oscar Niemeyer’s São Francisco Church in Pampulha, Brazil. Both projects violated the parameters of the exhibition: the former for being unfinished and the latter for being completed in 1944. Such curatorial transgressions were not uncommon and, more importantly are the implications of their curatorial staging. With Pampulha, the exhibition gestured back to *Brazil Builds*, summoning a work not included in 1943, both as conclusion and departure for a new chapter of modern architecture in the region. Both

works had been born under the sign of dictatorship. The 48 mega-blocks of the Venezuelan project appeared to march into the gallery, thanks to the large rectangular panels carrying images of other Latin American works. It was as if Drexler had summoned the developmentalist force of the Caracas housing project transmuting its bureaucratic impetus into a neo-plastic abstract composition, all to be embraced by Niemeyer’s lyrical vaults. Drexler simply followed the aesthetic guidelines of the Caracas project, set by Carlos Raúl Villanueva. In collaboration with local artists and with the architects of the Taller del Banco Obrero (TABO, the State Housing Authority), Villanueva transmuted the housing *superbloques* into a colossal abstract geometric composition, installing it in the landscape. The implicit juxtaposition of the figural work of Candido Portinari, present in the *azulejo* façade of the church, with the abstract polychromies of Venezuelan artist Mateo Manaure, carried by the Venezuelan housing projects, mapped the development of the synthesis of the arts in the region. It drew an arc from explicit collaborations between named artists and architects —Portinari-Niemeyer— to the general notion of *teamwork*, which in most cases happily dispensed with the need to credit the artist, especially if they were local.¹⁵ In the Venezuelan context, aesthetic teamwork acquired a newfound consciousness as a magical process that could summon universal meaning to valorize mammoth serialized housing projects with “art.” As Hitchcock argued, the juxtaposition of the crude superblocks against the landscape appeared as a splendid “colored rendering” of modernism’s urban dreams.¹⁶ In other words, the evolution of the synthesis of the arts carried with it the promise of modernism’s equation: modern architecture = democracy. Today it is difficult to find this promise, as the stunning three-dimensional color photos in the exhibition were not included in the catalogue, which presented only black-and-white photos unlike *Brazil Builds*.

The juxtaposition of Pampulha-Caracas was mediated by several works represented though photomurals in a braided formal and aesthetic experience that manifested a region called “Latin America.” In the main gallery, Drexler arranged a field of

¹⁵Manaure was credited as working in the University City, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Latin American Architecture since 1945* (New York.: Museum of Modern Art, 1955)., 51.

¹⁶Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Latin American Architecture since 1945* (New York.: Museum of Modern Art, 1955)., 137.

¹⁴Lewis Mumford, “The Sky Line: The Drab and the Daring,” *The New Yorker*, no. February 4 (1956)., 84.

formal relations and narrative actions, all under one critical and overarching curatorial move: a luminous ceiling. At MoMA, Latin American architecture appeared under the hallmark of U.S. corporate modernism as the light of democracy. In 1955, few critics chose to tell the story of dictatorship. Even Mumford, who was generally receptive to social issues in architecture, summarily dismissed the question. Without flinching, he remarked on the “new economic prosperity” that was driven by the extraction of raw materials — oil, coffee, and iron — and had produced “buildings of considerable vigor and inventiveness.” For Aline Saarinen, the “fantastic building boom” served as the sole critical context of the “staggeringly ambitious university cities, hundreds of public buildings and housing projects.”¹⁷ This architecture evidenced a heated economic development, which by default implied social modernization. Architectural aesthetics thus acted as a manifest statement of social development. In short, the region was on the road to political enlightenment. The 1955 exhibition was a snapshot of a “take-off.” A critical stage of development in the telos of Western modernity, as proposed by U.S. economist Walter Whitman Rostow, a few years later, in *The Stages of Economic Growth, a Non-Communist Manifesto*.¹⁸ If architecture in the region exhibited aesthetic maturity, abandoning European cultural tutelage, it stood to reason that the region would soon abandon political immaturity. So demanded the political economy of modern architecture. Neither Hitchcock nor Drexler were naïve. Confidence in modernism was not simply a matter of architectural aesthetics. Conviction rested in U.S. leadership and influence in the region; brilliantly embodied in the light of the Corridor. Under the soft glow of U.S. corporate enlightenment, the signs of dictatorship would be a thing of the past, which was the soft promise of the 1955 exhibition.

Hitchcock celebrated the progressive promise of U.S. business in the 1953 A&D exhibition, *Built in the USA: Postwar Architecture*, which served as the phantom companion to *Latin American Architecture since 1945*. In 1953, Hitchcock turned to “Beauty, character, grace, and elegance” as key markers of postwar democratic architecture. These aesthetic ideas — which had had little to no currency in func-

tionism or in the International Style — found their fullest applications in postwar corporate modernism with Maecenas who put “quality before economy” such as General Motors. At the time the largest corporation in the world, GM had commissioned Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates for the Technical Center in Detroit, Michigan.¹⁹ There, Saarinen developed one of the most-sophisticated examples of the dropped luminous ceiling. Drexler chose not to use this device in his 1953 staging, instead he emphasized MoMA’s translucent glass curtain wall. Goodwin and Stone’s south-facing façade was a key element of *Built in the USA*; incorporated as part of the exhibition, it brought home the ongoing debate on curtain wall construction in which U.S. businesses again led the way. Drexler unfolded the debate at MoMA with key examples such as Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill’s Lever House, which advanced the “advertising value of striking architecture,” not to mention the United Nations, which consecrated Wallace K. Harrison as the consummate US-American postwar architect.²⁰ Drexler staged the United Nations alongside Lever House and the Technical Center in a swift nationalization that highlighted an architectural corporate triumvirate of pragmatic businessman-architects with Harrison & Abramowitz, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, and Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates. With the United Nations, Harrison became the embodiment of the U.S. national character of business-pragmatism.²¹ Harrison’s pragmatism was deeply tied to the Rockefeller’s real estate holdings at home, such as Rockefeller Center, and abroad, most significantly to Venezuela and the Avila Hotel, which had launched Rockefeller’s Compañía de Fomento Venezolano (Venezuelan Development Company). This 1939 holding company served as a beachhead for Rockefeller’s future Latin America projects; an early learning ground for the 1946 International Basic Economy Corporation (IBEC) that will operate in Venezuela and Brazil as a form of enlightened missionary capitalism.²²

¹⁹Henry Russell Hitchcock, Arthur Drexler, and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Built in the USA: Post-War Architecture* (New York,: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952)., 16.

²⁰On Harrison: Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

²¹Charles L. Davis II, *Building Character: The Racial Politics of Modern Architecture Style* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2019)., 231. Davis elaborates on this nationalization of the U.N. through Harrison’s depictions of the project with U.S.-American colloquialisms, 229.

²²Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson A. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer, 1908-1958*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1996). Chapters 12 and 25. Also: Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁷Mumford., 84. Aline B. Saarinen, "Drama in Building: The Museum of Modern Art Sets Forth Impressive Latin-American Show," *The New York Times*, Sunday November 27 1955.

¹⁸I deal with this in Patricio del Real, "Para Caer En El Olvido: Henry-Russell Hitchcock Y La Arquitectura Latinoamericana," *Block*, no. 8 (2011).



Figure 4. Installation view of *Built in the USA: Postwar Architecture* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Jan. 20-March 15, 1953). Photo by David E. Scherman.

In 1953, Drexler filled MoMA's gallery with light of winter by demolishing the false wall that covered the Thermolux panels of Goodwin and Stone's south-facing façade and let natural light in.²³ Two years later, he built a luminous ceiling to cover

²³The false walls would have to be rebuilt after the show since the natural light proved to be too intense for artworks. On MoMA's glass façade: Lynes., 195. Problems with the MoMA's Thermolux

the skylights of MoMA's third-floor sculpture gallery and shine light upon the architecture of Latin America. Under the soft light of Drexler's 1955 luminous ceiling, the field of narrative actions was clear. In all, there was no need to talk about dictatorship because the region was under the tutelage of the United States and its enlightened corporations. Few outside or inside the region chose to highlight the very visible and known link between architecture and dictatorship that the exhibition tacitly sanctioned. Hitchcock generally spared his Latin American friends the embarrassment of lifting the formal veil that hid their collaborations with questionable "regimes." Lecturing at London's Royal Society of Arts, however, he uncharacteristically did by focusing on the "famous University City in Mexico," a monument to President Alemán. "Whatever may be said of the characteristic *regimes* of Latin America, there is no question that the President-Dictators have generally seen in architecture, like the sovereigns of the European past, a means of personal aggrandizing," he claimed. Authoritarian politics affected all public works. "In Mexico the most impressive housing developments are for Government employees and elsewhere I fear it is generally members of Government party who are housed first."²⁴ Monumentality and authoritarianism, with a side of corruption, undergirded these artful projects. "No dictator is happy unless he has embarked on a vast university or a series of housing developments to which his name can be attached," Hitchcock claimed; "so you have in the very social immaturity of these countries, conditions more conducive to elaborate architectural expressions than the bureaucratized state."²⁵

Such naked political observations were rare in Hitchcock. His comments gestured to actual socio-political conditions as well as to serious structural problems in the region's governments. But transformed through quick, schematic, and superficial brushstrokes to add realist color to his lecture, these overtures effectively supported ingrained stereotypes that saw the region as if populated by *caudillos*. In London, Hitchcock effectively advanced the general hegemonic image of the region

panels had sparked Goodwin's interest in Brazilian solutions and his 1942 trip. Zilah Quezado Decker, *Brazil Built: The Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil* (New York: E&FN Spon, 2000), 115.

²⁴Henry Russel Hitchcock, Jr., "Latin-American Architecture," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, March 1956, 344-46.

²⁵Henry Russell Hitchcock, "Men of the Year (Henry-Russell Hitchcock Interview by Sam Lambert)," *Architect's Journal* 123, no. 3177 (1956), 82.

summed up in the equation: *Latin America = dictatorship*. He recognized that the region's recurring political disturbances impinged upon "most people's consciousness;" that the region's endemic regime changes were not without relevance to architecture. Yet, he told his London audience, "in considering Latin American architecture we may properly disregard the political background and its social results, while recognizing that the local situations permit and encourage certain types of achievements and discourage others."²⁶ Juan Perón's rule, for example, had not been "conducive to a lively architecture activity." With him gone, "It is to be hoped that Argentina will now once again take its rightful place" in the region, he proposed.²⁷ Hitchcock lectured on March 1956, six months after Perón's downfall with the military-civic coup, euphemistically called the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution) that ushered the advent of developmentalist policies and Raúl Prebisch's "Plan de Restablecimiento Económico."²⁸ Hitchcock's comments seemed specifically aimed at his British audience, and the long and contorted history between England and Argentina. Yet it produced no effective lasting response. Politics could indeed be called upon to entice audience interest and such examples added a modicum of variety to Hitchcock's sustained attacks on Mexico's official architecture and its bombastic nationalism—as when he compared Carlos Lazo's Ministry of Communications and Public Works with Rio's famed Ministry of Education. The "loud external mosaics" of the former just did not compare to the "refined" azulejos of the latter.²⁹ Hitchcock was always careful to stop short of an "ethnic critic" of Mexico's architecture. Aesthetics helped veil a racialized discourse that surfaced in his public references to the "immaturity" of the region or in private letters, as when Colin Rowe asked Hitchcock why he had changed his mind about traveling to places where "beer was called *cerveza*"³⁰ All this is to say that com-

ments that directed audiences' interests to specific local situations in Argentina or Mexico, as in the case of Hitchcock's London lecture, supported the equation: *Latin America = dictatorship* and, at the same time and perhaps more importantly, drew attention away from the most egregious example of modern architecture under the sign of dictatorship: Venezuela. Just about everyone remained silent on the subject of Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

By 1955, two equations operated at MoMA: *modern architecture = democracy* and *Latin America = dictatorship*. Hitchcock's solution was to disregard the second not because politics did not impinge on architecture, but because U.S. influence in the region would necessarily be a palliative to dictatorship. Thus, it was not that modern architecture actually or necessarily equaled democracy but rather that modern architecture, commanded by U.S. political leadership plus corporate business know-how, would result in democracy within the region and the world. The benevolence of U.S. leadership manifested in different ways and emerged with particular acumen in its architecture schools, which gave "Latin Americans a training so broad that it could readily be applied under very different local conditions," Hitchcock argued.³¹ Yet, the final measure of U.S. influence would play out in the concept of architecture itself and the production of large-scale works; in short, the future of the region rested upon the question of monumentality in architecture. In Latin America, architecture "is still very much an art," Hitchcock stressed. "Public authorities" turned to it "as a principal expression of cultural ambition." This was patent in housing projects and University Cities that showed "the sociological and cultural aspirations of the various presidents and their regimes" as well as the "high standards of official taste." The University Cities in Mexico City and Caracas, as well as in Rio de Janeiro, were key examples; but this form of "cultural ambition" managed by government with "the determination to achieve monumental results" was present "in almost every Latin American country." Monumentality was the sign of a Latin American character trait, and Hitchcock found this drive to create monumental works "self-defeating." These projects shamed U.S. works, "even if we remember Wright's Florida Campus," Hitchcock slyly commented. Yet, he noted, construction often lagged and more modest proposals would better serve higher education in the region. Not all public works expressed grand cultural ambitions.

²⁶Hitchcock, "Latin-American Architecture," 344-46.

²⁷Henry Russel Hitchcock, Jr., "Latin-American Architecture," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, no. March (1956). 344-45.

²⁸Paúl Prebisch, *Moneda Sana o Inflación Incontenible. Plan de Restablecimiento Económico*. (Buenos Aires: Secretaría de la Presidencia de la Nación, 1956). Also: Celia Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

²⁹Hitchcock. 350.

³⁰Colin Rowe to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, December 29, 1954. Correspondence R, 1954, Box 7, Hitchcock Papers, AAA. I have dealt with this in: Patricio del Real, "Un Gusto Por La Cerveza: El Decubrimiento De Henry-Russell Hitchcock De La Arquitectura Latinoamericana / a Taste for Cerveza: Henry-Russell Hitchcock's Discovery of Latin American Architecture," *Trace*, no. 7 (2013).

³¹Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), 21.

For the most part, public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, were surprisingly contemporary in design, although rarely “strikingly excellent.”³²



Figure 5. Installation view of *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (March 29-July 19, 2015). Photo by Thomas Griesel. ©2015 The Museum of Modern Art.

The “social immaturity” of Latin American countries, Hitchcock argued in London, underwrote the architectural production of monumental works. Authoritarian governments were more conducive than the democratic European “bureaucratized state” to solicit such works, which he saw principally as expressions of personal ambitions of dictators or presidents. In short, monumental works, such as large-scale housing projects and University Cities, were signs of a deep Latin American character flaw. They revealed authoritarian desires no matter if they had been produced under dictatorships or not. With this, Hitchcock expressed the period’s deep preoccupation and distrust with monumentality, and surreptitiously reiterated Mum-

ford’s 1937 fundamentalist thesis: “if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.”³³ The social immaturity of Latin American governments brought about a temporal lag that recalled the immediate past of the Second World War and cast doubts on the region’s future. This temporal lag emerged in Hitchcock’s characterization of architecture in the region as being “still very much an art.” Monumental public works revealed the mismanagement of the vital energies of postwar architectural production and the need for some “good-old” U.S.-American business knowhow. These works “lagged behind” and more important — he implied — focused all creative energies in overly ambitious works, leaving the rest of the public sphere with modern, yet unexceptional works — not worthy of being exhibited.

Dictatorship was present in *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980*. Contrary to 1943 and 1955, in 2015, visitors confronted a monumental timeline that carried the difficult history of military coups, dirty wars, forceful economic measures, and U.S. interventions. This monumental wall, painted yellow, traversed the entire main galley much like Drexler’s and Hitchcock’s luminous ceiling traversed their “Corridor.” But unlike the diffused light of 1955, the bright yellow wall stepped forward to speak historical truths. Visitors could read the political history of the region as they contemplated the works of architecture. The exhibition made dictatorship present, yet it was not about repressive government regimes, since it actively refused to employ the equation *Latin America = dictatorship*. Such a stance would homogenize the region and effectively erase the conditions of architectural practice under these regimes, which, as Graciela Silvertri notes, unfold overarching dualisms that posit “los que se fueron contra los que se quedaron” (“those who left against those who stayed”).³⁴ The Estadio Mendoza by Manteola, Sánchez Gómez, Santos, Solsona, Viñoly (MSGSSV) invited us to enter an important architectural tradition of integrating monumental works in the landscape. This did not negate that the Estadio’s communitarian promise was managed by the military regime as a nationalist authoritarian project. But let’s not forget, that this

³³Lewis Mumford, “The Death of the Monument,” in *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*, ed. Naum Gabo (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 264.

³⁴Graciela Silvertri, “Apariencia y verdad: Reflexiones sobre obras, testimonios y documentos de arquitectura producida durante la dictadura militar en Argentina,” *Block 7*, Argentina 01+, 2010, 38. Also in: Graciela Silvertri, *Ars Publica: Ensayos De Crítica De La Arquitectura, La Ciudad Y El Paisaje* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, 2011).

³²Ibid., 29. Hitchcock’s reference to Wright operates in diverse registries: it underscored the U.S origins of the idea of university campuses; juxtaposes a private educational institution: Florida Southern College with public ones, and underscored the outdated grounds of monumental works by referencing “the greatest architect of the 19th Century,” as Philip Johnson called Wright.

nationalist imprint was part of Argentina's World Cup and that this project dated back to the government of Juan Domingo Perón and Isabel (María Estela) Martínez de Perón. Both governments coincided in the use of and need for mass spectacles to express their power. The exhibition *Latin America in Construction* invited us to revisit the architecture of a difficult period. This was not an invitation to escape history, but to return to it through architecture.

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