

FROM MILD CLIMATE'S ARCHITECTURE TO 'THIRD WORLD' PLANNING: RICHARD NEUTRA IN LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Richard Neutra is considered to be one of the main figures of the Modern Movement in world architecture. Born in 1892 and trained in Vienna, he emigrated to the U.S. in 1923, where he would soon reach an outstanding position in the professional scene. This paper does not focus on this very well known role he played in 20th Century architectural history. It rather addresses to a somewhat obscure aspect of his career. Starting with his work as consultant for the Puerto Rican government in 1943-45, it explores the moves from a bio-realistic approach to culturally and socially informed agendas within his work and efforts to succeed as planning advisor in Latin America. My intention is to examine how a certain foreign-modern perspective on so called Third World countries relates to the building of the professional, cultural and political networks of planning in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Richard Neutra is considered to be one of the main figures of Modern Movement in architecture (McCoy, 1979; Drexler and Hines, 1982; Hines, 2005; Lamprecht, 2006). Born in Vienna in 1892, he was trained architect at the local *Technische Hochschule*. In 1914 his education was suddenly interrupted with the outbreak of war and he was sent to front in the Balkans. Having finished his course in Vienna in 1918, he moved to Switzerland after the armistice, and to Germany in 1920, where he would engage larger commissions. In 1923, he finally could embrace his American obsession and emigrated to the U.S.

He arrived in New York City late that year and moved to Chicago after four months, where he undertook his first experience in a large scale building for the old and prestigious firm Holabird and Roche. His great efforts to find his path in the New World, his fascination for the modern metropolis and the new construction methods would soon lead him to an outstanding position within the North American architectural scene. In 1924, he joined Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin East, in Wisconsin, and then moved to Los Angeles to work with his fellow countryman Rudolph Schindler. With him, he took part of the polemic 1926 League of Nations competition. In 1927, he published *Wie Baut Amerika*, about the problems and possibilities of American architecture and urban design, and in 1930 the book *Amerika*, developing some of his early ideas about the subject. In 1932, he was recognized as the main American avant-garde architect at the MoMA's "The

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International Style” show. Being a member of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) since its creation in 1928, he was elected wartime American-based president of the organization in 1944 (mumford, 2000: 142-149). At the time he was already very well known for the design of some of the most remarkable buildings in contemporary architecture, mastering a whole California style influential both in the international avant-garde and its tropical margins.

This paper does not focus on these outstanding pieces of work nor on the acclaimed role he played in the history of architecture from the 1920's onwards. It rather addresses to a somewhat obscure aspect of his activity. Starting with his engagement as architect for the Puerto Rican government in 1943-44, I will explore his subsequent strategy to succeed as a planning expert and consultant in Latin America. My intention is to illuminate the changes within his career as exemplary of a collective professional movement to respond to work opportunities raised in the so called “Third World” fringe, where modernizing efforts were starting to be seen as organic parts of the expansion of capitalism and the industrial civilization.

Cosmopolitan Tropicalism

Like many other modern designers, Neutra has traced a rather erratic and cosmopolitan professional itinerary. Apart from his early emigration steps, in 1930 he embarked on an extended European journey to confirm the exchanges with his modern-architectural peers. He lectured in Vienna, Zurich, Basel, Prague, Hamburg, Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Rotterdam in one single and long trip. In Germany he met Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, who invited him to teach for a month at the Bauhaus as a visiting critic. He met Brinkman and Van der Vlugt in Rotterdam and also Le Corbusier, in Brussels, while taking part of the 3rd CIAM as an American delegate. In Tokyo and Osaka, where he sailed to on his way to Europe from Los Angeles, he was received as a celebrity, lecturing to well-informed audiences. On the way, he also visited Macao, Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai and Canton, publishing in Berlin his impressions about Asia. (Hines, 2005)

Throughout the 1930's, Neutra didn't travel much abroad, consumed by more than a hundred commissions he had taken, mostly in California and neighboring states. But the end of the War points out to a change in his usual destinations, when he starts a rather mobile professional venture in Latin America and elsewhere. Right after his experience in Puerto Rico in 1945, he went to Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and embarked into a US State Department sponsored tour through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. In '47 he was back to Peru, soon after travelling to India, where he would return several times along the years. In '48 he published in Brazil his book about his experience in Puerto Rico as a sort of introduction to wider plans for the subcontinent. While working in Guam and trying his way in Micronesia, Pakistan, South Africa and East Nigeria, he went to Venezuela in 1955 for the 9th Pan-American Conference, and to Brazil in 1959 for the International Art Criticism Conference held in Brasilia's building site, as well as in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, where from he extended his trip to Buenos Aires, La Plata, Cordoba and Rosario in Argentina.

This great mobility reveals an exploration of new geographic, professional and disciplinary frontiers, which resonates the reshaping of the contemporary agenda for architecture and architects. Attempting to move from private to public practice,

his modern sensibility seems to gradually evolve from a prodigal design approach to California's sun and landscape, to more socially and environmentally concerned planning attitudes, in which a civilizing mission of modern architecture is self-assigned.

It is true that his commissions in Latin America throughout the years would still be very much tied up to his reputation as the architect of well designed private houses according to thermic isolation concerns. (Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1951; Instituto Eduardo Torroja, 1968) The proof being his DeShulthes house in Havana from 1956 and the Gorrondona villa in Caracas from 1962, two of his very few achievements in the region where he would supposedly attest his ability to respond to physiological and biological needs of human habitat within the tropics. Nevertheless his efforts to deal with wider public commissions would clearly show a different approach to mild climate realities.

The experience in Puerto Rico is a major turning-point in this process. Unfortunately there is not much historical account for his work there. According to Thomas Hines though, the period refers to an important shift on Neutra's public persona. Apart the fluctuation within his design work - from the white, cool, flat-roofed International Style to a more textured architecture of brick, wood and slanting roofs - all throughout the war years and during his term as head of CIAM he would get involved in larger discussions on post-war planning and reconstruction, taking part of the San Francisco meeting which gave birth to the United Nations in the Spring of 1945. For him, the vast rebuilding of the world should be a task to be assumed by contemporary architects. Particularly on a time of uncertainty about the future of modernism and of relatively unpromising professional perspectives (Hines, 2005: 211-243).

The fact was that in late 1943, when Neutra was called from Washington to lead a massive design and construction program in Puerto Rico, he had very little work to do. Sharing the liberal beliefs of American-appointed governor Rexford Tugwell, between the Autumn of '43 and early '45, he established and directed an office of Puerto Rican architects and engineers. They were responsible to carry on a large building program according to the preliminary guidelines of what he saw as "the most advanced system" of public health and education, which included four district hospitals, many rural and urban health stations, schools, village centers etc.¹ His commission for the work was described by himself in an article of 1944:

"Governor Rexford G. Tugwell had appointed a committee for the Design of Public Works: Dr. Rafael Pico, distinguished chairman of the Planning, Zoning, and Urbanizing Board; Mr. Sergio Cuevas, Commissioner of the Interior; Santiago Iglesias Jr., son of the late Resident Commissioner of the same name in Washington; Paul Edwards, very active chief of the War Emergency program; and last but not least, Louis Sturcke Jr., head of the realistic and cautious Bureau of Budget. Looking for a reputed architect of some cosmopolitan adaptability and familiar with sub-tropical and tropical

¹ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Articles Miscellaneous*. Box 176, Folder 7: Planning and Fabrication (PL): "Puerto Rico performs", 12/2/1944, p.1

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conditions, the Committee came to invite me from Los Angeles to the Island and then commissioned me as their architect and consultant. I immediately commenced and aided in the organization of a Puerto Rican office to plan and project public works.”²

He certainly had a reputation. In his book about the Puerto Rican experience he included a letter from the Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles, dated February '41, recommending the work he had done on the completion of large size units of elementary and junior high schools there. He also published a second letter dated August '43 from the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles expressing their appreciation for his “outstanding” design and building supervision of Channel Heights Housing Project. (Neutra, 1948: 196-197) The very fact of including them suggests that he regarded his engagement on the welfare policies of the Roosevelt era as having played a part on his ability to coordinate social tasks as those performed in Puerto Rico.

Among the local team engaged in the design work, there were young architects like Raul Reichard (1908-1996), Osvaldo L. Toro (1914-1995) and Miguel Ferrer (1914-2004) and engineers such as Antonio Calderon, who according to Neutra belonged to “a gifted and forward looking generation” to whom “I was expected to exert a stimulating influence (...) and so help forward a general renaissance of planning and design on this island in transition.”³ Open air schools for over 150 villages and 128 rural health sub-stations were planned, designed, and redesigned, as well as several milk dispensaries, storage buildings, cisterns, village fountains, neighborhood centers with dance floors, stages, speakers’ platforms and broadcast equipment for educational, assistance, leisure and political purposes. These projects had been given urgent priority over the design of institutions of higher professional training, a Medical College and Nurses’ Training Centers, Industrial Arts schools and other facilities for urban zones including San Juan, which have never gone beyond their initial planning stage.

Not much of the planned buildings were actually erected, but numerous type studies were developed, many of which were included in his “Architecture of social concern in regions of mild climate”, a book to be published in Brazil in 1948. A general design attitude may be summarized: principles of flexibility, adaptability and extension were adopted on the spatial and programmatic level; standardized and semi-prefabricated reinforced concrete structures were designed to fit different, expandable or replicable situations; formal frugality was invested of regional and psychosomatic attributes such as outside patios, the spread of inner spaces into the outdoors, the fronting into prevalent breezes, the use of screens and awning doors and the design of light and removable furniture in order to respond both to the “climatic asset” and the “human material”. With no neglect to the bio-realistic approach (Castillo, 2003) once raised in California, concerns related to low-cost construction and local spatial and architectural patterns were clearly reinforced in face of the new socio-economic reality. After all, along with the obvious design improvement, there were other benefits intended with the program. Neutra himself referred to his expectations that such facilities would

² Idem, p.2.

³ Idem, p.3

*"make the villagers – who for centuries had not much cause to trust a distant government – feel these buildings as their own community property, where in the evenings they can play their domino, strum a guitar for dancers on the community porch, and incidentally, learn by suitable programs something on many things such as child care, diet, cloth making, and more practical housekeeping."*⁴

For him, the program should be considered as fitting "a promising political, technical and socio-economic transition" as well as the "mental reconditioning" of "tribesmen" in "a friendly manner". (Neutra, 1948, pp. 122, 159) It is clear that, in spite of the obvious improvement on the local standards of life, Neutra relates architecture's cultural role to a basic idea of a transition on the folk-urban gradient. The functionalist model had just become a major paradigm to planning and development in Latin America at the time⁵, working as a sort of ideological tool, expressive enough to justify beliefs and hopes on the necessary and universal movement of spreading out the benefits of contemporariness.

"We can foresee a time when our technical civilization, so well equipped to reach far over wide and formerly hard-to-accede areas, will actually hold its promise and do well not by merely the strictly urban variety of mankind. It will be a time, we may hope in not too far a distant future, when rendering all kinds of contemporary services in extra-metropolitan surroundings will be agreeable and commonplace. People, who populate vast stretches of earth, will then no longer feel as second rate citizens." (Neutra, 1948: 160)

The Puerto Rican program thus takes part of "a metropolitan mentality" on its movement through "provincial settings". As such, and although Neutra recognizes Latin America as an "immensely diversified" area of the globe - where studies on huge countries like Brazil or Argentina "for the purpose of contemporary permeation of facilities of this day" should be articulated into more defined geographical units - "the example of a small country (...) may be useful and instructive to an Empire!" (Neutra, 1948: 39) Moreover, within such an imperialistic spread of a technological and industrial civilization, a favorable role would be played by the cosmopolitan migration of experts to areas which "have not yet had the opportunity and experience" to produce their own indigenous professional leadership. "Be it in Indonesia or in Turkey, such an influx and influence of outsiders temporarily transplanted into soil, foreign to them" act in the provincial assimilation of the "cultural goods". (Neutra, 1948:118)

⁴ Idem, p. 4.

⁵ Among the North-American anthropological establishment, Robert Redfield had focused his attention on Latin America, particularly in Mexico, where he developed a powerful theoretical model on the social and cultural change from community village and urban society. His book on the *Folk Culture of Yucatan*, 1941, established his own dual typology on the "Folk-urban continuum". Very close to Chicago's sociology, Redfield's urban extreme coincides with Louis Wirth's description of city's way of life. On its assimilation on discourses about Latin American modernization, see. Gorelik. 2008.

Expertise ventures

In 1945, the U.S. Department of State commissioned Neutra to a cultural cooperation mission in South America. He was still President of the U.S.-chapter of CIAM. Stronger relations between modern architecture and public diplomacy had opened up to CIAM much more technical and political prestige in face of the reconstruction efforts and the building of international institutions such as the United Nations and UNESCO, whose headquarters were soon to be erected in New York and Paris respectively. (Mumford, 2000: 159-160) The Inter-American Affairs Office, coordinated by Nelson Rockefeller, and institutions such as the New York Museum of Modern Art, had clearly substituted the Pan-American Union in setting a continental agenda of cultural exchange and cooperation, including the patronage of modern architecture. Not only Neutra, but architects like Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Walter Gropius and Kenneth Conant would have the protection of the U.S. Department of State. (Liernur, 2004: 25)

For the preparation of his long trip across the region, Neutra had the support of the U.N. Information Offices, both to contact Latin American countries' diplomatic bureaus in the U.S. and to organize the local reception and press release during the trip⁶. Personal letters were sent to local professionals and he drew a list of initial contacts in the various countries he would visit: in Lima, architect and town planner Emilio Harth-Terre; in Santiago, Sergio Larrain and Harvard Design graduate Emilio Duhart; in La Paz, Emilio Villanueva; in Rio de Janeiro, architects Oscar Niemeyer, the Roberto brothers and Henrique Mindlin; in São Paulo, writer Sergio Milliet and architect Rino Levi.⁷ He had also made contacts with the Uruguayan architect Eduardo Baranano, and Julio Villalobos, from Argentina.

The trip would be undertaken by early October 1945 and would last until the end of November. On his return to the U.S. a thorough "Report on Visit of South American Republics" was sent to Mr. Francis Colligan from the Division of Cultural Cooperation of the U.S. Department of State. The document describes the content of his visit.

It is interesting to see that no matter being so quick a visit to Guayaquil, in Ecuador, Neutra seemed to have focused on recent architecture, the site of the new people's assembly hall and museum, and the discussion of the national building program.⁸ A larger social and cultural agenda would be undertaken in Peru where the trip also seems to have focused on Lima's contemporary situation. Although he visited historical Lima, Arequipa, Cuzco and Machu Picchu, Neutra's interests were clearly

⁶ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8: United Nations Information Office: Latin America; Directory Press, Periodical, Radio, News, Photographic Representatives: Latin America, May 1, 1945.

⁷ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8, June 26, 1945; Idem. Letter from Charles W. Collier, from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, September 14, 1945.

⁸ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8: Report on Visit of South American Republics. By Richard J. Neutra, Architect and President, U.S. Chapter of CIAM. Undated.

aimed at the metropolitan growth. He visited the suburbs and neighboring towns, crossed the main arteries from the harbor to the old commercial center and the manufacturing zones and discussed the urban development and plans with local architects, such as Harth-Terre, Luis Dorich and Fernando Belaúnde Terry, an ascending Peruvian political leader, just recently made deputy at the national congress. In that same year, Belaúnde Terry had sponsored the creation of the *Cooperación Nacional de La Vivienda*, to which followed a number of institutional initiatives destined to play a major social role on the country as Lima's *Barriadas* would become a major national question and the Acción Popular party would come to power with the election of the architect as President of Peru in 1963. (Gorelik, 2008) Not by chance, his most formal lecture, delivered at the Hall of the *Artistas Aficionados*, deliberately focused on the topic of "Metropolitan future of a city with a great historical heritage" and had "Mr. Belaunde Terry, who, as *deputado*, has a splendid stage appearance" as moderator.⁹

In La Paz, Neutra would also insist on the need of urban planning while speaking to official and university audiences. That was also the case in Buenos Aires. In spite of the "unofficial character" of his lectures there - due to the political non-cooperation between the U.S. and the pro-fascist Argentina's government during most of the 2nd World War - the themes raised by Neutra were often conditioned by the relevance of a foreign perspective towards design and planning. It is interesting to note that he would not speak inside the University, but at private settings. At the editorial office of *Sur* he raised the question of "the possible value of the strange visitor"; in Victoria Ocampo's Villa, this aristocratic home of avant-garde ideas, he spoke about "the clients of the planner and architect"; to a large group of young architects meeting in a private house he focused on the "international cooperation within the planning profession".¹⁰

In Brazil, he visited Rio Janeiro, Sao Paulo, the two major urban centers at the time, as well as Belo Horizonte and Ouro Preto. In a country entering an intense process of industrialization, with an internationally acclaimed architecture, well known in the U.S. since the 1943 MoMA's show on "Brazil Builds", Neutra's visit would assume a less hierarchical meaning. In Sao Paulo he was received by Gregori Warchavchik, "the dean of modern architecture in South America", in a large social meeting offered to him and some 200 other guests, including an elite group of architects such as Henrique Mindlin, Rino Levi, Daniele Calabi, Eduardo Kneese de Mello, Lucyan Korngold and Vilanova Artigas. In Rio, an official agenda would bring him closer to institutions and authorities - the city's Mayor, the Foreign Affairs' minister, the director of the Inner Brazil Development Foundation, the US Ambassador, the *Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil*, the School of Fine Arts etc - but an important part of his time was dedicated to visiting some of the most remarkable works of architects like Oscar Niemeyer, Jorge Moreira, Lucio Costa, the Roberto brothers, Burle-Marx, Afonso Reidy etc. Everywhere, visiting or lecturing, meeting colleagues or at press conferences, Neutra's discourse would clearly move from the praise of planning to professional ethics, his themes ranging from "the communal and social

⁹ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8: Report...

¹⁰ Idem, *ibidem*.

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requirements” for design or “the social responsibility of the architect” to “architecture for the people at large”.¹¹

The strategic role of so much travelling to his professional career thereafter may be grasped in his extensive correspondence with local politicians, professional and academic leaders, editors, as well as with fellow architects, artists and students. According to his wife, Dione Neutra, the design opportunities in the U.S. were still not very promising at the time: “only one big residence is nearing completion. It took a whole year to build it and 1200 letters were written to contractor, owner, subcontractors etc”¹². As Neutra would point out, Latin America, that so far had been held back by adverse political, geographical and economic conditions, was a new frontier to explore. Taking benefit from delay, it had an opportunity to find its chance to enter into the “purchase of development”. (Neutra, 1948: 56) During the trip, while in Peru, he wrote to William Griffith, special representative of the Inter-American Educational Foundation at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, to declare his enthusiasm with the possible work as a consultant in problems of rural and urban school planning in that country:

“At the moment I am on a trip through Latin American countries and concerned with studies and consultations in methods of school house planning. I have directed a letter to Mr. Luciano Tahay and to the Minister of Education, Sr. Manuel Galich, expressing my willingness to consult with the government of Guatemala on their school and housing problems as soon as I have returned to my main office in Los Angeles, which I believe will be at the end of November. Would you perhaps have the kindness to write me a few explanatory remarks about the problems and the circumstances under which I could visit and survey the situation for the government of Guatemala?”¹³

His engagement within the Inter-American affairs is relevant here. In the post-war period it was a sort of political and financial link to the network of planning and development policies in the region. In May 1946, Neutra would also be invited by architect Enrique Gebhard to teach at the University of Chile for three months, period when he was also expected to work as technical advisor to the National government for planning and housing matters¹⁴.

“Perhaps a little later this year or next I could come with Mrs. Neutra for a month to Chile, if our air travel and living costs could be paid by working on a moderate schedule with your staff of professors, as a consultant in curricular matters and giving a course of lectures. You are, however, right to assume that a much more fruitful influence could be exercised by me, if I were given the practical job as associate or consultant architect on any one of your larger governmental jobs, and, as I have on such occasions done in the past,

¹¹ Idem, *ibidem*.

¹² Idem. Letter from Dione Neutra to Mr. Eduardo Kneese de Mello, Los Angeles, January 24, 1947.

¹³ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8: Letter from Richard Neutra to William Griffith. Lima, October 10, 1945.

¹⁴ Idem. Letter from Enrique Gebhard to Richard Neutra, Santiago, May 13, 1946.

help to train a substantial staff of younger men in the office, which does the work on the practical job in hand, be it hospitals, schools, housing projects, airports, or whatever may be the subject. There is no course of lectures which could equal the effectiveness of such an activity on my part, which might entail several visits to Chile, not to extend too long, because I naturally do not wish to give up my work in other parts.”¹⁵

He was clearly more optimistic about his professional possibilities than to academic collaboration. In Argentina, to where U.S. diplomatic relations were quite challenging since the end of the War and the coming to power of Juan Domingo Perón, Neutra would insist on testing his own personal prestige. On March 23, 1946, he would write Perón, former minister of war and recently elected president of Argentina, to praise his constructive effort to build up “a nation of contemporary merit and greatness”.

“You may remember the invitation you extended to me, while I visited Buenos Aires in October, 1945. Just to refresh your memory: we discussed your plans for communal projects in rural districts and I was very hopefully impressed about what you sketched for me on a sheet of paper. I on my part let you see housing projects for workers, health centers and schools, which I had, I believe with similar intentions, designed in great numbers for the government of Puerto Rico and elsewhere. Political opposition to such projects is not infrequent anywhere. Since this animated and stimulating conversation, I have been often annoyed by the one-sided and, I assume distorted reporting of the newspapers, which I daily have to read concerning your policies and about what we should better consider legitimate Argentine aspirations for an unshackled development of her own industrial and agricultural potentials, the welfare of her people at large and the producing classes.”¹⁶

It is not worthless to recall that in October 1945 the former minister of work, welfare and war, then vice-president of the country, had been arrested and released a week later to be acclaimed as the strongest candidate on the national elections to come. In hopes that the Perón would be able to carry on his own plans for the physical improvement of Argentina, Neutra acted diplomatically, congratulating him for the housing project he had visited in the north of Buenos Aires the year before. Perón clearly understood the architect’s reconnection and a few weeks later his secretary answered his letter manifesting his intent to recur to Neutra’s “generous collaboration offer” when necessary.¹⁷

A clear step on profiting from his experience in South America and the Caribbean is flagrant in his ambitious steps for the publication of his “Architecture of Social Concern” in Brazil. It used to be a mystery to me why this book on his Puerto Rican commission was first published in Brazil than in Puerto Rico itself or rather in the U.S. His very correspondence with German editor Gerth Todtmann, based in Sao

¹⁵ Idem. Letter from Richard Neutra to Enrique Gebhard, Los Angeles, May 25, 1946.

¹⁶ Idem. Letter from Richard Neutra to Colonel Juan Perón, Los Angeles, March 23, 1946.

¹⁷ Idem. Letter from the Private Secretary of Colonel Juan Duarte Perón to Richard Neutra. Buenos Aires, April 10, 1946.

Paulo, is quite revealing to that matter. The contract between Neutra and Todtmann had been established in January 1947¹⁸, but in early '46 he already seemed to have the publication in mind. On a letter to the Argentine editor of *Nuestra Arquitectura*, which Neutra sent him soon after his return to Los Angeles from South America, he had announced its publication with the aid of Gregori Warchavchik, whom he suggests "would probably be interested to cooperate with you for a Spanish edition" as well.¹⁹ By July 1947, Todtmann wrote to Neutra about a few editorial concerns and referred to Warchavchik's preface to the book and the hypothetical Spanish version of it²⁰. By November '48, the book was printed and Neutra wrote to Todtmann to thank him for the enterprise and suggest that he send a copy to U.S. President Harry Truman with a brief note as follows:

*"Architecture, when it connotes planning the constructed environment at large, is a social issue of the first order. It is, in Brazil as in North America, an issue of public economics and internal and foreign politics as well. The properly balanced, contemporary reconstruction of the setting for social life in the various countries of the planet will ease strains and stresses everywhere. Our new publication, of which we take the liberty to dedicate a copy to you, is deeply aware of all these mentioned implications, and through the work of an architect and planner considered prominent in Brazil as in the United States, gives an account of the approaches which lead to significant solutions in public education, health maintenance, and housing."*²¹

Following Neutra's recommendations, the book should also be sold all over the world and copies were sent to Los Angeles, New York, London, and a few to the main booksellers in Switzerland, France, Italy, Portugal, Israel, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Germany, Sweden, Colombia, Spain. They were also sent to important periodicals, like *The Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Press*, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Parchitecture* etc for reviews.²²

In parallel, negotiations were being made with Pietro Maria Bardi for the organization of an exhibition of Neutra's architectural work at the Sao Paulo Art Museum, in which he recognized an important asset for the publication itself as to his own prestige, particularly if "such an exhibition" would not only be shown in Sao Paulo but "later, elsewhere – all over Latin America, perhaps". To Neutra, the idea would seem most desirable as it could support the showings of the book, "not only in Sao Paulo, but in all South American capitals and perhaps even in all North American

¹⁸ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 186, Folder 5: correspondence regarding writings: contract signed in January 1 and January 9, 1947, in German.

¹⁹ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 1429, Folder 8: Letter from Richard Neutra to Mr. Scott. Los Angeles, undated, unsigned.

²⁰ UCLA/ Young Research Library/ Special Collections. *Richard Neutra Papers: Correspondence*. Box 186, Folder 5: correspondence regarding writings: Letter from Todtmann to Neutra, São Paulo, July 24, 1947, in German.

²¹ Idem. Letter from Neutra to Todtmann, Los Angeles, November 29, 1948, in English.

²² Idem. Letter from Todtmann to Neutra, São Paulo, December 24, 1948, in English.

art museums, colleges, etc.” Besides “the name of your publishing house may be better known and the book may sell better”.²³

No matter all the efforts made, in February 1949, Neutra seemed worried for the lack of interest in his book from the part of the American reader.²⁴ Along the years Todtmann would be continuously charged for neglecting the book’s international distribution or its envoi to periodicals, editor houses or events like the Bergamo CIAM meeting. In April ‘49 his sister in law, Regula Thorston, hired as his private secretary, wrote Todtmann about the poor advertising of a book that, according to her, had greatly ennobled its publisher: “It may not be usual that a publisher explains his intent, but a Brazilian publishing house, collecting and publishing for the first time the work of a leading American architect, may be permitted to give its motivations.” A sort of book release for the Brazilian reader was then suggested:

“Brazil has been celebrated for its novel and impressive architecture of the last years. A vast country with many areas in the beginning of development, Brazil, like many other countries, needs the stimulating influence of a practitioner in architecture, who has been known for his social consciousness. The pictorial review of Neutra’s generic work in this respect is here more important than the glamorized portrayal of this or that individual building. Neutra’s ideas sprang from a rich contact with broad and diversified groups of society and their representation. The pictorial preface depicts briefly this background of the author.”²⁵

Seen as a unique contribution to the local professional milieu – in a country in urgent need to realize “that it takes more than a most handsome Ministry building to bring health and education to the people of a vast and relatively undeveloped nation”²⁶ - the book should be praised as offering a mostly utilitarian and humble response to the national lure for the monumental and the luxurious in architecture.

Conclusion

It is interesting to acknowledge that one of Neutra’s closer colleagues, British architect Maxwell Fry, had in 1940 written him about his own frustrations with the CIAM discourse and the anxieties he felt towards the near future²⁷. Like Neutra and many other architects, Fry and his wife, architect Jane Drew, would soon embark on their tropical adventure, working as planners and architects in British West Africa (Le Roux, 2003: 337-354). As we all know, the outbreak of war had created a wide diaspora of modern architects, mainly to England, France and the USA (Otto, 1983; Cormier, 1986; Benton, 1996), but also to Latin America and other countries (Ruiz-Funes, 1996; Falbel, 2003; Bozdogan, 2003; Nicolai, 2004; Nolden, 2004; Le Roux, 2004; Wright, 2008). As the undecieving war years proved its destructive effects on professional’s self-pride and opportunities, a whole generation of expatriate

²³ Idem. Letter from Todtmann to Neutra, São Paulo, December 6, 1948, in German; Letter from Neutra to Todtmann, Los Angeles, December 17, 1948, in English.

²⁴ Idem. Letter from Neutra to Todtmann, Los Angeles, February 4, 1949;

²⁵ Idem. Letter from R. Thorston to Todtmann, Los Angeles, April 20, 1949.

²⁶ Idem. Review of “Architecture of Social Concern”. By Theodor C.

²⁷ Hines, op. cit., p. 211.

architects from Britain, France, Italy, the U.S., along with many others from Poland, Hungary, Portugal etc, would also move to “Third World” countries. Either to work with colonial infrastructure, including town and village planning, educational buildings, houses for expatriates, government offices etc, or to independent and modernizing nations seemed to be opening up new professional horizons within the public commission and the real estate market (Lira, 2008; Silva, 2010).

The flow of western architects and planners to the South and the East would soon construct a whole new network of design for the tropics. (Le Roux, 2003: 350)²⁸ Although post-colonial opportunities seemed to be more and more limited, it is interesting to see how some architects’ experiences in the post-war period would both grow into rather successful careers abroad and affect their former principles of design. One could say that the very mainstream of modern architecture, under attack since the outbreak of war, had gone into the wave of tropicalization. This process would probably transcend the climatic approach, fostering the dissemination of new architectural devices. Defining an in-between space, for instance, a second skin, isolated from the modernist glass wall, would generate formal solutions independent from the inner functions of the buildings and promote the reassessment of monumental values. “Tropical” devices like that had been widely tested in Brazil and would soon maybe conquer mainstream architecture, from Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh to Mies van der Rohe’s *Nationalgalerie* in Berlin. (Liernur, 2004: 30-31)

That seems to have been the case of Fry and Drew, who while maintaining their London based office would go on from Ghana to practice in India, Kuwait, Nigeria, Ceylon and Iran. And also of Neutra. But his great international reputation and work abroad, would never prevent this émigré architect to remain at the VDL home and studio, fronting the Silverlake Reservoir, in Los Angeles. I do not tend to underestimate the shifts in Neutra’s aesthetics as taking part of such a “tropical” wave in the 1940s and 50s. It is enough here to suggest though that his move from California to Latin America, in spite of the mild climate they share, represented a major shift on his perspectives of architecture as an asset to the world. Touching the keystone of development’s ideology, the socio-technical benefits of his biorealistic approach had a founding compromise with the assumption of a world civilization, unable to accept that the very fact of civilization implies, and indeed consists in the coexistence of cultures exhibiting maximum possible diversities. (Lévi-Strauss, 1952)

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²⁸ In 1952 twenty-five to fifty British architects had gone to work in the tropics, while in 1953 there were as many as two hundred students from tropical countries studying in Britain.

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