



From Mild Climate's Architecture to Third World Planning: Richard Neutra in Latin America

José Tavares Correira DE LIRA, Associate Professor
University of Sao Paulo, School of Architecture and Planning, Brazil
joselira@usp.br

Richard Neutra is considered to be one of the main figures of the Modern Movement in architecture. Born and trained as architect in Viena in 1892, he worked in Switzerland and Germany, before immigrating to the USA in 1923. His tremendous efforts to find his way in the New World and his fascination for the Modern Metropolis and its built environment and ways of life, would soon lead him to an outstanding position within the North American architectural scene. Soon after arriving in the US through New York City, where he engaged in small offices for short periods of time, he moved to Chicago and got a job at the large and prestigious firm Holabird and Roche, one of the pioneers of the development of the skyscraper in the late 19th Century along with Sullivan and Adler. In 1924 he joined Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin East and soon moved to Los Angeles to work in some of his commissions and with Rudolph Schindler. Naturalized in 1927, and by 1932 having published a couple of books about American architecture and construction, and built some of the most remarkable International Style private houses in California, he was recognized as the main American modern architect.

This paper, though, will not focus on this very well known role he played in the history of architecture during the 1920s and 1930s. I'll rather address here to a somewhat obscure aspect of his career. Starting with his work as architect and consultant for the Puerto Rican US government in 1943-45, I will explore a different dimension of his international fortune: his work and efforts to succeed as planning advisor and professional in Latin America as well as in much of the then called Third World countries in the post war period.

Like many other modern designers, Neutra has traced a rather mobile and world wide professional experience. In 1930, he had been in China. In 1945, he went to Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and embarked into his South American tour sponsored by the US State Department in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. In 1947 he went back to Peru and then to India. In 1953 to Guam and Micronesia in the South Pacific. In 1955 to Venezuela and in 1959 to Brasilia's building site in central Brazil, and to Buenos Aires, La Plata, Cordoba and Rosario in Argentina. Among his correspondents, there were several professional and academic leaders, individual architects, artists and students, planning and design journals, politicians as powerful as Argentinean dictator Juan Perón, Peruvian president Belaunde-Terry, the first East Nigerian government of Azikwe.

With this paper I'll examine some of these connections in order to understand Richard Neutra's moves from the architectural scene to the planning scene, as well as from the International Style to regionalistic approaches. My intention is to examine the building of this new professional frontier and work opportunities in the post-colonial world which would reshape the role of Latin America in world economy: from its colonialist, ethnocentric and naturalistic representations to a more complex bio-realistic point of view to which the region should be seen in socio-cultural and economic terms as taking part of the industrialized civilization and the expanded market relations and values.

KEY WORDS: Richard Neutra, Latin America, planning consultant, post-war period