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Design and its Proof: Richard J Neutra and Darell Boyd Harmon

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When describing his 'Philosophy of Design' Neutra described his architecture as an assimilation of ideas that were informed by his own observations and those of the sciences.[i] Eager to substantiate his design theory and the innovative nature of his school design, Neutra extended his investigations into the sciences. He proposed that he would take scientific research findings and apply them to the architectural design problem; his writings reveal his critical knowledge of science and scientific methodology, and his trenchant observations on its relevance for architectural design.

Because of its difficulty proving its significance, Neutra proposed that one of the ways that his 'biorealism' theory could be crucially informed; was by scientific research into biological functioning and how it was affected by environment. Researching in Texas, investigating the impact of classrooms on children, Darell Boyd Harmon was mentioned many times within Neutra's writings. Harmon's research investigated in detail the psycho-physiological functioning of the child in the traditional classroom, which linked children grinding their teeth in frustration with poor illumination levels. The ways, in which Neutra engaged with such research, provides an opportunity for examining how science was used critically to inform his 'biorealistic' theory in practice. Neutra's ideas about environment and the child constituted both an affirmation and a critique of Harmon's scientific methodology. In one way Neutra used Harmon's approach to support his architectural interventions, he referred to the results extensive significance, and used them to enforce his propositions for uniform lighting through his classroom spaces. However in another way Neutra criticised the limitations of scientific experiments, through its rigorous approach it limited its application for architectural practice design development. While Neutra consistently suggested his 'scientific attitude,'[ii] he was concerned that the limitations of 'scientific systematics and information' may undermine the intuitive quality of architecture in practice.[iii] The reality was Neutra sought to design in both intuitive and conscious ways through the design process, and used scientific ideas to inform the translation of his design theories into practice.[iv]

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[i] NEUTRA, R. undated-a. Richard J Neutra Philosophy of Design. Los Angeles: Richard J Neutra Special Collection, UCLA., p 1.
[ii] NEUTRA, R. 1969b. *Survival Through Design,* New York, OUP., p 381.
[iii] NEUTRA, R. J. undated-b. PSEUDO-SCIENCE AND ART IN ARCHITECTURE by Richard J Neutra. Los Angeles: UCLA, Richard J Neutra Special Collections., p 5.
[iv] NEUTRA, R. undated-a. Richard J Neutra Philosophy of Design. Los Angeles: Richard J Neutra Special Collection, UCLA., p 1.