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THE HOUSE AT THE WATERFRONT AS THE ROOT OF A NEW REGIONALISM

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Abstract. Modern houses built on the waterfront are interesting examples of how architecture combines constructive and spatial evolution that occurs in the first decades of the twentieth century with the search for a new regionalism, showing special attention to the site and to local building tradition. Different architects choose to give their personal response to the house on the waterfront, from the pioneers of modernism as Le Corbusier or Giuseppe Terragni to generations linked to the modern revision that occurs with the last International Congresses of Modern Architecture. Within these authors, we analyse the work of Portuguese Fernando Tavora and Spanish Xosé Bar Boo, who raised the theme of the house on the waterfront from their early academic projects to develop it later in his professional career. They have become modern conquerors of natural and symbolic boundaries through architecture, making their buildings and the relationship with the place, the root of a new regionalism.

Key words: architecture; 20th century; modernity; housing; regionalism.

1. Introduction: The House at the End of the World

Europe, leaving their joints penetrate all the seas of the Old World, benefits from richest possible contact with the marine world. To this quality of

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contact is added a privileged maritime situation regarding general movement of the seas and winds, and an abundance of bays and natural harbors whose configuration, logical consequence of the structure on the continent, has favored the development of the art of navigation, ensuring the dominance of the seas (Ritter, 1859).

The description Europe at Ritter eyes, where continental and marine forms interpenetrate, reaches a paradigmatic expression in northwestern Spain. The length of the Galician coast, around 1,700 km, in relation to its length, makes the region the perfect example of the ideas expressed by the geographer on the European continent.

With three of its four provinces washed by the sea, it is clear the importance of it for the life of the Galicians. Not only has become the working basis for much of the population, from the shipyard to the kitchen, but the Galician culture can not be understood if it's not considered in relation to the sea. A sea that has become the source of stories, songs, superstitions, and has been the inspiration for numerous works, including architectural projects.

Galicia, as well as Europe as a whole, "has been able to dispense to their inhabitants the beautiful communicative coherence of his parts and the no less valuable gift of the experience of the sea. His political and cultural history would be inexplicable without the maritime scenario in which there is or by which it has been reported. The history of its cities is often the history of its ports and coastal enclaves" (Gomez, *a*).

The land of Galicia, "lying at the waterfront" in the words of poet Celso Emilio Ferreiro, is distinguished by a coastline full of *rías*, a distinct type of coast whose name was assigned in 1886 by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, and its found in only a few marine edges worldwide (Chao, 1995).

Ramón Otero Pedrayo insists that the process of the Galician geography gives to the region an unique originality (Chao, 1995), as the *rías* constitute a juncture and become the meeting place where the waters of the rivers find the waters of the seas, with the consequent contribution of material and energy.

As the Mediterranean led and connected to Europe, the Galician sea represents the end of the land, the *Finisterrae*, where some pilgrims continue their pilgrimage beyond Santiago de Compostela to get to the last mark in the land. "Does they it to recognize there, in front of the infinite and threatening ocean that existed an imposed borders to the impetus conqueror of man?" (Richert, 2009).

When man faces and lives to this end of the world to make it part of their everyday landscape, he transforms it, as far as possible, through domestic architecture. With the evolution of technology, he seeks a direct dialogue with the frontier.

In the history of architecture and engineering, the buildings erected on the seashore have excelled in remarkable times by its mass and its expressive eloquence. [...] What does this mean? It means, in my view, that the coastline is an area of maximum symbolic tension: sea in front of the land, the flat and wet against the broken and dry, the soft *versus* the hard, the entrenched against the cut off; the anchor in front of the sail (Gómez, *b*).

The architecture located on the coast and, especially, the one which seeks to create the daily habitat, serves to explain the evolution of modern principles in the construction of places with meaning, linking the existing *locus* with the built environment in search of regional character.

2. Pioneers in the Conquest of the Frontier

For the architects of the modernity, the conquest of the border waterfront had been an exciting project. We met several projects spread across different coasts where each author realizes her desire to occupy the border combined with the verification of his dreams of inhabit the edge.

The houses on the sea have, therefore, advance mythical connotations of outpost and bulwark, and of manifest of modern ideals, demonstrating the power of man against the storm, taking and framing the horizon, that passes to form part of the house, as the Friedrich's traveler on the sea of clouds, dominant on the landscape and landscape itself.

With this approach, the architects of the modernity set their houses in front of the sea. In them we can see clearly as formal and constructive principles intertwine with the search for the meaning of the place, introducing a strong regionalist component.

Thus, in the unrealized plan for Errazuriz House (1929...30), Le Corbusier must place a home facing the Pacific, in the town of Zapallar (Chile). A careful look at vernacular architecture makes him to change the European purists façades by local materials, beginning a process of incorporation of tangible references to the place that he will keep for the rest of his architectural production (Vásquez, 2002 a).

The house consists of two volumes defined by stone bearing walls (Fig. 1). In the main volume we find the lounge, in part of which a ramp leads to the master bedroom on the top floor. The roof arises inverted and supported by walls and a line of wooden pillars. Facilities and a guest room are located in the secondary volumen, which is reached by a footbridge.

Le Corbusier conquest in Chile's central coast generates a stone terrace on the slope leading down to the sea, on which appears the house. A succession of large windows frame the passage of ships, continuing the sea level over the stone pavement. "The sturdiness of the materials is not at all an obstacle to the manifestation of a clear plan and a modern aesthetic" (Le Corbusier, 1999).

When the project is shown in volume 2 of his Complete Works, Le Corbusier illustrated it with photographs of another house built by near the water: a house designed by the Czech architect Antonnin Raymond in 1932 at Kaurizawa (Vásquez, 2002 b) – Japan, with very similar approaches to the Chilean proposal. Le Corbusier highlights the admirable tradition of Japanese domestic architecture and how it is possible to combine the culture with modern principles, through proposals such as that made by Raymond (Fig. 2).

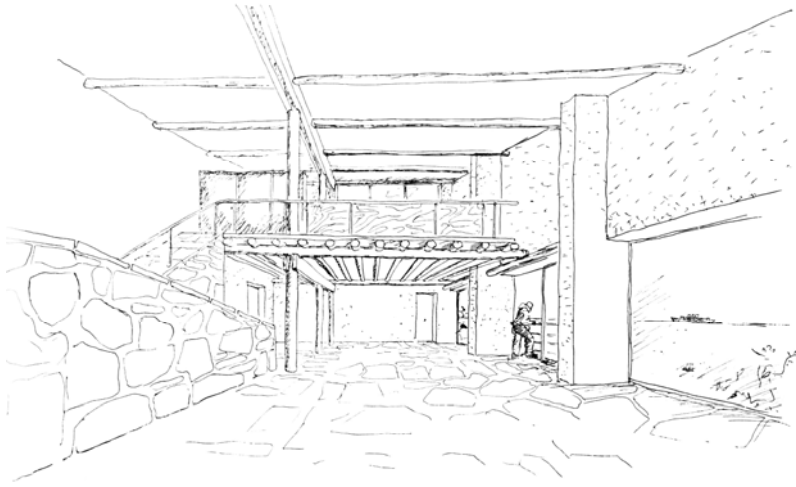


Fig. 1 – Le Corbusier, Errazuriz House, Zapallar (Chile), 1929-1930.



Fig. 2 – Antonnin Raymond, house at Kaurizawa (Japan), 1932.

The regional search began with the project of the Errazuriz House will immediately continuity in other works by Le Corbusier as Madame de Mandrot

villa in Le Pradet (Toulon, France, 1930-1931) or other house built on the edge of the water on the same dates, but replacing the central Chilean coast by the Mare Nostrum: the house E.1027 by Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici (1926...1929). Unlike the House Errazuriz, anchored on the ground, the E.1027 floats on the coast and transmits an even stronger notion of dominance over the landscape (Fig. 3).

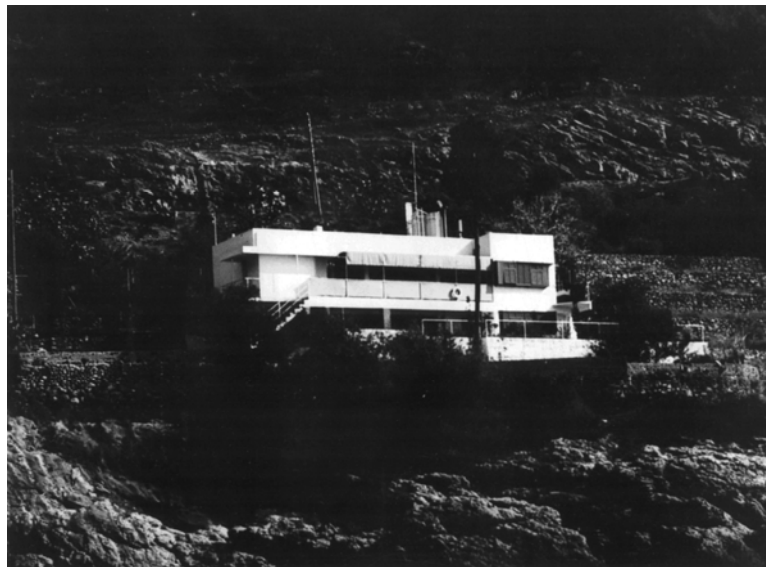


Fig. 3 – Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, house E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (France), 1926...1929.

Until the eighteenth century, the view of nature is always tragic, and the sea, as part of the cosmos, is perceived as an infinite darkness. The idea of possession of the horizon, not from prominent enclave parameters or captivating landscape is evident in the E.1027 house, replacing the fearful attitude by a lucid, excited and communion with nature attitude. The horizontal domain of the house avoids heroic content to the human need for the land as an act of affirmation. It's about feeling privileged to stand upright, to conquer the horizon. The modern house replaces religious and cosmological orientation of the primitive house by a provision to the views, the beach and the sun, in a word: the health (Espegel, 2010).

Without incorporating local materials, the house E.1027 is perceived as an element of the place, offering a new interpretation of the meaning of the regional. The location of walls and paths, the seeking of the views and the sun are incorporated into the architecture in a natural way, engaging the landscape and forming a new landscape in itself, in the same way that the ship gives meaning to seascape.

How a house so abstract and radically modern can interweave the place, even participating in local culture? Its authors claimed: “I think most people are mistaken about the meaning that we give to the word *typical*. Typical for them stands for simplified creation intended to be mass produced. But I understand something else. A typical house is just a house built to the highest technical procedures that are less expensive, and that the architect performs as an already established situation, requiring the maximum perfection. That is, it is a model that should not be replicated to infinity, but could be used to build other houses in similar situations” (Gray, 2012).

In an analogous way, the “Project of the villa on the lake” of Giuseppe Terragni (1936) symbolizes the conquest of the waters with the heroic modernity (Fig 4). Still giving more importance to the autonomous object placed on the landscape – on clouds, following Fiedrich –, the house is separated from the floor, incorporating a cover garden that becomes a plane levitating above the water.

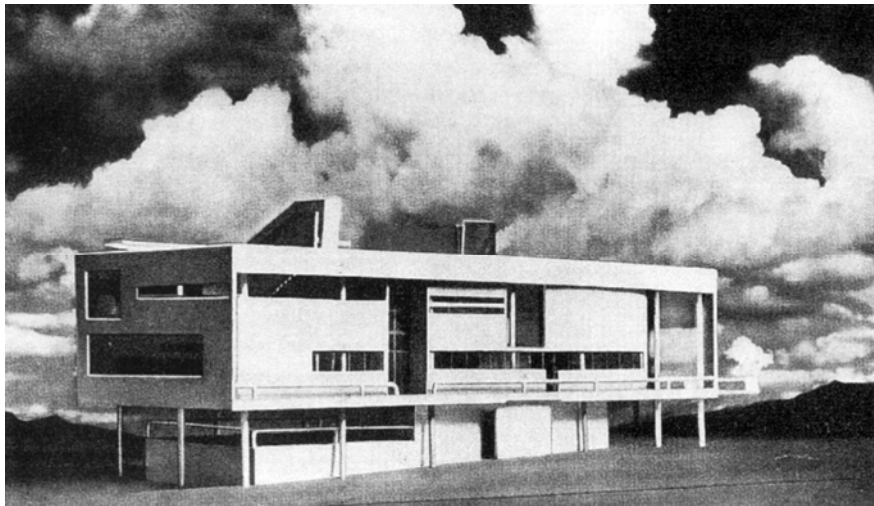


Fig. 4 – Giuseppe Terragni, Project of the villa on the lake, Como (Italia), 1936.

The interest of the modernity in the plane reaches a new level when Terragni start to dialogue between the man and the sea, which will reach its paradigmatic expression a year later by the hand of two Italians: architect Adalberto Libera and writer Curzio Malaparte in the house for the latter, built on the cliffs of Capri in 1937 (Fig. 5).

Beyond the uniqueness of the proposal and the uncertainty of his own, the Casa Malaparte symbolizes perfectly the conquest of the sea by the architecture. It is in essence an artificial plane, a classic stylobate, built on the coast, surrounded by water. Below it lies the housing part that corresponds to

the protection, to the shelter. It is the bunker that frames the seascape fragments. Above, a minimum sail-shaped gesture indicates the space of domination over the sea, a triumph for man, the most modern roof desired by Le Corbusier, the garden of light.



Fig. 5 – Adalberto Libera and Curzio Malaparte, Malaparte House in Capri (Italia), 1937.

The house is located at the end of a road: is the end point of a physical path (it is unclear whether land or sea). No one can cross or circle, you can enter it and turn around, and go back to it and return the same way. It is, in this sense, an extreme work, last, borderline. It is located on the cliff, on a limit lying between land and water, exactly in the perfect line of the horizon (Parra, 2009).

3. The Modern Revision of Fernando Távora

The choice of this houses on the sea marks the beginning of a path, a local interpretation of the principles of modern architecture and the search for a new regionalism. In the mid-twentieth century, on the Atlantic coasts of the Iberian peninsula, the development of this path will lead to new proposals, some arising from experimental academic environment.

In 1951, the Portuguese architecture student Fernando Távora attends to the VIII International Congress of Modern Architecture in Hoddeson (England), where coincides with Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. For many, this congress

represents the last meeting of the modern masters, the latest attempt to provide a common intellectual and unitary vision “the last congress, Bergamo and Hoddesdon, have spent much time on philosophical arguments and definitions... Result: many of our discussions repeat the same topics over and over again” (Bosman, 1992).

The conference title, *The Heart of the City*, manifests overcoming the global nature of the Athens Charter and focuses their interest in local problems in the search for identity that will crystallize in the CIAM IX and X by the hand of the younger generation.

These concerns were already latent in the young Távora some years before, how his essay published in November 1947 and eloquently entitled *The problem of Portuguese house* reflects (Távora, 1993a) and where, in response to the massive construction activity produced in his country, proposes to make, or rather “redo everything, starting from the beginning”.

Faced with the basis of the so-called *International Modern Architecture*, he claims that the only architecture that Portuguese architects can perform in a sincere is an architecture of a local and independent character, close to the regional.

That regional carácter will have to find both in existing Portuguese architecture and in the possibilities that modern construction allows:

When studying the Portuguese milieu we should take into account two basic elements: Man and the Land, in the present and in the past, influencing each other and conditioning all the Architecture which within the Portuguese truth is to be built. These are the decisive factors that must subject all manifestations and possibilities and things which may directly interest Architecture to a detailed study. Conditions vary, the Portuguese situation is different, the men of today are not the same as those of yesterday, neither are the means of transport they used the same, nor the social, political or economic ideas the same. As the levels of these variations are so high, why shouldn't there be other, many other solutions for the Portuguese of today? Why insists on a status quo when everything is pointing towards a different road ahead? (Távora, 1993b).

In Hoddeson, Távora see confirmed his student's concerns about a modern architecture that is able to identify with the formal and spatial values of tradition. A year later, when he is doing his project for obtaining the degree in architecture (CODA, a), he may implement his intentions, with a project titled “A House on the Sea”.

Located in Foz do Douro, near the city of Porto, the house on the sea stands in “a quite naked place, beaten by the strong North wind in summer and from the Southwest in the days of rain; at high tide the sea invades noisily the beach and reaches on the rock where the house we project is located” (CODA, b).

Since the beginning of the report accompanying the project, Távora indicates the powerful influence of the proximity of the sea: from the choice of materials to the internal distribution and taking into account the aspects of tradition and local spatial construction, such as the use of white and blue tile as façade cladding (Fig. 6).

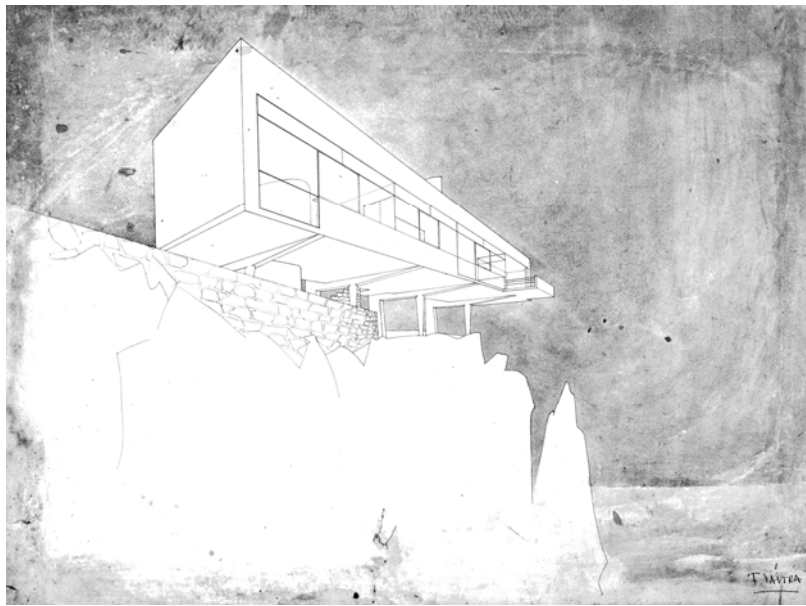


Fig. 6 – Fernando Távora, Project of a house in Porto (Portugal), 1952.

Two opposite walls: the input, firm, majestic in the theory of its pillars, closed. The sea, open, light, fluctuating, extending in a last effort by a terrace and revealing, through her glasses the whole structure and all the forms faded inside the house. Lining traditional tile façades: observe its perfection, the beauty of its colour, its brilliance (nothing like it knows better to reflect the setting in Foz), one of the most interesting elements in this construction. You can imagine the effect of the ceramic box of the house, with his reflections, accurate, flawless, almost metallic, contrasting with the white and quiet of the structural elements and the rock from whence springs, or allying with the transparency of the glass. May the spirit of each viewer of this project can imagine what for us is a reality (CODA, c).

“The sea is never tired of being seen” is the phrase that puts Távora in the mouth of the alleged owner of the house, and the report with “a structure based on the rock underlying the volume where you can live and seems to deliver it to the sea. This could translate into words the project itself” (CODA, c). A project that observed several years later by Kenneth Frampton, will

become the touchstone of the Porto School, for his "rationalism topographically mediated" (Frampton, 1994).

4. Atlantic Connections: Richard Neutra and Xosé Bar Boo

Like the house on the sea marks the beginning of the career of Távora and his search for a new regionalism, in the same time, another architect will do the same with another house on the sea, in this case on the sea of his homeland, which he had moved away to study in the School of Architecture of Madrid.

In 1955, while attending the 4th year of architecture studies, Xosé Bar Boo (Vigo 1922...1994, graduated in 1957), received the task of designing a summer home for a family's friend in the beach of Samil (Vigo, Galicia) (Garrido, 2000a). The order is similar to the academic project of Távora, designed also for a friend of the architect.

The Villa at Samil beach is located on a seafront property, downhill towards the beach (Fig. 7). Regarding the Távora proposal to raise the house over water, like Terragni, Bar chooses to anchor it to the ground, following the path initiated by Le Corbusier and Gray.

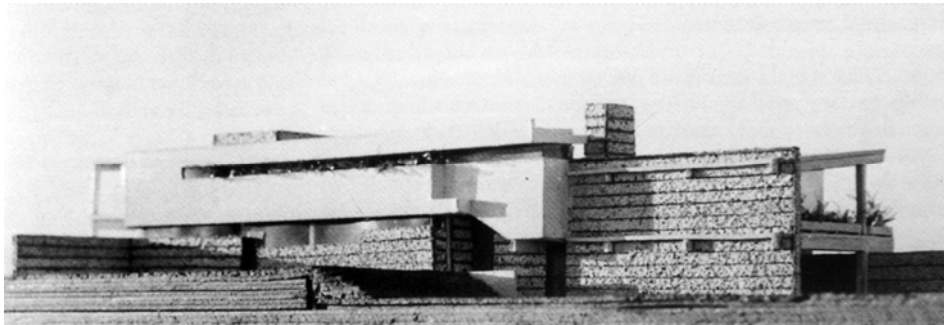


Fig. 7 – Xosé Bar Boo, Project of a house in Samil, Vigo (Spain), 1955.

On some powerful granite walls, like is common in Galician building tradition, a concrete structure rises slightly, closed to the North winds and fully open to the horizon. The use of traditional materials in a contemporary way is a constant in the later work of Bar, a perfect example of the new regionalism in architecture.

The interior of the house extends through large glass in cantilevered terraces that gravitate between stone walls and were colonized with vegetation, turning the architecture into a landscape and blurring the boundaries between outside and inside, anticipating a professional career that will make its author in one of the greatest exponents of modern architecture in Galicia. "It was a house that was to be built to announce a new era, that combine the notion of traditional life we had with the new ideas that come" (Garrido, 2000 b).

When the architect Richard Neutra, visiting Madrid School of Architecture, observed the model of Bar's Project, he remembered their own houses on the sea and recognized common shared principles (Fig. 8). Across the ocean, Neutra had designed several houses on the sea: the pioneers Lovell House (1929) and Sten House (1934) or the more recent Brown House (1938), the first on the East coast of the United States and nicknamed "Windshield" by its topographical situation.



Fig. 8 – Richard Neutra observes Xosé Bar Boo's project in the School of Architecture of Madrid (Spain), 1955.

In all of them he combined modern construction techniques with a deep respect for the place and local tradition. Like his admired Wright, his houses were mainly modern but also American and regional, for his masterful adaptation to different locations. In Windshield, for example, he respects existing rocks in the place and incorporated them as part of the spatial configuration of the house (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9 – Richard Neutra, Brown House, nicknamed "Windshield", Fishers Island, New York (USA), 1938.

For all these reasons, no wonder that Neutra observed placed a project that shares the principles that he is using at the time in the Slavin house in Santa Barbara (California) both in modern as in regional principles, offering a new solution the “problem of house”, to paraphrase the words used earlier by Távora.

Years later, and after having built in Vigo one of the first buildings where he could put into practice the knowledge acquired in their training: the residence and comercial building for his own family (1957), he may at last realize his first houses on the sea: the Ibáñez Aldecoa house (Fig. 10) and the Daniel Vazquez house (Fig. 11), both in 1963.



Fig. 10 – Xosé Bar Boo, Ibáñez Aldecoa House, Vigo (Spain), 1963.

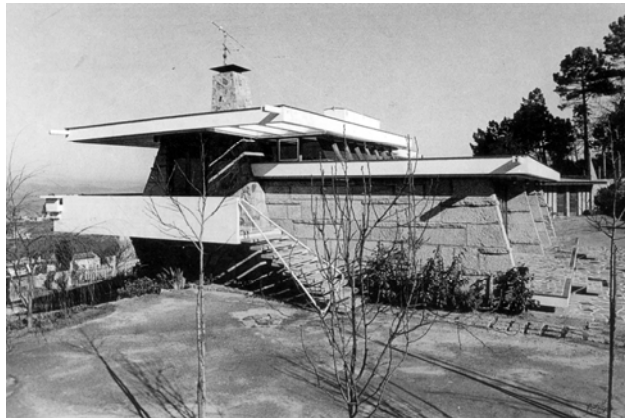


Fig. 11 – Xosé Bar Boo, Daniel Vázquez House, Vigo (Spain), 1963.

The two residences are located, as well as their academic project, on the coast near his hometown Vigo, and they were built with parallel and

perpendicular to the horizon stone walls. On those walls planes of concrete were supported, located at different heights to accommodate the slope. The extension of the planes in cantilever and the diagonal ends of the walls blurred the limits of the house.

The granite ashlar, made by craftsmen, the horizontality of the composition – as Celso Emilio Ferreira lying land – and the minimal transformation of topography are signs of the dialogue between architecture and place, in short, between modernity and local tradition.

5. Conclusion: The Root of a New Regionalism

Given these major steps on the path begun, other architects will follow, develop and complete, taking the house over the sea as the right opportunity to realize the recovery of modern principles. The house will serve to bring out the modernity, but also to be intentionally related to the site, identified with the local character.

The incorporation of construction and spatial principles of the present difference premodern regionalism and modernity locally interpreted, making a home that is healthy, bright, free and open – like the *Windshield* of Neutra –, while it has a distinct identity with recognizable shapes in tradition.

Thus, the house becomes an *imago mundi*, to make visible the privacy and to participate in a community that recognizes it as their own. This is evident in the different houses over the sea we have seen: they are all part of the same desire, in a way of being and living in the world, and they are all different, in the specific way of being and acting in the world.

As pioneers in the conquest of the frontier, the architecture still poses an inquiry, a research on the concept of limit, the meeting between land and water, which is now done from the reflection in the tradition of the place itself. Architecture is the place, and as such place, melts, disappears. Only visible and self-referential to look toward the horizon, beyond the border. Again, shelter and conquest of the limit.

This is the conquest of the limit by the architecture, as described by Heidegger in 1954: “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary” (Heidegger, 1971).

As stated Carmen Espegel (2010), it is precisely in the home for holiday, in the house that serves an extraordinary lifestyle, where the appropriate lecture of site is manifested more clearly. That house that is away from the traditional sense of home, which is occupied fragmentary and often in an unexpected way, that house becomes the expression and the verification of how to inhabit a place.

These homes, made even as paradigms of thought of their authors (We can remember the Cabanon of Le Corbusier, the refuge of Alvar Aalto in Muuratsalo, Utzon's house in Mallorca or Ramón Vázquez Molezún's intervention in Bueu (Fig. 12), all are houses on the sea), and they share the idea of being temporary habitats and dreams of living at the same time. It is in this encounter between land and water where they produce the right atmosphere to bring the true sense of place. The place where the ground disappears, the *finisterrae*.

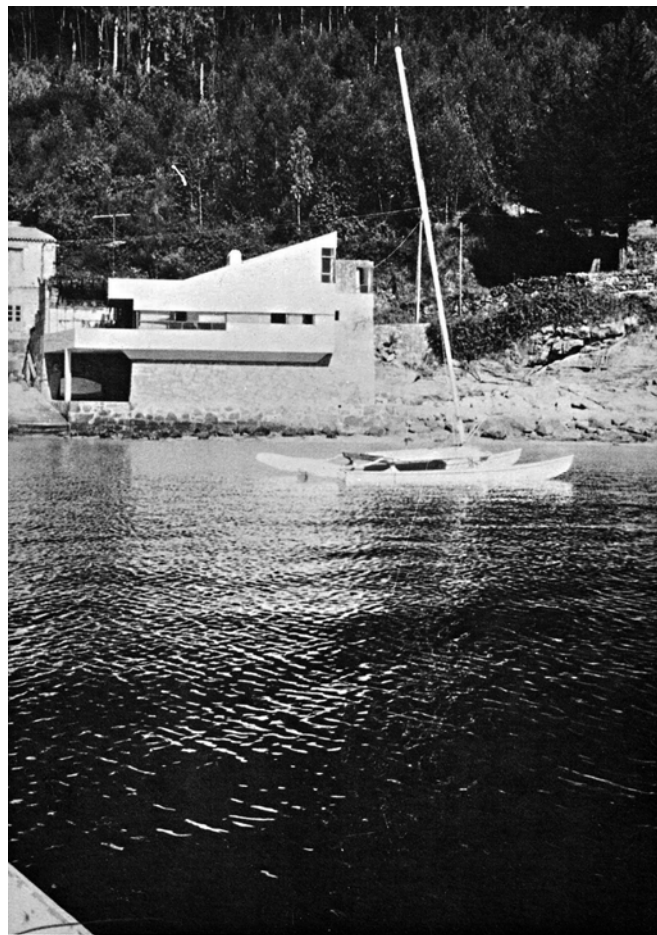


Fig. 12 – Ramón Vázquez Molezún, House in Bueu (Spain), 1967.

Like Ulysses of his time, modern architects observed their other halves on each coast, but they will be true to their halves left in Ithaca, in their own land, and so they will be able to start new trips, new conquests, without forgetting where they come from.

With sublime irony, old Homer tells us that the hardships and revelations do not end when the trip is over, but most unknown lands are those who apparently do not present themselves as such, and that, such if we like it or not, in our life we are always treading the edge of a border zone, a coastline thaw we do not know if it belongs to the dream or to the reality, and it retracts again and again while stretching before us unknown territories (Gómez, c).

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LOCUINȚA LA MALUL MĂRII, LA ORIGINEA UNUI NOU STIL REGIONALIST

(Rezumat)

Locuințele moderne construite la malul mării constituie exemple interesante ale manierei în care arhitectura combină evoluțiile constructive și spațiale care s-au produs în prima decadă a secolului XX cu exploatarea unui nou stil regionalist, în relație cu specificul amplasamentului și tradițiile locale. O serie de arhitecți au dat o interpretare personală locuinței la malul mării, de la pionieri ai modernismului, precum Le Corbusier sau Giuseppe Terragni, până la generații legate de revisionismul ultimului Congres internațional de arhitectură modernă. Dintre acești arhitecți, a fost analizată opera portughezului Fernando Tavora și a spaniolului Xosé Bar Boo, care a abordat acest program arhitectural de la primele proiecte pentru a-l dezvolta în perioada de maturitate a carierei. Au devenit astfel cuceritori de granițe naturale și simbolice, prin arhitectură, făcând din clădirile proiectate și din relația cu amplasamentul o nouă origine pentru un stil regionalist.