Naturalizing the Neocolonial: Probing the “Civilizing” Legacy of the Beaux-Arts Movement in Modern Brazil

“Indeed, to create an art that could be ours and of our time, we must not, regardless of our viewpoint, seek motives, origins and sources of inspiration too far away from ourselves and from the environment in which our past has elapsed and our future shall proceed.”

At the turn of the twentieth century, Brazil displayed an intense interest in neocolonial architecture. The style was selected to represent the nation in the world exhibitions that flooded the globe during this period [FIG. 1]. Wrapped in historic associations, neocolonial style was in fact an amalgam of eclectic features, rooted in the Beaux Arts tradition but infused with colonial and even Orientalist elements. While public rhetoric surrounding neocolonial style stressed a new era connected to a past heritage, I argue that the visual vocabulary used to describe Brazilian identity was infused with exoticism, Eurocentrism and hierarchies of race and class.

This paper aims to trace and deconstruct the ideological development and impact of Brazilian neocolonial architecture, from its original links to the Beaux Arts of the French Academy to the discourses of regionalism it left in its wake. It takes as its starting point Jean-Baptiste Debret’s (b.1768- d.1848) compendium, Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil, ou Séjour d'un Artiste Français au Brésil (“A Picturesque and Historic Voyage to Brazil, or the Sojourn of a French Artist in Brazil”). This three-volume illustrated text [FIG. 2] conveys Europe’s vision of Brazil, its art, and its architecture, and a copy of the album is housed in Rice University’s Woodson library.¹ Published in France in 1834, the volume was fueled by Debret’s participation as a traveling artist with the Missão Artística Francesa. Debret’s text
serves as a fascinating record of the transition from colonial to neoclassical architecture via the Beaux Arts movement in Rio da Janeiro. The text also provides a platform from which we can examine the influence of Grandjean de Montigny, another member of the Missão Artística Francesa [FIG. 3]. Moving from de Montigny’s neoclassical designs, I will briefly examine the role of the Beaux-Arts and neocolonial movement in urbanism, evident in the city plans of Pereira Passos and Alfred Agache. Finally, by examining the neocolonial pavilions of Brazil’s Centennial in 1922 [FIG. 4], I interrogate the ambivalent relationship between Beaux-Arts and neocolonial movements, arguing its eclectic and exotic nature served as a springboard for the intellectual call for regionalism that followed shortly thereafter. This call for regionalism surfaced in the ideology of Gilberto Freyre himself, as seen in his Manifesto Regional de 1926, available in the archives of the International Center for Arts of the Americas.² I will conclude by considering the socio-political implications of neocolonialism, arguing that this architectural style ideologically harkens back an earlier structural framework for “naturalizing” laboring, non-white bodies under European domination.

**Contextualizing the Brazilian Beaux-Arts Academy**

Brazil was a country transformed by radical political and social change as the nineteenth century came to its close. The nation acquired independence from Portugal in 1822, replacing monarchical power with a decentralized oligarchic system that ultimately maintained social and racial hierarchies.³ Within this order, white aristocratic landowners controlled agriculture and wealth, while African slaves labored on the vast coffee and sugar plantations that provided the backbone of the national economy. The sharp disparity between race, wealth and power was perhaps most strikingly represented in the architecture of the plantations themselves [FIG. 5],
as demonstrated by Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre in his seminal text, *Casa Grande e Senzala/ The Mansion and the Shanty.* In his work, Freyre claims “the house of the nineteenth century continued to exert more influence than any other factor on the social formation of the urban Brazilian. The mansion, more European, produced one social type; the shanty more African or Indian, produced another.” Thus, Freyre placed the architecture of the colonial plantation at the very root of the racial and class divide that dominated the social fabric of nineteenth century Brazil.

The manner in which Brazilian colonial architecture was perceived as a “natural” setting for white control and slave labor is captured in Jean-Baptiste Debret’s (b.1768- d.1848) three-volume set of engravings, the *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil,* published between 1834 and 1839 [FIG. 6]. Debret was a member of the French Academy and pupil of the famous painter, Jacques-Louis David, yet his most important work is linked to his journey to Brazil as a member of the Bonapartiste French Artistic Mission. The *Missão Artística Francesa* was a group of French artist and architects who arrived in Rio in 1816, which also included former secretary of the *Institut de France,* Joachim Lebreton (1760-1819), landscape architect Nicolas Taunay (1755-1830), his brother and sculptor Auguste Marie Taunay (1768-1824), engraver Charles-Simon Pradier (1783-1847) and architect Grandjean de Montingy (1776-1850).6

There are two interpretations regarding the origins of the mission. In one account, the group was recruited by the Portuguese kingdom to establish a new school of visual arts in the capital, while others believe the group of loyal Bonapartistes offered their services to Emperor Dom João VI for employment in Brazil because of the disenfranchisement at home in France after the Bourbons resumed power. The mission was likely the result of mutual interests, with the Dom João VI welcoming the idea of the French group founding an Academy, the *Escola*
Real de Ciências, Artes e Ofícios (Royal School of Sciences, Arts and Crafts) in Rio in August 12, 1816. Scholars argue that the Portuguese Emperor so openly received the French academy’s presence because of a desire to “elevate the public taste.”

Debret’s volumes contain a plethora of imagery and text related to indigenous peoples and African slaves. The initial volume begins with Debret’s bold proclamation of his understanding of France’s artistic mission, declaring he and his comrades work was, “Animated by an identical zeal and the enthusiasm of the wise travelers who no longer fear …[we] face the hazards of a long and still many time dangerous navigation, leaving France, our common homeland, to study a nature and create an unprecedented impression of this new world, the deep scars and hopefully useful presence of French artists.”

Debret also goes on to boldly claim his engravings were destined to “accompany the progressive march of civilization in Brazil.” These quotations reveals Debret’s use of a heroic narrative to reify the mission of he and his colleagues and add a dimension of morality to their “civilizing” cause.

The “scientific posture” Debret adopted on his journey to Brazil is exhibited throughout the illustrated album of his journey, establishing “pseudoscientific categories” for the flora and fauna” he meticulously recorded, in manner reminiscent of his German colleague Alexander von Humboldt. Yet Debret’s scopophilia further indulged a European taste for the foreign and scientific classification by populating his the tropical, country and urban milieus he rendered, and labeling the diverse individuals who lived within them in essentializing categories. Figures of Brazilian indigenous peoples are placed nude within an exotic tropical setting [FIG. 7], or are shown alongside the “Civilized Natives,” who are clothed in colonial garb [FIG. 8]. Interestingly, the figure of the native or “civilized native” is only either shown in the tropical jungle or countryside. By contrast, the figures of black African slaves are only placed either in an urban or plantation setting [FIG. 9]. Within these milieus, Debret created a detailed record of
the black Brazilian life, illustrating the various forms of work and punishment endured by slaves, as well as the occupations of freed blacks within the city of Rio.\textsuperscript{12}

In virtually every image of black life in Rio, the architecture that surrounds the figures of Afro-descendants in Debret’s illustrations consistently bears colonial characteristics. For example, the scene “La boutique de la rue du Val Longo” shows the interior of a slave market,\textsuperscript{13} filled with starving, nearly naked adults and small children, who are presented for sale to the white man seated in the ornate chair. The coffered wooden ceiling and criss-crossed wooden mashrabiyye framed doors are mudéjar architectural elements– Moorish architectural elements absorbed by the Spanish and Portuguese during the Reconquista era that ultimately became infused into colonial architecture.\textsuperscript{14} Another scene shows slaves at work loading boxes at the port, again in a plaza surrounded by colonial structures topped with traditional red-tiled roofs.

In surveying a variety of Debret’s illustrations, the viewer comes away with the implicit cultural message of colonial architecture as the “natural” setting of slavery in Brazil. In nearly every scene depicting African slaves, colonial style adorns the structures that provide the backdrop for laboring bodies. The consistent relationship of this architecture with slavery suggests it is emblematic of the colonial gaze. The production of the colonial subject has been described by Homi Bhabha, who cites the scopic drive as a major protagonist in creating the colonial subject, in its enablement of both discipline and pleasure as a function of power.\textsuperscript{15} The imposing nature of the colonial plantation as a whole, as well as in its parts like the central courtyard, \textbf{[FIG. 10]} functions as a Foucauldian panopticon— allowing for the control of multitudes by an elite few through voyeuristic architecture.\textsuperscript{16} The persistence of colonial architecture as the backdrop in scenes of slavery transforms them into an iconographic symbol of dominion over laboring bodies and the tropical landscape upon which they toil.
The artistic placidity imparted upon these scenes of servile labor transmutes the horrors of slavery into the *picturesque*. It is critical to note that both Debret and German itinerant artist, Johann Moritz Rugendas, used the term *picturesque* within the titles of the illustrated albums they produced regarding their voyages to Brazil.\(^{17}\) The work of other foreign artists, such as and Austrians Thomas Ender and Henry Chamberlain echo this subject matter, demonstrating a rampant taste for tropical, colonial and racialized imagery within European consumer culture.[FIG. 11-12]. The circulation and proliferation of these picturesque images of slavery sheds light on the dangerous political and economic aspects of the picturesque. As an idealized representation of nature, the picturesque also commodifies nature—appropriaing its materials and aestheticizing them. This act of aestheticizing the natural world via the picturesque ultimately transforms the subject rendered into a marketable good.\(^{18}\) It also establishes a palatable illusion of the world. In the case of Debret, his picturesque images of slaves at work in a colonial landscape produces an aestheticized image of black labor and colonial worlds—further commodifying the human subjects of the slave market within the realm of the art market.

Philosopher Michel Foucault’s work provides us with another lens through which to analyze the economic dimensions of Debret’s imagery. Foucault states that nature is the cause for power exchanges, for in order for people to live, produce food, and take care of other essential needs, they must exchange products between themselves or people in other regions.\(^{19}\) Foucault argues that in order to maintain peace, there arose a need for civil and international law—an issue that came to the fore in the eighteenth century as liberalism, which can also be seen as governmental naturalism.\(^{20}\) Foucault critiques this liberalism as a form of “enlightened despotism”, which promises certain freedoms yet actually establishes a rubric of gubernatorial limitations on human life.\(^{21}\) He goes on to define “naïve naturalism” as the act of defining the
market by exchange or competition as having “a sort of given nature, something produced spontaneously which the state must respect … as it is a natural datum.” Yet Foucault also notes “the naturalness of the population” as primarily driven by desire.

Foucault then provides an ideological understanding for Debret’s images of slavery. The picturesque qualities of Debret’s illustrations capture a sense of “naïve normalization.” The illustrations of slaves “naturalized” or “normalized” within the frame of colonial architecture capture the mechanism of human exchange that made life for European court and wealthy planters possible. Yet while Debret’s images “normalize” images of slavery— both in its scenes of slave labor and slave punishment— the colonial architecture in each illustration reminds us of the desire of the master—the patrons of which profited from the spoils of slavery by their own volition and power, and which became increasingly problematic within the tenants of liberalism that had been brewing in Europe and Brazil since the eighteenth century.

Issues of race and status shifted as the world and nation abolished slavery. The process was complicated, taking over seventeen years and instituted via three key laws. The first law arrived in 1871, providing freedom to the children of all slave mothers, but only after the age of 21. The second legal benchmark arrived in 1885, with a law that granted freedom to all slaves aged 65 and older. Abolition of all slavery was finally achieved with the Golden Law of May 1888, which freed all slaves without compensation. During this era, Imperial Brazil was preoccupied with its perceived image on the international stage, particularly in the eyes of Europe as the fledging nation relied heavily on European investments. Slavery had left Brazil stamped with an immoral legacy, condemned by Enlightenment Europe despite its complicity in facilitating and profiting from the spoils of slave labor in South America.
At the same time, the abolition of slavery contributed to several critical urban issues. Waves of displaced slaves from the countryside arrived in Rio looking for work, just as European immigrants were recruited to fill the labor void created by the end of slavery. These white European migrants were consistently selected over former black slaves for employment. The abrupt mass migration led overpopulation, joblessness, poverty and unhygienic living situations. The capital was frequently described by traveling Europeans as sickly or “inadequate.” Travelogues by elite European visitors such as Austrian explorer Mme. Ida Laura Pfeiffer in the mid-nineteenth century describe Rio as “A filthy city, in which, it may be said, there was no air, no light, no sewers, no street cleaning; a city built upon bogs where mosquitos freely multiplied.” Rampant outbreaks of smallpox, cholera and yellow fever plagued the city, particularly affecting the poor.

Abolition re-distributed race and class spatial divides in modern Rio. Whereas Freyre cited the colonial era as one in which master and slave shared the same land but different living units, the former master of the modern era maintained his casa (house) in a post-abolition era. However, the freed black in a post-abolition era was designated to the rua (street). The master’s casa still iconographically symbolized security and stability, emblematic of scholar Yi Fu Tuan’s categorization of “space” as a zone that is firmly defined. An awareness of the social importance of the master’s casa is expressed in Debret’s Voyages Picturesque, in the artists’ decision to include several carefully rendered facades and plans of “Casas brasileiras.” In his third tome, Debret includes images of “two Brazilian houses,” [FIG. 13], citing them as representative of those you find on “nearly all the streets and plazas of Rio de Janeiro.” Debret also includes an elegant colonial “small rural house [FIG. 14],” complete with courtyard plan and tiled colonial roof, and a rendering of a “large house of the city [FIG. 15].” Each of these
illustrations is accompanied with didactic text, in which Debret carefully labeled the origins of each architectural element, citing Roman, Pompeian and North Africa Moorish influences. By citing these examples as typical, Debret implicitly making the claim that these housing types were exemplary of the homes of all European descended masters in colonial-era Brazil.

In contrast, displaced freed blacks were seen as in control of the streets, a zone constantly in flux, malleable and activated within Tuan’s temporal zone of the “place.” Scholar Sandra Lauderdale Graham has demonstrated that the mobility of black servants—particularly nursemamas and washerwomen—between the shantytowns known as cortiços and well-to-do homes of the elite, became a source of major anxiety for the upper classes. Harsh public critiques of the sanitary conditions of the city, overpopulation and the legacy of slavery left Brazil with an international inferiority complex, and the desire for a public image overhaul instigated changes in urban architecture.

**Building A Brazilian Beaux Arts Legacy**

It is within this context of hygiene concerns and social tensions that the Beaux Arts and neocolonial architecture emerged in Brazil, spearheaded by architect Grandjean de Montigny—a colleague of Debret in the Missão Artística Francesa. As Debret’s engravings in the Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil demonstrate, colonial architecture had become associated with the immoral practice of slavery and backwardness during the Enlightenment era. The administration under Dom João VI, headed by Paulo Fernandez Viana, forbid “embarrassing aspects” of colonial architecture including the rótulas or paneled windows associated with Moorish culture. All of these elements contributed to Emperor Dom João VI’s openness to establishing an Imperial academy of the arts rooted in the French academic tradition in the
capital, in the hopes of inventing a new international image for Brazil through art and architecture.

The third volume of Debret’s *Voyage Pittoresque* dedicates a chapter to the “State of Beaux-Arts in Brazil,” and records Montigny’s role in establishing the school of architecture. The section opens with an optimistic applause for the “progress” of the Beaux Arts school in Brazil by Debret, and then relates an overview of the literature, science and art in Brazil, as written by three Brazilian members of the historic institute. The text declares, “Today, with a few rare exceptions, the savants of Brazil profess the doctrines of the French.” The chapter fleetingly acknowledges the existence of indigenous art forms, which are noted to share a “resemblance with the work of the Egyptians of the infancy of art.” It also briefly mentions the Portuguese relied on African laborers, which contributed to music and painting. Yet the narrative only cites the moment of arrival of the Portuguese court, led by João VI, as that in which “progress” advanced in the arts, following with the assertion that the French Mission allowed “Rio-Janeiro to don the ornaments of another Athens.” The text also applauds the academy for “a prodigious revolution that manifested in the ideas of the Brazilian people: that painters, who had not been appreciated up until this moment, could be admitted into the most brilliant of social circles.” After relating a detailed list of the Academy’s first instructors and pupils, Debret includes a copy of the first Royal Decree delivered to the artists of the academy upon receiving their pension. Within this decree, the academy is declared an institution established for the “well-being and the civilization of [its] peoples,” along with national institutions for agriculture, mineralogy and commerce. Together, these declarations position the academy of Brazil squarely within the French academic tradition, as defined by architectural historian Arthur Drexler. Drexler noted two corollary functions of the French Academy in
addition to its visual component that harkened back to Hellenistic and classical styles. These include (1) “increasing the glory” of the king and (2) establishing a hierarchy that separated academically trained architects and artists from craftsman. Thus, the Beaux Arts tradition must be understood as inherently tied to French imperialism and class segregation, and the importation of the academy to Brazil can then be seen as transplanting French socio-political models in the modern age.

Debret carefully notes the appearance and involvement of French architect Auguste Henri-Victor Grandjean de Montigny within the fledgling Brazilian academy in his text. A trained neo-classicist in the Parisian Académie des Beaux-Artes and architect to Napoleon’s brother until 1808, Montigny was the recipient of the Grand Prix de Rome. Upon arrival with the Missão Artística Francesa in 1818, Montigny became the first professor of architecture in Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Rio. There, Montigny introduced neoclassicism and the French Beaux Arts curriculum to Brazil. True to the academic tenants of his European training, Montigny’s work emphasized Imperial Roman and Renaissance models. Florentine palatial and French Gothic examples were also referenced in the movement, which constantly sought connections to a Eurocentric history and classicism.

Grandjean de Montingy was responsible for the first building designed by the Missão Artística Francesa, located at the center of Rio—the Stock Exchange and later Customs House of the capital [FIG. 16]. The architect received the medal of the Order of Christ for his design. Inaugurated on the birthday of Dom João VI, on May 13, 1820, this structure can be seen as spearheading the Neoclassical style in Brazil, emphasizing Renaissance ideals of “balance, clarity and proportion.” The façade is austere, originally featuring a frontal arcade of Roman arches, topped by a demi-oculus and triangular pediment [FIG. 17]. The interior of the
structure features four intersecting barrel vaults and a central lantern tower, evocative of the plan of Roman baths and basilicas. The building can also be seen as an early move to establish a neocolonial style in Brazil, in the purest sense of the architectural movement is most simply defined as an abstraction of classicism.

The building served as a hub of commercial activity when it first opened as the Stock Exchange, and later functioned as the Customs House in 1824. Interesting, the building was also selected as the site of political protest know as the “Açougue dos Bragança” (Bragança Butchery) on April 21, 1821. The protest involved the police dispersal of rioters demanding the Portuguese court remain in Brazil, instead of returning to Europe. In other words, an architectural structure that embodied Europe’s imperial and political ties with Brazil served as the stage for public outcry against the crown’s foreign dependency.

Montigny’s neoclassical French training is also reflected in the façade of the Imperial Academy itself. The design of this building [FIG. 18], as well as the historical development of the academy, was also recorded by Debret in his “Voyage Pittoresque.” The façade is an homage to Greco-Roman and Renaissance traditions. An arcade of equally proportional arches culminate at center in an entrance formed by Renaissance barrel arch, flanked by recessed panels and Roman allegories in sculptural relief in its uppermost corners, visible in a nineteenth century photograph by Mark Ferrez [FIG. 19]. The entire structure is topped with a Greek pediment, featuring a Greco-Roman figure at the center of a symmetrical equestrian scene in bas-relief. The second story of the structure features iconic columns and two more Greek allegories, here freestanding and sculpted in the round. An irrefutable sense of symmetry and structure emanates from the building, underscoring the notion of Classical Antiquity as the font of “civilization,” and visually representing the positivist ideology of “Ordem e Progresso /
Order and Progress”—which would eventually come to brandish the Brazilian flag.

Neoclassicism in Brazil, then, can be seen as an expression of not only Eurocentric discourses of “Western Civilization” but also European positivism.

The empire’s exuberant embrace of the French Beaux Arts tradition signaled the advent of the Carioca Belle Epoque—a period in which Rio’s elite promoted an idea of “civilized” nation that looked to Europe and spurned the powerful African presence within the city. Various European political ideologies circulated among the Brazilian elite at this time, including Liberalism, Abolitionism, Republicanism, and Positivism—all of which were inherently linked to discourses of race. For example, in 1883, Brazilian statesman Joaquim Nabuco penned the following argument in his condemnation of slavery;

“The principal effect of slavery upon our generation has been to Africanize it, to saturate it with Negro blood, just as the main result of any great effort to introduce immigrants from China would be to Mongolize it, to saturate it with yellow blood”… European immigration, attracted by the openness of our institutions and by the freedom of our system, will endlessly send to the tropics a current of lively, energetic and healthy Caucasian blood which we can absorb without danger…”

Thus, even abolitionist rhetoric during this era carried heavy-handed racist and Europhilic.

Modern urban developments during this time began to reflect concerns over race and class, responding to the Beaux Arts visions of “civilization” and concretizing them through reforms within the city’s fabric [FIG. 20]. It is within this climate that neocolonial ideology and architecture surfaced in Brazil, flourishing during the period during which the nation celebrated its centennial.

Politically speaking, neocolonialism has been defined by scholar Jeffrey Needell as “the combination of formal political independence with informal economic and political dependence”—essentially the condition of Latin America after the 1820s which reached its zenith by the 1880s. Architecturally, however, neocolonialism refers to an offshoot of the Beaux-Arts academic tradition that eclectically incorporates certain stylized Hispanic or
Portuguese colonial era elements.\textsuperscript{58} Neocolonial architecture can be defined as an eclectic style comprised of features representative of a national tradition, in its most basic essence. Yet, as Fabiola Lopéz-Duran has pointed out, there is a certain “interchangeability of the neo-colonial and Beaux-Arts languages.”\textsuperscript{59}

The Beaux Art urbanism executed under Passos would lead to major changes under his successor that would pave the way for the centennial esplanade brimming with neocolonial architecture.\textsuperscript{60} Passos studied architecture at the \textit{grandes ecoles} in Paris and was greatly influenced by the effects of Hausmannization,\textsuperscript{61} a form of urbanism emphasized the value of air and light to ensure the public health. Urban hygiene validated the destruction of delapidated neighborhoods, historic buildings, and narrow streets in favor of wide thoroughfares and centralized boulevards.\textsuperscript{62} Passos modeled his 1903-1906 urban reforms after Hausmann, clearing the capital’s \textit{cidade velha} (old city), and replacing it with a network of wide avenues including the Av. Central —now the Av. Rio Brancto\textsuperscript{63} — to establish a main artery from the port to city center.\textsuperscript{64} Monuments, such as the obelisk, concretized the European model of axial alignment within the city plan.\textsuperscript{65} Yet Passos also implemented legal reforms, prohibiting food peddling on the streets and unregulated popular processions, known as \textit{cordões}.\textsuperscript{66} As such behaviors were primarily enacted by immigrants and Afro descendants, Passos’ laws specifically targeted the poor, and included a violently opposed vaccination campaign and slum clearance.\textsuperscript{67} All of these reforms were completed in the name of “civilizing” Rio, based on the notion that in ameliorating and beautifying the city, one would “improve” its inhabitants.

\textbf{The Neocolonial Boom and a Picturesque Image of History}
As Beaux Arts urban planning began to reshape the city, neocolonial architecture proliferated. Fabiola Lopéz Duran has demonstrated the connection between notions of urban hygiene, social hygiene and eugenics in her work. Lopéz-Duran details the manner in which Passo’s successor, mayor Carlos Sampaio (1861-1930), escalated the “City Beautiful” campaign and enacted one of the most aggressive, eugenic measures of urbanism which transformed Rio—the destruction of the Morro do Castello.\(^6^8\) The leveling of this mountain – the foundational site of Rio itself – was initiated by Sampaio between 1920 and 1922 in the name of urban hygiene and beautification.\(^6^9\) The rhetoric for the removal of the mountain for reasons of urban air circulation was intimately tied to elitist perceptions of the site, which saw the mountain as ridden with disease and the marginalized poor—primarily the black and the ill.\(^7^0\) The total removal of the Morro do Castelo facilitated the construction of the Castelo esplanade, selected as the site of the Centennial Commemoration Exhibition of the Independence of Brazil in 1922.\(^7^1\)

An impressive majority of pavilions in Rio’s Centennial exhibition were constructed in the neocolonial style, which harkened strongly back to Portuguese colonial architecture in ornament while still maintaining a Beaux Arts architectural structure in plan.\(^7^2\) Although the exhibition was originally conceived as a national exposition, the Rio-based exhibition [FIG.21] ultimately developed into a full-blown universal exposition, modeled after the world’s fairs that originated and had become increasingly popular in Paris.\(^7^3\) The international pavilions in the exhibition represented nations around the world,\(^7^4\) projecting a unique public image for each country on the Brazilian stage while often incorporating neocolonial architectural features.

The neocolonial style reflected in the pavilions of the Centennial celebration had been in development since 1914, when Portuguese engineer Ricardo Severo gave a speech inaugurating
the movement at the Artistic Cultural Society of São Paolo, at a conference entitled “Of Traditional Art in Brazil.” Severo’s lecture was brimming with nationalist rhetoric, and he advocated the reintroduction of traditional forms of Portuguese colonial architecture would lead to an “architectural renaissance” than would provide the “perfect crystallization of nationality”.

Severo exalted a “cult of tradition” in his public eulogy on neocolonial architecture, declaring:

“Do not attempt, gentlemen, to see in this traditionalist veneration diluted in nostalgic and old-fashioned poetry, the manifestation of a romantic and retrograde yearning for the past. Indeed, to create an art that could be ours and of our time, we must not, regardless of our viewpoint, seek motives, origins and sources of inspiration too far away from ourselves and from the environment in which our past has elapsed and our future shall proceed.”

Thus, Severo’s speech declared neocolonial architecture at once traditional and modern.

The conferences’ aim was to identify the origins of Brazilian architecture by looking to traditional arts, which it deemed was tied to “ethnographic backgrounds; bound intimately to the primitive habits and customs of its peoples from various origins.” During the conference, Severo presented various illustrations of Moorish architectural elements which could ideally be incorporated in neocolonial designs, including roofing types known as “beira-severa” and screened windows and balconies. Severo’s renderings and architectural element selections are believed to have been inspired by the categorization of Brazilian housing typologies established in Debret’s Voyage Picturesque.

The term, “neocolonialism,” was first coined by doctor and art historian José Mariano Filho, president of the Brazilian Society of Fine Arts and active proponent of the movement between 1917 and 1930s. Mariano Filho sponsored trips for young architects to develop the new movement by visiting Brazilian cities known for their colonial architecture, including Minas Gerais, Diamantina, and Ouro Preto. Among these young designers of a new national style was Lucio Costa, who would gain fame as an architect and
worked in the style from 1921 to 1924. Costa would design several structures for the Centennial Commemoration exhibition, which will soon be discussed in relation to specific pavilion types.  

Just as scholar Zeynep Celik has argued that the Parisian *expositions universelles* were “elaborate mechanisms of cultural production,” so too were the international pavilions of the Centennial exhibition. The pavilion of Japan [FIG.23], for example, was constructed with a white and red-lacquered façade, in a traditional wood material and featuring a tiled roof. The Japanese pavilion presented a striking contrast with the Argentine pavilion, which chose to represent its nation with a staunchly Beaux Arts façade [FIG.24]. The North American pavilion [FIG.25] presented a clean façade with strong Renaissance features, like the central arcade and rusticated corners, which might almost appear neocolonial except for the traditional colonial roof. The British pavilion also displayed strong neoclassical tendencies, bearing repeating rows of demi-oculi, and colonnaded entryways topped by garlanded pediments in relief [FIG.26]. The meticulous attention to the unique ornamental detail of the pavilions can be seen as a mode of carefully constructing cultural difference. While seeming to represent an educational entry into another land, the facades merely present picturesque images of each nation. Although some international pavilions opted for more traditional forms, a large number incorporated various Portuguese colonial elements cohesive with the neocolonial style. The international pavilions that flooded the exhibition, then, worked together with the barrage of neocolonial structures Brazil constructed in honor of its own industry, agricultural and administrative activities, creating a visual tableau of architectural nostalgia for colonial-era Brazil. 

Two distinct categories of neocolonial architecture can be identified in the Brazilian pavilions. A more neoclassical and traditionally Beaux Arts vein can be found in the structures
dedicated to the nation, its industries and its administration. These elaborate pavilions included the Pavilion of Grand Industry [FIG. 27], designed by Lucio Costa, which boasted a tall campanile-like tower and robust round base reminiscent of the Roman fortress, the *Castel San Angelo*. Costa was also responsible for the plan for the Gateway to Brazil [FIG. 28], which also evoked allegiances to Western antiquity with its huge coffered barrel vault base, reminiscent of the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine. Costa’s designs merge stocky Renaissance forms with Beaux Arts and baroque ornamentation, infusing the language of European design in the foundations of his structures while embellishing his pavilions with ornament that developed in Brazil as a Portuguese colony.

There was also the staunchly Neoclassical Pavilion of Statistics [FIG. 29], whose columns — both classical at the entrance and paneled around the entire structure, reaffirm a sense of order and stability. A strictly Beaux Arts structure functioned as the Pavilion of Administration and the Federal District [FIG. 30]. This building appears almost over-the-top in its ornateness, with its garlands in sculptural relief, the channeled rustication of its first story, and dramatic stairway leading to an entryway topped in stucco ornamentation and flanked by Corinthian columns. The designs of the pavilions dedicated to human and federal resources closely follow the core tenants of the French academic tradition, and contribute to a revivalist chapter in Brazil’s architectural history that Montigny would have surely embraced. These tenants are perhaps most comprehensively emphasized in the Main Festival Pavilion [FIG. 31], with its virtually endless arcades of Corinthian columns, its inclusion of three coffered barrel vaults, and over-the-top assemblage of Greek monumental statuary above its garlanded entryway [FIG. 32].
In striking contrast, different aspects of colonial architecture emerged in the pavilions erected in the name of Brazilian natural export products, such as its fish and agrarian products. The Pavilions of Fish and Game [FIG. 33] were playfully topped by typical colonial tile roofs and adorned with the Moorish *mashrabiya* screened balconies. The Pavilions of Agriculture and Transportation [FIG. 34] also bore tiled roofs, but also incorporated Portuguese baroque stucco window ornamentation. The decorative features of these structures demonstrate how the neocolonial style brilliantly merged Beaux Arts architecture with the re-introduction of more “exotic” colonial elements, as can be seen in the Moorish windows and belvederes of Brazil’s colonial era, once outlawed under Dom João VI. Interestingly, the pavilions of Brazilian gross national natural products appear to comprise a second category of neocolonial architecture, more whimsical in its eclectic revival of arabesque elements and more in line with the approach advocated by Severo in his lecture at the Of Traditional Art in Brazil Conference of 1914.

Why such visible difference in the types of neocolonial styles ascribed to the pavilions dedicated to Brazilian natural and those of human/federal resources? It may possibly be linked to the role of consumption within the universal exhibitions that proliferated at the turn of the twentieth century. Alina Payne has noted that underscoring the world’s fair was a cultural and economic competitiveness, spurred by an awakening sense of an international market.\(^8^9\) Within this global marketplace, ornament and design played a pivotal role. A European façade carried the connotation of ordered, Western “civilization,” while foreign architectural elements could be considered exotic, and appeal to consumers on account of their novelty. The desire to view of consume the exotic was a major lure for the average attendee of World’s Fairs, fueling the problematic popularity of human display featuring belly-dancing.\(^9^0\) Yet non-European nations who chose to participate in the universal exhibitions of the twentieth century also saw the fairs
as an opportunity to reposition themselves in the eyes of the countries they were economically dependent upon, while further marketing their products. In this sense, the neoclassical and Beaux Arts façade of pavilions associated with human resources would present a Brazil that appealed and understood the social and economic order of Europe. At the same time, the rather Orientalist reintroduction of Moorish elements on the pavilions dedicated to Brazil’s natural resources signaled the potential quenching of a European “taste for the exotic” via the countries’ gross natural, national products.

Patricia Morton’s work on the Museum of the Colonies of the 1933 Colonial exhibition in France provides a deeper understanding of other aspects of ornament, also perceptible in Brazil’s neocolonial architecture. Morton distinguishes visual techniques of assimilation and association at play in the colonial architecture of France. Assimilation was rooted in the concept that the colonies should subsume their own culture to the colonizer’s way of life, at the cost of losing their own cultural distinctiveness.\textsuperscript{91} While the architectural structure of the Museum of the Colonies maintained its European model, exoticizing references to the colonies were exerted in sculptural relief—connoting a supplemental and therefore marginal value. The Brazilian pavilions of 1922 can be seen in a similar light. The Moorish and Reconquista colonial architectural elements, which carried associations of indigenous suppression and African slavery, are relegated to mere playful, ornamental aspects of the buildings, while the plan is undoubtedly Beaux Arts. The wide esplanade of the exhibition plaza, built upon the former land of the now demolished Morro da Castelo, all testify to a prioritization of European models and values. In this light, neo-colonial architecture can be viewed as an exoticized national and falsely nostalgic style.
This renewed and revisionist representation of history imbued within neocolonial architecture suggests a desire to re-institute former structures of class and power, particularly with respect to race. As Morton argues, social and racial hierarchies were maintained in the design of the Museum of the Colonies, in that the architectural structure of the building maintained its purity, which is to say it maintained the European foundations of the metropole. The colonies, by contrast, were relegated to mere, detractable ornament, and thus were represented as subsidiary and expendable. To rephrase this scenario in racial terms, the architecture of the colonial pavilion maintained its “whiteness,” while the “colorful” aspects of the pavilion—associated with the nation’s non-European heritage—remained relegated to ornament. The neocolonial pavilion of Brazil’s Centennial Commemoration follows the same rubric. Those structures that revived the Moorish or African slave affiliations of Brazil’s colonial past only applied these references to the ornamental features of the building, while the structure remained firmly European. Thus the architecture that represented Brazil on the international stage remained primarily and structurally “white,” while the non-white was acknowledge in the mere footnote of ornament. The hybridity of style maintains hierarchies of race and class.

With this in mind, it is critical to recognize the 1922 Rio Centennial Commemoration was also the site of overt, public discussions of a “new race” and neocolonial architecture by the various Latin American participants across the continent. As Lopez-Duran has shown, the catalog of the exhibition, known as the Livro de Ouro, advocated the fair as an “expression of the constructive energy of a new race.” The catalog was a graphic showcase of European beauty, echoing the racial and social pseudo-sciences under discussion at the fair its related medical conferences related to puericulture. Another prominent voice within contemporary
debates of racial miscegenation taking place at the exhibition was Mexican author and intellectual, José Vasconcelos. During the period of the exhibition, Vasconcelos was developing a text he would later title as “The Cosmic Race.” In this work, Vasconcelos advocated for a new “modern mestizo” that would be comprised of all ethnicities, but at the cost of assimilating all difference within the so-called “melting pot.” Not surprisingly, Vasconcelos was a strong supporter of the neocolonial architectural style, considering it an amalgam of indigenous hands and Spanish intellect. Vasconcelos pushed for its adoption on the Mexican pavilion of the Rio fair. As Minister of Education, Vasconcelos aimed to construct a new building that would demonstrate “America will be the first continent on earth to witness the realization of a race of men derived from all of the superior aspects of previous races—this will be a final race, the cosmic race.” Upon visiting the Centennial exhibition, Vasoncelos noted that the “colonial-style Portuguese buildings. . . [reflect] all of the splendor and luxury of the conquering nation of Portugal. . . . However, the Brazilian architects have enlarged the constructions, bestowing upon the buildings a spacious and attractive quality. This corresponds to the new Brazilian nation that has improved upon the older colonial traditions.” In a speech at the Rio Centennial Exposition, Vasconcelos declared, “We have assimilated European influences, and now it is our duty to create.” In many ways, Vasconcelos statement can be seen as expressing the ideology undergirding neocolonial architecture. It speaks of an awareness of European ties, and at the same time, a desire to distinguish a unique national and Latin American identity. It is interesting to consider that the neocolonial style was adopted by many Latin American countries in world’s exhibitions abroad, as was the case of Argentina and various other nations who chose to participate in the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929 in Seville, Spain [FIG. 35].
Merely one year later, neocolonial style was officially designated the “national style” of Brazil, and the mandatory style of all structures that represented Brazil in the flurry of world exhibitions that swept the globe.\textsuperscript{99} Recalling that neocolonial architecture eclectically fused Hispanic colonial era elements with Beaux Arts elements,\textsuperscript{100} it seems shocking that a national style would include any visual reference to Rio’s past—spurned as it was by the Belle Epoque elite. Yet Brazil’s neocolonial movement must be seen as both an extension of the Beaux-Arts academy and rejection of the “cosmopolitanism” threatening a rapidly modernizing Brazil.\textsuperscript{101} While this may seem paradoxical, one can understand the distinction by considering neocolonial as primarily a continued embrace of European traditions, rather than cosmopolitan in the global or universal sense of the term. Furthermore, it is critical to recognize that neocolonial architecture exerted a sanitized, aestheticized and abstract visual references to a Brazilian colonial past, still compliant with notions of the picturesque.

**The Legacy of the Neocolonial**

Upon scrutiny, architectural mimesis can still be identified in the Brazilian neo-colonial style, revealing a desire to visually replicate the foreign environment upon which it relies for economic support. In the case on Brazilian neo-colonialism, the effort to duplicate a foreign milieu is merged with an exoticized, ahistorical representation of the past—yet one which echoed and sanitized the images rendered by Debret. The neo-colonial architecture that peppered the pavilions of the Centennial Exhibition of Rio can be seen as a form of cultural camouflage, hiding discourses of racial inequity by “naturalizing” class systems— that is, by constructing an environment in which racial hierarchies appear natural or even nostalgic. In this sense, the same systems of economic exchange which Foucault dubbed “naturalism” are at play.
in the colonial architecture illustrated by Debret in the nineteenth century and the neocolonial architecture of the twentieth century. Both present an idealized milieu in which European dominance is maintained. While the non-European, African influences of the arabesque Reconquista and slave legacy of the colonial era are allowed visibility, they are confined to a subservient structural zone.

Neocolonial style was not without its critics, and the debate caused many fractures within the movement that paved the way towards modernism. The avant-garde movement of Brazil was taking place at the same moment as the Centennial Exposition, signaled by Modern Art Week in São Paolo. Many modernists were supporters of the movement, including Mario da Andrade. Lucio Costa would himself turn sharply away from the movement in favor of the ornament-free style of architectural modernism. At the same time, the rhetoric that surrounded neocolonial architecture ran parallel to that of Brazilian modernism, in that it constantly called for a certain quest to create a distinct vision of Brazil based on a re-examination of the past.

While firmly evoking European traditions and even maintaining Eurocentric hierarchies of race, the discourses of Brazilian heritage and modernity place the neocolonial style in an ambiguous terrain. While echoing the forms of the metropole, neocolonialism also paradoxically sought to individualize Brazil from the rest of Latin America. It is this ambiguous position of the style that ties it to discourses of regionalism that would emerge within the late 1920s.

Gilberto Freyre’s own work provides an interesting thread through which we can connect colonial style and the call for regionalism. Recalling that Freyre discussed the racial and political implications of colonial architecture in his work, *The Mansion and the Shanty*, one must also acknowledge that Freyre penned his *Manifesto Regional de 1926* only a few years after the fair took place. In this text, Freyre reacts against the specter of what he calls
“monoculture”— the essentialization of Brazil within the blanket of Latin America by non-Latin American nations. Freyre invites a reconsideration of a regional “pitoresco,” of “cor local”, or local color, and advocates a return to the architectural forms of the “honest architecture of Brazil” which was full of “Oriental and African reminiscence.” In this sense, one can identify Freyre as an indirect supporter of the revivalist visual elements at play in neocolonial architecture. Yet while Freyre and neocolonial architecture arrive at the same visual solution, the ideological framework for their call to a revivalization of regional forms differs in the degree in which European forms are allowed to contribute.

Conclusions

By tracing the French academic influence of Brazil’s first Imperial Academy of Fine Art, one identifies the manner in which Beaux-Arts traditions and positivist notions were absorbed into neocolonial political and architecture of the nation. While the Debret colonial renderings and Costa’s neocolonial pavilions of Rio may appear worlds apart, they share the same imperialist tenants rooted firmly within the Beaux Arts tradition. In establishing the Imperial Academy of Fine arts within the city of Rio, the path was paved for the conventional use of neoclassical and Beaux Arts in architecture and urbanism. The ideology of “City Beautiful” thinking, emblematic of the Tropical Belle Epoque, transformed by positivist notions of Europhilia and hygiene into urban doctrines of social hygiene. In seeking to reconcile European legitimacy and a sense of its own Brazilian history, the neocolonial style was officially adopted as the national style of Brazil. Only neocolonialism, with its Beaux Arts foundations and sanitized, ornamental references to a racially “exotic” heritage, would be presented upon the world’s stage as the architectural emblem of “Ordem e Progresso.” At the
same time, the degree of ambivalence that infiltrated neocolonial discourses paradoxically allowed room for a dialogue advocating a regional vision of Brazil to emerge on the world’s stage during the era of Rio’s Centennial exhibition [FIG. 36].
Paper Figures:

[FIG. 1] Neocolonial pavilions, Centennial Commemoration Exhibition of 1922, Rio de Janeiro.


[FIG. 5], Gilberto Freyre, *The Mansion and the Shanty.*

[FIG. 8] Jean-Baptiste Debret, “Voyage Pittoresque et Historique de Brésil,” engravings, published 1834 and 1839, illustration of “civilized” indigenous peoples


[FIG. 18] Montigy’s design for the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro, recorded by Debret in the *Voyages Pitturesque*. 
[FIG. 19] Photographic detail, façade of Montigy’s design for the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro, photographed by Marc Ferrez, 1891. Image from “Imperial Academy of Fine arts” entry, Wikipedia, 25 November 2012. Facade of the former Imperial Academy of Fine Arts (Imperial Academy of Fine Arts) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This building was demolished in 1938. Portico now serves as the portal for the Jardim Botanico da Rio. See Marc Ferrez’ album of Rio de Janeiro.


[FIG. 31] Main Festival Pavillion, (Fachada frontal do Pavilhão de Festas), Rio de Janeiro, Centennial Commemorative Exhibition, 1922.
http://www.skyscraperCity.com/showthread.php?t=837422

[FIG. 33] Pavilion of Fish and Game / Otherwise known as *Pavilhão da Caça e Pesca/ Pesca e Jogo*, Rio de Janeiro, Centennial Commemorative Exhibition, 1922. 
http://www.skyscraperCity.com/showthread.php?t=837422
[FIG. 34] Agriculture and Transportation Pavilion, Rio de Janeiro, Centennial Commemorative Exhibition, 1922.

NOTES


4 For an in-depth account of Brazil’s social order on the plantation during this era, see Giberto Freyre’s text, *Casa Grande e Senzala/ The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, New York: Kropf, 1946.


12 Sadler, *Brazil Imagined*, 120.


16 Foucault, “Eye of Power.”

17 Sadler, *Brazil Imagined*, 120, 349. Rugenda’s Brazilian album was entitled, *Viagem pitoresca através do Brasil*. It was originally published in 1835 as *Malerische reise in Brasilien* and as *Voyage pitoresque dans le Brésil*.


20 Ibid., 58.

21 Ibid., 64.
22 Ibid., 120.

25 Assistant Professor at Princeton University, Bruno Carvalho, described Rio de Janeiro as suffering from the perception of being an “inadequate city” in his lecture on the city’s development at Rice University, titled “Rio de Janeiro, City of Monikers: Marvelous and Integrated, Divided and Olympic,” which took place on October 23, at Sewell Hall.

26 Austrian author Ida Laura Pfeiffer was one of the first female explorers, famous for her accounts of her multiple journeys around the world. Her travelogues, covering journeys from South America to Asia, have been translated in over seven languages. For more on Pfeiffer, see James Wood, ed. (1907). “Pfeiffer, Ida,” in The Nuttall Encyclopaedia. London and New York: Frederick Warne.
30 Original quote found in Debret, Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil, tome 3, 42. Cited in Pinheiro, Neocolonial, Modernismo e preservação do patrimônio no debate cultural dos anos 1920 no Brasil, 30.
31 Pinheiro, Neocolonial, Modernismo e preservação do patrimônio no debate cultural dos anos 1920 no Brasil, 33.
32 For discussion of casa as marker of stability, see Lauderdale Graham, House and Street, 4. For Yi Fu Tuan’s original definition of terms “Space” and “place”, see Yi Fu Tuan, Space and Place.
36 Ibid., vol.3, 81. The authors of the history are noted as M. Domingos-José-Consalves de Magalhães, M. Francisco de Sales Torres-Homen and M. de Araujo Porto-Alegre. Debret cites the history as originally appearing in as an extract of the Journal de l’Institut historique, 1ère année, August, 1ère edition.
37 Debret, Voyage pittoresque, vol.3, 83. Please note all translations from the original French are my own original attempts.
38 Ibid., vol.3, 84.
39 Ibid., vol.3, 84.
40 Ibid., vol.3, 86.
41 Ibid., vol.3, 87.
42 Ibid., 103. Original French text reads “di bien-être et de la civilisation des peuples.
The building underwent its first remodeling in 1852, at the hands of Brazilian engineer André Reboucas and Portuguese architect Raphael de Castro. 


Debret, Voyage pittoresque, vol.3, Plate, 5 partie.


Ibid., 97.


This is Needell’s definition of the term. See footnote 1, Jeffrey Needle, “Making the Carioca Belle Epoque Concrete: The Urban Reforms of Rio de Janeiro under Pereira Passos,” Journal of Urban History, 1984, 10: 384.


Fabiola López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” 64.


Ibid., 394.

Fabiola López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” in Eugenics in the Garden, 90, fn. 128.


I would like to cite architectural historian Dr. Farès Al-dahdah for his discussion of Passo’s use of “City Beautiful” ideology in his class lecture recapitulating the urban development of Rio on October 30, 2012. The lecture was part of the course, “Rio de Janeiro: A Social and Architectural History,” co-taught with historian Dr. Alida Metcalf.

Jeffrey Needle, “Making the Carioca Belle Epoque Concrete,” 402.


López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” in Eugenics in the Garden.


López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” in Eugenics in the Garden, 68.

López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” in Eugenics in the Garden, 64.


Pinheiro, Neocolonial, Modernismo e preservção do patrimônio no debate cultural dos anos 1920 no Brasil. 35.


Ibid.

Pinheiro, Maria Lucia Bressan. Neocolonial, Modernismo e preservação do patrimônio no debate cultural dos anos 1920 no Brasil. (São Paolo : Editora de Universidade de São Paolo; Fapesp, 2011), 36.
80 Pinheiro, Neocolonial, Modernismo e preservação do patrimônio no debate cultural dos anos 1920 no Brasil, 39.
81 Ibid., 32, footnote.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
87 The famous Castel San’Angelo was originally constructed as the Mausoleum of Hadrian between 130-139 AD, and became known as the Castel San’Angelo when the structure was appropriated by the Vatican popes in the early 14th century. For more on the structure, see James Grout, “Mausoleum of Hadrian,” http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/romanurbs/mausoleum.html. Accessed 12/9/2012.
88 The Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine is one of the largest and famous structures found on the Roman forum in Rome, Italy. Its colossal, coffered concrete vaults are considered a marvel of antique architecture. For more on the basilica, see Giavarini, Carlo., The Basilica of Maxentius: the Monument, its Materials, Construction, and Stability, Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2005.
92 Patricia A. Morton, “National and Colonial,” 366. Many thanks to my co-advisor Fabiola Lopez-Duran for pointing out Morton’s argument for incorporation into this project.
93 López-Durán, “Practicing Utopia,” in Eugenics in the Garden, 71.
103 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 7.
106 Ibid., 22.