

The “anonymous” practice of construction and architectural theory: the tender age of the Form in the American industrial prototypes between 19th and 20th-century

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Abstract

The intersections between the anonymous practice of construction and the development of Modernist architectural theories have provided some of the most interesting pieces to architectural history, determining a progress of built environment. In this regard, the relationship between the development of American industrial prototypes at the end of the 19th-century and the Modernist architectural theory in the first decades of the 20th-century seems to be exemplary.

Even though the early reinforced concrete construction systems were made in Europe, in the second half of the 19th-century, the American experimental practice led to the fulfilment of some industrial prototypes that fostered the aesthetic reflection and debate in the figurative research thanks to some leading figures of the Modern Movement.

As a matter of fact, the early concrete grain elevators and great flat-roofed frame structures arose in North America. Walter Gropius embraced the idea that “these forms are useful and powerful not only for the single, but also for a big community because of their technical reproducibility” (Gropius W., 2007).

The proposed paper would analyse the relationship between this practice of construction and the European theory on the phenomenon at the beginning of the 20th-century. These analyses lead to questioning some of the contemporary

paradigms about the roles of theory and practice in order to obtain progress.

The story of these structures shows how the anonymity of the practical experimentations on utilitarian buildings, produced in response to usefulness and economic standards, has different effects to an architectural theory.

Keywords: Modernism, anonymous process, industrial structures, form