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silos in South America – for the Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe in Hagen. He brought them together in an exemplary show called *Vorbildliche Industriebauten* (Model Industrial Buildings), at the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne in 1914, and compared these structures with those of the ancient high cultures, above all in Egypt, in his famous lecture *Monumentale Kunst und Industriebau* (Monumental Art and Industrial Building). It was the simplicity of the building cubes, the elementary stereometry and the accumulation of the same forms that made these industrial buildings so similar to the architecture of antiquity.

At the same time, these records of anonymous engineering achievement were not just indebted to the basic principles of ancient building – as presumed by Europeans – but they also expressed the socially defining power of the nation: industry. The productive force was expressed in the monumentality and plain completeness of the structures, and the accumulation and articulation of serial parts in the office and factory buildings added up to an image of the people lined up and working at the machines, and the equality of these individual beings within the mass. The Europeans thought that they could see in this formal basic configuration of the accumulation of equal parts and of the ancient principles of load and support in the frame architecture the completeness of a culture of the kind that the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl had defined in the terms of “Kunstwollen”. They could use the concrete skeleton as a way of returning to ancient building and claiming it back. At the same time this was a modern culture: they could see an architectural symbol of modern industrial society in this anti-ornament.

The documents of this period seem remarkably alien to today’s readers, as the description lent a mystical quality to the American buildings by comparing them with the structures of Ancient Egypt. But the analogy between America and Egypt still became a *topos*, as European architects felt themselves to be spiritually related to the builders of the pyramids.

Linking ancient building methods with praise of the American continent’s lack of history was not seen as a contradiction. Richard Neutra’s 1927 book *Wie baut Amerika?* (How Does America Build?) or Erich Mendelsohn’s 1929 national comparison *Amerika-Europa-Russland* (America-Europe-Russia) established the image of a closed continent whose genetic building bricks were a grid pattern, pure construction, the accumulation of equal elementary parts. This expressed democratic equality for all. It was the basis premise for the subsequent International Style in architecture, which intended to eradicate individual national characteristics. Typically, Adolf Loos was one of the first people to call the formal architectural language developed in North American industrial architecture *Esperanto*.

The rational building concepts that were developed in Europe in the 20s represented a mass implementation of what Taylorism had already introduced on the socio-economic plane. The “American principle” had already established itself in European economics. But this did not do any harm to the cult celebration of America in architecture. Thus Henry Ford’s River Rouge factory in Detroit, for example, became a subject that appeared frequently in art and photography. The “new Ford factory” was described as follows as late as 1932: it was said to be a “symbol and document of everything that was connected in any way with the concepts of rationalization, mechanization and technical beauty. For this reason a visit to this factory makes one of the most powerful impressions that America is able to offer.” Fordism became a key concept for understanding modernization processes based on the American – the rational – principle, and the culture-critical traits that European Americanism had still had in the days of Loos and in the 20s became increasingly less significant. It led to the functionalism within the construction industry that was familiar after the Second World War. Authors who proclaimed Postmodernism were thus right to attack the effects and perversions of the Modernist models, the schematic accumulation and high-rise buildings without a trace of imagination, but

without themselves having taken the developments in Modernist architects’ arguments into account.

Walter Gropius was forced to recognize the fact that America was projection terrain for the desires of Neues Bauen in Europe at an early stage, when he took part in the Chicago Tribune competition in 1922. The grid pattern on the façade taken from American industrial buildings made the high-rise building’s (almost) unornamented skeleton structure seem too much like the unsublimated form of an industrial structure, and thus of raw capitalism; the design thus found little favour. The Americans wanted comparatively traditional decorative forms for the building

Lasting ideals

The emergence of a style beyond the styles, detached from fashion’s addiction to change, was one of Classical Modernism’s Utopias in Europe. This aim was pursued into the second half of the 20th century, and reached another high point in 50s and 60s Germany at the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm. Functionality that could stand the test of time was one of the Ulm “design engineers’” recurrent themes. The Braun company in Kronberg/Ts, which was one of the first German firms to set up a product design department, appointing Dieter Rams as the team leader, expressed this understanding of design prototypically for decades – not without acquiring some absurd traits in terms of their steadfastness from time to time and eliciting them from the reactions of their disciples. The Ulm people retained this orientation by rejecting any concession to the taste of the times. Dieter Rams’ motto “less design is more design” took up one of Modernism’s principal aims, which had become accepted over the decades through Mies van der Rohe’s dictum “less is more”, and above all through International Style. Thus the durability of these guiding aims lent historical authority to this perception of design, and timelessness had developed a prestigious reliability in terms of value.

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