

Rinascimento industriale italiano. Marco Zanuso per la *Olivetti brasileira*

Abstract

The first phase of construction of the industrial complex built by Olivetti Industrial Sur America near São Paulo (1956–1959) coincides with one of the crucial historical moments in Italian architecture and industry in the last century.

Designed by Milanese architect and designer Marco Zanuso (1916–2001), the complex had been commissioned by Adriano Olivetti with the aim of taking production of their typewriters overseas and making themselves more competitive in the US market. Zanuso's design for their new complex was divided into several parts, with each formally and functionally characterized, and the plant equipment integrated into the structural system. The site was inaugurated in November 1959, a few months before the sudden death of its patron in February 1960. Its opening was to be the final act of the crusade that the most enlightened Italian entrepreneur of the post-World War II period had led in the name of culturally and technologically advancing industry.

This essay reconstructs the dynamics that led to Zanuso being appointed as architect of the Olivetti complex and outlines the chronology of its intermittent construction. It identifies the likely architectural reference models, situating Zanuso's design both in the debate on industrial aesthetics that was dominant in Europe during the period and in the context of the exuberant Brazilian architectural scene of those years. The essay also explores the concept of the organic in architecture and argues that Zanuso's highly innovative and inventive project reflects a specifically corporate approach to organicism, characterized by the hexagonal geometry of modular structures. The broader picture that emerges is one of a moment of intense brilliance in Italian industry and architecture which, despite its importance, is yet to be fully explored.