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Functionalism

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Despite the criticism that Modernism has received over the years, "Form follows function" remains a good slogan for architecture and urban design provided one redefines *function.* Ultimately, what a designer regards as the range of functions of an urban design is a political not an empirical question, but we have an increasingly well developed positive understanding of people and their environments on which to base such positions. Recent research has considerably enhanced our understanding of the functions that the built environment can possibly serve. A powerful way of considering these possibilities is through an understanding of human needs. This is the position that the Modernists took. Our advantage is that the range of human needs can now be established from empirical research and the clinical experience of psychologists, as well as from introspective analyses. Any statement of the human needs served by the built environment will remain fragmentary because our understanding is incomplete. It always will be, but we can now define functionalism more completely than the Modernists did. In order to understand this assertion, it is necessary to first understand the Modernist concept of functionalism. This understanding will put a revised concept into perspective.

The traditional concept of function in architecture

Twentieth-century urban design ideas have become closely related to the concept of functionalism of the Bauhaus, the de Stijl movement in Holland, and to the Rationalism of Le Corbusier (Trancik 1986).

During the third decade of the twentieth century, Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier argued for an architecture comparable to the functional purity of airplanes, ships, and grain elevators (Le Corbusier 1923; Wingler 1969). Functionalism in architecture came to mean technical efficiency in building construction, with ease and efficiency in the movement of people (i.e., the least movement or fewest actions) as the basis for the internal planning. Functional urban design was thus seen as hygienic, cost efficient, and efficient in the circulation of people and traffic flow while conveniently providing the basic necessities of life (see also Le Corbusier 1948). Sometimes the way climate, but more frequently the way air conditioning and energy consumption as a whole, are handled are items whose performance has to be efficient. The aesthetic quality of the environment, particularly its symbolic aspects, became a byproduct of attaining other ends.

This definition of functional buildings and urban designs is a very limited one, as people like Gropius began to recognize in the 1960s (Gropius 1962), but it is still the basis for much urban design, particularly that based on the speed of vehicular and pedestrian traffic flows. Designs based on purely Modernist functional requirements turn out dull places and, moreover, those that are inefficient in many respects, including their adaptability to change (J. Jacobs 1969). This result is not because traffic engineers and efficiency experts are involved, but because their ends become primary, partly because their studies are understandable, quantifiable, and efficient. As Aldo van Eyck noted:

> *Instead of the inconvenience of filth and confusion, we have now the* boredom of hygiene.

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