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Critique of functionalist reasoning and Dwelling Theory

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Abstract: This article aims to develop a succinct critical examination of the notions of utility, implementation and purpose in architecture and urban development. Terms such as utility or function have been used in theoretical discourses without rigorous conceptual definition. Therefore, both sentences and ideologies have proliferated, that have converged in a peculiarly heteroclite manner within the current of what we prefer to characterize here as functionalist reason, that is, a slightly ambiguous manner of committing to the reason behind architecture. However, this critique of functionalist reasoning cannot simply be resolved with the proposal of rigorous Dwelling Theory and urban development. Dwelling Theory can be founded on a proposed theoretical/conceptual deconstruction of the complex idea of function.

Key words: utility; function; functionalism; dwelling theory

1 Introduction

Houses are built to be lived in, not for contemplation; therefore, let us prioritize use over uniformity, except in those cases where both can coexist. Let us leave appearance to the enchanted palaces of poets who build them at low cost. Francis Bacon, 1625.

2 The classical conception of utilitas

For a long time now, at least in the Western European tradition, there has been a clear awareness of the imperative of utility in architecture. Underlying historical common sense is the prevailing idea that buildings and other architectural creations entail legitimate expectations regarding their use, implementation, and purpose. Perhaps it is precisely because it is embedded in common sense that the idea of utility appears supposedly clear and distinct, when in fact it is a complex and blurred truism. As will be seen later, terms such as utility or function have been used in theoretical discourses without a rigorous conceptual demarcation. Indeed, both statements and ideologies have proliferated, converging in a peculiarly heterogeneous manner within the framework of what we prefer to characterize here as functionalist reasoning—that is, a somewhat ambiguous way of engaging with the "why" of architecture.

From the earliest surviving written record of architectural reflection—Vitruvius's treatise—there is explicit mention of the classical idea of utilitas.

Vitruvius begins by defining architecture as the professional discipline concerned with constructing buildings and then

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enumerates, in a triadic manner, a compelling imperative characterization:

> Such structures must achieve safety, utility, and beauty. Safety is achieved when the foundations are laid solidly and when materials are carefully selected, without skimping on expenses. Utility is achieved through the correct arrangement of a building's parts so that they do not cause any obstruction, together with an appropriate distribution—according to their own characteristics—oriented in the most convenient manner. Beauty is achieved when the building's appearance is pleasing and refined, and when the proper proportions of its parts embody the theory of symmetry (VITRUVIUS, 1,3).

Vitruvius's characterization of his concept of utilitas presents it as virtues of the designed and constructed form: the arrangement of components, the distribution of spaces, and orientation. It is curious that he defines utility as the way in which the parts of the building do not cause any obstruction. This seems to indicate that, in any case, the demands of firmitas and venustas must leave, in a somewhat residual way, some leeway for fluid use. This, upon closer inspection, sheds some light on the degree of the Roman architect's commitment with respect to the performance of the architectural artifact. In the absence of a refined theory of stability, as well as a consistent and reciprocal theory of utility, the theoretical discourse seems to prioritize decorum as a category.

> An architect's primary concern must be that buildings possess precise proportions in their various parts and as a whole. Once the measure of their symmetry has been established and the proportions of that measure perfectly calculated, it is then the architect's task to choose the nature of the site in relation to the building's function and beauty, adjusting its dimensions by adding or removing what is necessary to always preserve its symmetry, so that it appears as though everything has come together correctly and that nothing is lacking in its exterior appearance (VITRUVIUS, 6,2).

For Vitruvius, utility is verified, in any case, in certain configurations handed down by custom and tradition, according to various factors specific to the site and culture. In Book VI, Chapter 1, he describes the climatic conditions and the arrangement of buildings with regard to orientation; in Chapter 5, he addresses the most appropriate layout of houses from the perspective of decorum; while in Chapter 6, he discusses the distinctive features of country houses; finally, in Chapter 7, he examines Greek houses as examples of architectural types. This is certainly not a theory of utility, but rather empirical observations regarding the various configurations of buildings. Much less, of course, is it a theory of function, in which architectural compositions would be mutually implicated with modes of use. Thus, utility is understood as the virtue inherent in architectural construction that is fulfilled by facilitating—to a greater or lesser extent—the implementation of the building's intended use.

During the Italian Renaissance—and especially following Leon Battista Alberti's meticulous reading of Vitruvius's treatise—a profound conceptual redefinition took place. With Alberti, there was a shift from the rudiments of the craft toward the still-embryonic outlines of a theory serving as a professional foundation. "For Alberti, then, architecture is the only art capable of harmoniously uniting necessity, utility, and beauty. This marks the beginning of the idea of concinnitas; necessity and utility would be understood by the author as necessary links to achieve the ultimate goal of beauty, thus the problems of architecture are encompassed within concinnitas as a unified whole" (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 36). By uniting in a supremely interwoven manner the elements that appeared clearly articulated in Vitruvius, Alberti connects both utility with beauty, as well as the commitment to develop, in the future, separate theories that would ultimately converge into a superior synthesis of architectural form. The Renaissance witnessed an outburst of still obscure intuitions that only technical and philosophical development would help to clarify—albeit with great effort—in relative terms.

One of these vague intuitions appears in Filarete's *Treatise on Architecture*. Indeed, it foreshadows the considerati-

-on of the human element in function as an internal rule and standard that would inform architectural form.

> [...] In Filarete's case, through his *Trattato d'architettura* of 1465, the theme of function reemerges with remarkable significance. For him, as for Alberti, the origin of function lies in basic necessity, but he also revisits Vitruvius's idea of the primitive hut, this time associated with the Christian tradition, positioning Adam as the first builder after his expulsion from Paradise. For Filarete, the primitive hut was conceived on a human scale and thus contains the basis of all architectural orders. But this does not imply that the author considers the hut to be the norm of architecture—as would be the case in the 18th century with Laugier—but rather that it contains within itself a system of proportions (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 39).

It is undoubtedly thrilling to observe how a particularly luminous and far-sighted idea appears as a faint glimmer, like a bold conjecture cast in a bottle into the sea of historical time, where, under very different circumstances, it will acquire a clear and distinct meaning. The Renaissance treatise writer barely articulates a cryptic clue that will permeate the evolution of architectural thought until it becomes unequivocally clear that the purpose of architectural form ─ its first and last purpose─is to serve, comfortably and precisely, the habitation of the human body in action.

3 Modern functionalism

While the classical concept of utility is vague and imprecise, the modern idea of function is scarcely less so. Whereas in the classical conception utility is attributed to the built object, the modern understanding of the meaning of function entails a relationship between a subject ─ operator, user, or referent ─ and the "form" ─ configuration, figure, or, strictly speaking, final form ─ of the architectural entity. With this, it is true that the problem begins to be framed in the right direction, but one must still concede that the term "function" harbors considerable conceptual indeterminacy; the idea of function is certainly not a simple one (DE ZURKO, 1958, p. 17s). In any case, toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, there was an exuberant development of so-called architectural functionalism, a current of thought that explored the relationship between "function" and "form" in various ways.

"The basic premise that form must follow function becomes a guiding principle for the architect, but it also constitutes a yardstick by which architecture is measured." (DE ZURKO, 1958, p. 15). This misleading maxim has inspired─and also stifled─architectural reflection for more than a century. The fact is that neither "form" nor, much less, "function" has been reflected upon with sufficient rigor, and when they are equated in a presumed causal relationship, what is revealed is a signifier as open-ended as it is devoid of conceptual content. Perhaps the root of the misunderstanding stems from the more than millennia-old reifying mindset espoused by architects, who regard their subject matter as the thing designed and built, rather than understanding it as a vibrant, living relationship between human beings and the formal and material transformations of the inhabited environment. In this latter understanding, function and form are mutually identified, provided that the terms are defined clearly and distinctly.

First and foremost, it is imperative to strictly define what is meant by the term "function." "In its most general sense, this term refers to an action or capacity for action attributed to any person or thing within an organized system. The core of this meaning is that of action, derived from the Greek εργον (ergon, 'action, work, effort')." (CASANOVA BERNA, 2008, p. 95). For its part, "use" implies a coherent and complex structure of functions and meanings developed in various contexts by a user when effectively utilizing a useful object. Finally, the concept of purpose must be defined distinctively; it is the totality of the determinations that operate on the essence of a thing. As can be seen, it is possible to distinctly characterize three concepts that tend to flit about, disoriented within the core meaning of the term "function," at least in its common and historical usage. But if a minimum of rigor is applied, then the terrain under discussion gradually becomes clearer.

A close correspondence can be established with an ad hoc rearticulation of the general notion of "form." Thus, it can be understood that a specific and defined function corresponds, as a manifestation, to a functional configuration, that is, a discrete and specific set of features that correspond, point by point, to the action in question. This functional or operational configuration is not a form, but rather a very precise set of formal features that become evident in the specific context of the given operation. It makes no sense to claim that the functional configuration follows the function, because they are exactly and manifestly the same thing. In turn, a use corresponds to a figure of use framed within a context, which implies positing an identity between the ceremonies or rituals of the use and the corresponding significant figures. But a figure of use is not a form; rather, it is a complex of features and meanings within a context where things are implemented in their utilitarian capacity. What is a form, however, is the absolute and total determination of purpose. In this sense, the only thing that can be said about architectural form derives from an assigned purpose, and that purpose is to be inhabited.

From these considerations emerges a critique of functionalist reasoning in modern architecture. This reasoning—functionalist rather than functional—takes care to treat the term "function" as an empty signifier, as an emergence from a confused background of meaning. Perhaps this is because architects have always been interested, as a self-imposed imperative, in the determination of form rather than in the careful conceptualization of function. In this sense, the theoretical inconsistencies that have developed throughout history can only be addressed through a decisive paradigm shift. And this must begin, naturally, with a careful deconstruction of the term itself, its meanings, and, above all, its connotations in social life.

For the sake of rigor, it becomes imperative to hierarchically differentiate the concepts of operational function, use, and utility, as well as that of purpose. The approach to the study of operational function is, by definition, a specific mechanical and ergonomic analysis. The operational function stems from a functional configuration, defined as the set of formal features that enable a specific mechanical operation. Use and utility constitute a second layer, relatively more complex than that of operational function, and which includes not only complex structures of operations but also cultural meanings framed within specific contexts of implementation in use, through which the resulting forms take on the character of ceremonies, rituals, and habits that are intricately circumstantial. Meanwhile, purpose constitutes an absolute and total determination of the design of things—their "why"—which finds clear and precise expression in form. Viewed in this way, purpose constitutes a third stratum that is superior in complexity. It is also worth pausing to consider the subjective configurations associated with these layers. Thus, the operational function is an action or effort performed by an operator, while the activity of use implies the determination of the user's specific subjective character; likewise, purpose, in architecture, has the situated subject itself—that is, the inhabitant—as its point of reference.

Once the preceding considerations are taken into account, it is worth reviewing the way in which the term "function" has effectively played out historically. In this regard, Damián Plouganou, in a rather extensive 2020 doctoral dissertation, has conducted a detailed examination of the issue. This study begins with an initial distribution of concepts that operate within various contexts of meaning. This approach proves particularly interesting as a complement to the critical examination of functionalist reasoning. While, from a theoretical standpoint, inconsistencies can be identified in the meanings strictly denoted by the term, a rigorous historical-critical analysis can eloquently account for the dispersion of connotative meanings associated with the expression:

> In the most radical inquiries of modernity, "function" takes on interests that go beyond its merely utilitarian objectives, extending to proposals that imply, implicitly and/or explicitly, the expansion of an architectural project into a project of social reform. In these operations, the term "function" proves insufficient and expands into a range of meanings that also broaden the various conceptions of the problem. These terms are grouped into

four notions that encompass the different ways in which function has been interpreted and theorized:

- "efficiency"—rationalism, scientism, and economics applied to functional layouts—,
- "adaptation"—consideration of the particularities of each need within its specific context—,
- "flexibility"—the range of functional possibilities within a single space—,
- "connectivity"—emphasis on the connections, synergy, and narrative produced by the very configuration of circulation routes— (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 19).

These four main connotations, presented in this way, reveal that what truly concerns the functional approach is, in all cases, its presumed impact on architectural form. As will be discussed in detail later, depending on which theoretical assumptions are adopted, these meanings will proliferate as drivers of form determination at the drawing board—that is, in design as a revelation or touchstone of professional discourse. It is in this historical context that genuine challenges to the concrete form of operational function—such as Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's meticulous study in the so-called Frankfurt Kitchen or Carin Boalt's work in Sweden—constitute the exception rather than the rule.

It is significant how the notion of efficiency in operational function is reified in both use and purpose. This process is by no means innocent on the ideological level: it is the era in which mechanization takes the lead (GIEDION, 1948/1978). Not far from this conception lies the rationalization of "the house as a machine for living in" (LE CORBUSIER, 1923, p. 73). Indeed, the impetuous advance of machine-based productivism sweeps away even the most exalted minds, scattering the paradigm of the modern production process far and wide.

> What [Moisei] Ginzburg means by a "correct functional solution" may be found in his own assessment of the organizational model that Henry Ford developed in his American factories. In the same article, Gínzburg quotes Ford, who explains that the layout of the machines and the use of space are based on a scientific calculation, which saves time and maximizes space within the factory. Thus, Gínzburg's interpretation of the user's way of life stems from Fordist pragmatism, which views the user as just another cog in a "social machinery" characterized, at least in its initial phase, by the efficient use of space and time. For him—and herein lies one of the key points of "efficiency"—people's activities must be economized as if they were a phase of the production process (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 63).

It is striking to observe, with the historical distance available today, how the functionalist architectural forces devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the mission of maximizing the use of space, rationalizing the Existenzminimum, and cultivating an austere, deterministic, and stripped-down architecture, while a functionalist researcher like Carin Boalt applied herself with meticulousness and scientific method to examining the specific trajectories of the inhabiting body. For it is one thing to pay inquisitive attention to the actions of specific individuals such as housewives—who deserve a spirit of solidarity in alleviating their efforts—and quite another to serve the administration of living space and habitable resources for the benefit of the dominant political economy.

The extension of the concept of efficiency from the operational level to the levels of use and purpose reveals itself as a conceptual inconsistency: efficiency is certainly not the relevant criterion at the higher levels, whereas it is, strictly speaking, applicable to mechanical operations. There is an undue rationalization that discards important values of cultural significance in the rituals of use, as well as a degradation of the intrinsic value of purpose. In fact, this functionalist rationale for the rationalization of efficiency gives rise to a purely productivist approach characterized by the overexploitation of space, the rigid assignment of purposes, and a manifest lack of flexibility in the face of historical change.

If efficiency constituted the connotation of rationalization, adaptation is an emerging meaning of an attitude of empiri-

-cal and gradual adjustment:

> The concept of "adaptation" refers to the arrangement of a building's various functions and internal layouts to meet each specific need. The various concepts that comprise it are typically grounded in the critical observation of everyday and natural phenomena, and their translation into design proposals is much more deeply rooted in experience itself—in the traditional and the empirical rather than in the normative (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 92).

The leading exponent of the notion of function as empirical adaptation is the work of Alvar Aalto. In this case, the idea of function is aligned with that of use, and he advocates moving beyond the militant mechanicism of the Modern Movement in favor of a necessary humanization of architecture. "Making architecture more human means creating better architecture and achieving a functionalism that is much broader than the purely technical" (AALTO, 1970/1977, p. 29). Here, consideration of purely mechanical operation must be complemented with due attention to biological and psychological variables. The call for humanization, although brief, constitutes a clear ethical warning, while also serving as an epistemic caution.

Empirical functionalism can be criticized for a certain theoretical inadequacy. Indeed, it did not seem to go beyond a specific addressing of certain practical problems without advancing toward a consistent and systematic conceptualization. The humanism advocated by Aalto is noteworthy, however, although a certain defensive tone and an insufficient substantive argument must also be noted. In short, this conception of function as adaptation to use can also be blamed for a relative methodological shortcoming, beyond the broad and vague slogan of achieving "better architecture." For what remains to be done, in any case, is the clear and distinct articulation of a purpose specific to architecture—one that is perhaps mistakenly taken for granted.

With regard to the idea of flexibility, Plouganou cites, by way of example, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's stance on the matter. But in this case, one might ask whether this is, at its core, functionalism in the strict sense. For, in fact, what do we have here? Is it flexibility of use, operational functional slack, or rather a radical indeterminacy?

> Mies calls for a way of living that, as he himself puts it, allows for the development of the spirit, that manages to connect with the inhabitant while remaining universal. In his translation of this into space and function itself, he seems to understand that this ethereal idea requires a confrontation with emptiness, with nothingness, leading to self-realization. A space that, by its very weightlessness, avoids any resemblance to any recognized activity or almost any trace of culture, and remains suspended in a void—a void that must gradually be filled by the inhabitant's own qualities. In short, the aim is to free space from any connotation or reference so that it can be filled according to one's own will. Mies's conception transcends "flexibility" to move toward functional neutrality (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 179).

Perhaps the key to functional indeterminacy lies in spatialization itself. For what is clear is that Mies strips the interior of any concrete sense of place in order to confront the subject with abstract space—disconnected from the rituals of use—thus transforming the purpose of architecture into an ecstatic experience. Flexibility of use, in any case, can only be attributed to places conceived, designed, and implemented as such—that is, as concrete environments rather than abstract space, as spheres brimming with human life rather than emptied into nothingness. Refined spatialization, it seems, consistently leads not so much to functional neutrality as to indeterminacy at a boundary where architecture is nothing more than an effusion of a metaphysical spirit. But the situation changes radically if, instead of fluid and abstract space, we consider the concrete place. It is then that flexibility or slack, that is, allowing situated life to slack, can cast a genuinely novel conceptual insight.

There is a certain virtue in pushing things to the limits of their meaning. Seeking the most radical form of functional flexibility at the cost of emptying the inhabited place of its inherent meanings reveals that it is only in abstract space that this flexibility ultimately devolves into pure indifference. Yet, at the same time, it allows us to understand that the places which architecture must cultivate and protect must retain a sufficient slack, a historical generosity that mitigates the rigors of the fallacious, rigid determinations of ad hoc domains. It is also now understood that architecture is not an art of space, but rather a social activity of producing shelters for specific places, and that the spatializing void is, ultimately, an action foreign to architectural reason.

The fourth connotative notion is referred to as co-connectivity, although it could just as well be characterized as functional legibility. In this sense, an important component of meaning emerges because use and purpose cannot be understood without considering the meanings that foreshadow and promote the various operational functions inscribed in the inhabited world. The fact is that we inhabit a world of actions within a given context that attributes meaning and coherence not only to the specific and operational use of tools but also confers coherence on the meaning structured by the ceremonies and rituals of those uses.

> "Connectivity" refers both to the links between different spaces within a building and to the elements that make them possible, generating in this process an interaction among users and, in some circumstances, giving rise to a sequence of meanings. This active "narrative," which is an inherent part of its essence, will also serve as a source of inspiration for the ways in which function is expressed and communicated. But in addition to this, "connectivity" includes the very separation of activities within the program, which inevitably impact the relationships among the users themselves, whether these impacts are desired or not. One could say that the issue of "connectivity" is not only intrinsic to architecture but also to society and its inherent cultural dimensions. Through it, a thread of concepts is woven that addresses the way people approach buildings, interpret them, and experience them through their functions (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 196).

This understanding of the concept of function foreshadows the conjecture that there is a core underlying structure of meanings that forms the backbone of architectural forms of use. "[...] what enables the use of architecture (passing through, entering, standing, climbing, exiting, leaning, etc.) are not only the possible functions but, above all, the meanings linked to them, which predispose me to functional use." (ECO, 1968, p. 256). In a certain sense, this establishes the precedence of the meaning of the figure of use over the practical structure of the operation. Learning the utilitarian implementation of architectural components constitutes the acquisition of a language, of a mental mechanism for deciphering cultural codes that go beyond pure mechanistic processes.

At this point, it is significant to appreciate how the notions of connectivity and utilitarian legibility shed a faint yet decisive light in a direction that manages to transcend both crude mechanicism and pragmatic utilitarianism. It is therefore worth pausing to consider Le Corbusier's notion of the plan, that is, a kind of internal design that structures the architectural form through its circulation paths, from which a decisive emotional apprehension of architecture arises.

> The problem of function in Le Corbusier, which finds its place in the development of the plan, does not govern the work in its entirety, as Häring would expect; yet at the same time, the plan proves to be the ideal tool for resolving circulation paths, that "essence of sensation" to which the author refers. The need for a plan that ensures proper circulation is part of the economy of the design, while at the same time constituting the very experience of the circulation path (PLOUGANOU, 2020, p. 223).

With this profound insight into an internal design that would govern the emotional fulfillment of architectural realization, we find ourselves on the threshold of the value of practicality, that is, a notion that makes human habitation a

purpose-driven and decisive factor in shaping architectural form. But for such a notion to emerge with its full conceptual power, the epistemological obstacle of viewing habitation as merely a function—when in reality it constitutes an end in itself—must first be overcome. A certain amount of reflective effort must be devoted to critiquing the conception of dwelling as a function.

4 Living as a function

In the functionalist thinking of modern urban planners, there is an explicit reduction of the concept of inhabiting to the idea of residing or being housed. In this way, an activity that is ubiquitous wherever people are present and live is transformed into the use of an ad hoc facility. At the same time, there is a clear and reductionist segmentation into four "functions," each of which corresponds to a utilitarian implementation and a distinct frame of reference. Thus, inhabiting becomes a specific act of residing in dwellings grouped in distinct zones of the city; working is a purpose carried out in places designated for this purpose in another region of the city—necessarily distant from other regions and facilities intended for recreation or self-cultivation, these activities also being understood as uses; finally, from one segmented portion of the city to another, city dwellers move swiftly and fluidly from places of production to those of consumption and to those of social reproduction. Urban planning, in short, involves a meticulous functionalist segregation of the urban form.

> The foundations of urban planning are the four functions: Living, Working, Recreation (Leisure hours), Circulation (ATHENS CHARTER, 1933, PARAGRAPH 77).

The set of the conceptual operations necessary to arrive at such a declaration emerges as a sensible and expected outcome of the urban planner's Icarian gaze upon the object under examination. With the city laid out on the drawing board, viewed from the heights where power thrives, the immediate task appears to have been to map out a tumultuous, contradictory, and chaotic reality. While maintaining certain precise distances, functional reduction, segmentation, and segregation are operational mechanisms that were deemed suitable and appropriate for achieving a certain legibility amid the generalized chaos of the city under developed capitalism.

For modern urban planning aspires, in any case, to the achievement of "legibility, visibility, and intelligibility" (DELGADO, 2018, p. 66). Architectural functionalism, thus, proves functional… to the political, social, and economic power that will find, at best, general guidelines for navigating the complexity of the urban environment:

> "The Plans shall determine the structure of each of the sectors designated for the four basic functions and shall establish their respective locations within the whole" (ATHENS CHARTER, 1933, PARAGRAPH 78).

Viewed from a historical perspective, one must reflect on the very specific political conditions under which plans formulated in this way could decisively affect the concrete life of cities. For this is not a matter of naive oversimplifications or conceptual shortcomings in addressing courses of action, but rather a way of conceiving urban reality and carrying out a concrete professional practice. The segmenting functionalization of the urban plan is the clear expression of the desire for deterministic control, on the part of those in power and their technocratic agents, over the complex opacity of social life in the city as it actually exists.

It is particularly significant to pause and consider how social life in the city is understood when viewed from an Icarian and functionalist perspective:

> The cycle of daily functions—living, working, and recreation (recovery)—will be regulated by urban planning within the strictest economy of time, with housing considered the very center of urban planning concerns and the focal point of all measures (ATHENS CHARTER, 1933, PARAGRAPH 79).

While the first half of the paragraph reveals no desire for technocratic domination—not even a dystopian undertone, it must be said—the second half slips in a statement that, in a very different context, could well be the motto of truly sensible

urban planning. For what jars in this formulation is the abusive assumption of dwelling as a function. It seems that the vague notion of "function" has become a sort of burden that has hindered the effective growth of a comprehensive urban theory and the consistent development of urban planning interventions.

Weighed down by this burden, the very conception of the city does nothing but reaffirm itself as a "functional unit." The complex human, social, and economic phenomenon of the city is reduced to a figure as intelligible as it is mendacious, as legible as it is illusory, as comprehensible as an obedient industrial facility. It is a representation of the city in which both its concrete structure and its heterogeneous and contradictory constitution are conspicuous by their absence: the map, then, dreams its territory.

> The city, defined as a functional unit, must grow harmoniously in each of its parts, arranging spaces and connections where the stages of its development can be inscribed in balance (ATHENS CHARTER, 1933, PARAGRAPH 84).

This statement encapsulates the entire history of modern urban thought as it was effectively developed since the Renaissance. At its core, it is no longer a matter of transforming the real city, but rather of proposing an operational idealization that is subservient to the symbolic exercise of power. The city is conceived from the sociopolitical demand for intelligibility. And this intelligibility is not so much a rigorous understanding of the actual reality of urban life, but rather an ideal state that functions as a guiding principle for political and technocratic action, planned from the heights of the desire for domination.

It should be noted that reducing the concept of dwelling to a function is not a mere oversimplification, but rather a technocratic and pragmatic operation; for if dwelling is conceived as a pure function of residence, the functional configuration that expresses it is housing. Within urban planning practice, this reinterprets the prior premise that inhabitation stands at the centre or origin of architectural and urban intervention: urbanisation proceeds through the promotion and construction of functional residential units. But since dwelling is merely a function, and this function occurs in a specific and distinct manner within residential units, the rich complexity of urban life in the actually existing neighborhood is replaced by the functional grouping of residential cells into housing complexes.

> The starting point of urban planning is a residential cell (a dwelling) and its integration into a group, forming a residential unit of effective scale (ATHENS CHARTER, 1933, PARAGRAPH 88).

These few lines encapsulate both functionalist urban planning thought and define a modus operandi for the socio-residential segregation that will be carried out by private real estate developers. Housing estates are not merely aggregates of similar dwellings conceived and built in a single act of material realization; rather, they are intended to house populations that have also been carefully selected for their socioeconomic similarity. The architectural enclosure of this unifying construction gesture thus results in the cloistering of a social aggregate of residents with similar socioeconomic status who, in the course of their daily lives, are clearly segregated from the surrounding neighborhood. The actually existing city thus begins to transform into an archipelago of differentiated residential units, and its complex compactness gives way to diffuse urbanization.

The reduction of the idea of inhabiting to that of residing, combined with the assumption that the former is a vaguely defined "function," has not only shaped 20th-century urban theory. It has also served as an operational tool for real estate business practices that have come to shape our cities as they appear today—beset by a proliferation of segregated, diffuse, and problematically articulated residential developments. But it is in this current context that both the conceptual inconsistencies and the concrete anomalies in the actual functioning of urban life are beginning to be perceived; it is here, then, that a Theory of Dwelling effectively emerges—one that challenges functionalism while offering pragmatic alternati-

-ves to the hegemonic practice of urban planning.

5 The deconstruction of functionalism in the Theory of Dwelling

A Theory of Dwelling can be grounded in a theoretical and conceptual deconstruction of the complex idea of function. The highest and most synthetic level of any function is the purpose that manifests itself in the form itself: The first postulate of an Architectural Theory of Dwelling is that the defining purpose of architectural form is the dwelling of people and social groups, under all circumstances. This dwelling, as a purpose that is a manifestation of the human being's situated existence, must be specifically elucidated, studied, and categorized. Below this highest level, in an intermediate stratum, lies use, which is the concrete implementation in ceremonies, rituals, and the manipulation of objects or systems of useful objects. Utilitarian configurations must be the subject of specific anthropological inquiry. Finally, at the hierarchically lower stratum—clearly defined by its mechanical nature—lies the operational function, which is the subject of specific anthropometric and ergonomic inquiry.

A historical-critical review of functionalist thought and discourse shows that, despite the interposition of all manner of epistemological obstacles and conceptual shortcomings, architectural thought was able to shed light on a disjointed set of prescient insights regarding the subject at hand. If today it is possible to historically construct a renewed Theory of Dwelling, it is due to a millennia-old concern for architectural utilitas and, also, to the crisis of modern functionalism. For it is true that Filarete had already intuited that the key to architectural reflection lies in the actual constitution of the human body and its action. Likewise, the premise of mechanistic functionalism—that, in a certain sense, architecture must function—is valid, although it is not entirely true that it must do so merely on the operational level. Aalto's defense of a human rather than a mechanical functionalism is also timely and pertinent. And Le Corbusier's intuition in discerning an inner design within architectural form, a purpose human in character —not merely emotional, but existential— is prescient.

The deconstruction of functionalist reasoning leads us to turn our reflection toward the major premise that dwelling is not a function of use, much less an operational function, but rather constitutes a human purpose that precedes any architectural endeavor. "We do not dwell because we have built, but rather we build and have built to the extent that we dwell—that is, insofar as we are those who dwell" (HEIDEGGER, 1954/1994, p. 110). Dwelling is a phenomenon emerging from the situated human condition and has a relational, social, and cultural nature, involving subjects that are complexly configured and places that are no less complexly articulated. Dwelling occurs in any circumstance in which a human being makes a presence and inhabits a place. From this it follows that a Theory of Dwelling can be nothing other than a hermeneutic endeavor that not only investigates the observation of situated human behaviors but also scrutinizes the meaning these behaviors take on for the subjects involved.

This assumption leads us to reexamine the social nature of architectural activity. Indeed, architecture would no longer be the art and technique of constructing buildings—which is, in any case, what architects do—but rather a social mode of producing formal and material transformations in the environment motivated by human inhabitation. It is a complex social service emerging from the situated condition of human beings. This presents inhabiting as the subject matter of an anthropological science that must guide architecture toward the goal of achieving an appropriate, dignified, and decent situation for people in their places. For this reason, the professional practice of architecture and urban planning constitutes only a part of a complex social production system.

The Theory of Dwelling promotes an architecture that is no longer restricted to designing and building things, but rather to fostering and safeguarding the relationships between people and built environments. This entails a specific ethical commitment: at the heart of all professional endeavors is not "the building," but the people who inhabit it. It also promotes urban planning that is committed to recognizing the potential of urban life itself, viewed from a close and supportive

perspective: a vision of the urban that shares the perspectives of ordinary city dwellers and is committed to their future. In this approach, inhabiting ceases to be a misleading reduction to mere residing and instead becomes an outpouring of human life found in every corner and nook of the city.

These considerations, in turn, lead to a methodological outline. Thus, the Theory of Dwelling would aim to understand, respect, and promote the genuine forms of human dwelling, and then shape these designs within a generous environmental framework. This implies testing the hypothesis of an inner law at work—a preexisting architecture of life that would inform a consistent and harmonious built architecture. This would lead to the realization of architecture as practical humanism—that is, a virtuous "letting be" of the body's gestures within the inhabited space. If these conditions were met, an architecture rigorously informed by the Theory of Dwelling could assume an emancipatory sociopolitical role: the inhabitant could, at last, breathe deeply and freely within spaces designed according to their own human dimensions and condition.

In any case, the Theory of Dwelling constitutes a framework within which to develop a comprehensive anthropological discipline. This is because it must open spaces for the cultivation of rigorous knowledge and conceptualizations that serve as a solid and firm epistemological foundation. It must also undertake a methodical examination of the social practices of dwelling, which implies not only a descriptive study but also a meticulous of such practices. Finally, it must also delve into the intrinsic productive nature of human dwelling, with all its artistic and aesthetic implications. In short, this theory must be constructed as a practical form of humanism centered on the situated condition of the human being.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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