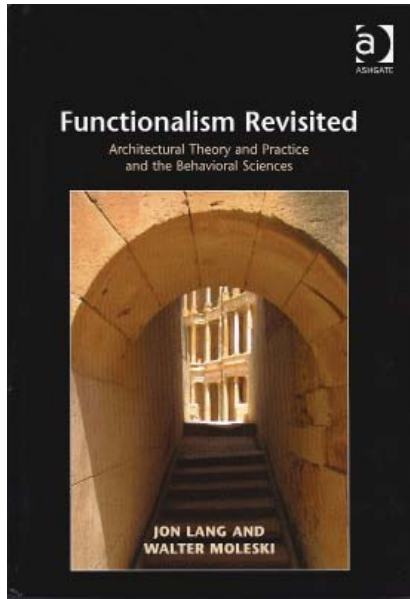


## FUNCTIONALISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE: A REVIEW OF FUNCTIONALISM REVISITED BY JOHN LANG AND WALTER MOLESKI.

Publisher: ASHGATE, Hard Cover: 356 pages including illustrations,  
Surrey, England, 2010 - ISBN 978-1-4094-0701-0

Ashraf M. Salama



**Functionalism Revisited:**  
Architectural Theories and Practice and the  
Behavioral Sciences

**Jon Lang and Walter Moleski**

One more important contribution after 'Creating Architectural Theory' which represents one of the classical writings on the theories of architecture. In this book, redefining functionalism in architectural theory is the ultimate task of Jon Lang and Walter Moleski. The authors argue, and rightly so, that it is insufficient to define functionalism as merely the utility of buildings and urban spaces. Rather, functionalism is conceived within a broad range of purposes of the built environment, which are important to architects and designers today, and the way in which people experience these intended purposes. People experience buildings either as environments or as objects, both of which are necessary forms of experience. While buildings perceived as objects possess aesthetic value, buildings understood as part of an environment enhance our understanding of that environment, its purposes and meanings.

In light of the argument, the book is divided into five parts. The first two parts are largely concerned with the theory of functionalism within the field of architecture in its broadest sense. This is followed by two parts that elaborate on the practice of functionalism

within the context of the built environment. Finally, the book ends with a conclusion that shows how theory can inform practice as a process as well as a product.

Part I, Introduction: Architectural Theory and Functional Theory, begins by emphasizing that it is important to move beyond what is to what ought to be. A normative approach to understanding the functions of the built environment and its components is necessary. Moving even further, Lang and Moleski argue that theories of what architecture is as well as what it ought to be do not necessarily signalize the capacity of what it can be, in other words, its potential. In addition, theoretical knowledge in design fields are divided into three categories; first, a theory of functionalism; second, "a set of architectural theories (statements of the purposes that buildings and urban designs should serve in a particular circumstance and how to achieve them"; and, finally, theories about the design process.

In Chapter one, The Inheritance: Architectural Practice and Architectural Theory Today, the authors distinguish between two approaches in architectural theories: the rationalist and the empiricist approaches. The former relies on reasoning, while the latter draws heavily on tradition. The motive of both rationalists and empiricists is "enhancing the quality of life of people". These theoretical approaches are articulated in current architectural practice in a number of manifestations, which the authors delve deeper into: neo-modernist, post-modernist, revivalist and neo-traditionalist, and ecological.

Chapter two of Part I, A Framework for Theory in Architecture, highlights the significance of the

impact of buildings, environments, and people on one another, which is more often that not neglected by the cognoscenti. Consequently, the discipline of environmental psychology emerged in order to better understand natural and built environments and their functionalities, in terms of how people experience them. This is influenced by the social and cultural backgrounds of the people experiencing the environment.

Part II, Creating a Theory of Functionalism, begins by stating the traditional definition of functionalism as "the instrumental or task activities to be housed by a building, the technological mechanisms for holding it up structurally, and operating it..." (Lang and Moleski, 2010, p. 32). This section scrutinizes the evolution of approaches to functionalism, from simple to complex.

In Chapter Three, Concepts of Function in Architecture, it is argued that it is not the functions that have evolved, but rather their models, in other words, the simplifications of the functions. Also in this chapter, similar to the previous two, the authors divide the theories of functionalism into the rationalist and the empiricist approaches. The rationalists perceived functionalism in terms of the aesthetic value of a building or environment as well as its livability. On the other hand, the empiricists presented functionalism implicitly, if at all.

Next, Chapter Four, Experiencing Architecture: The Foundation for a Theory of Functionalism, begins with a statement of the importance of understanding the relationship between people (and their experiences) and the built environment. An understanding of the processes

of perception is essential to understanding this relationship. Interestingly, the authors assert that perceptions on the nature of human understanding are universal, although there may be deep-rooted socio-cultural differences. This chapter unfolds as the authors describe environmental psychology and cognition, in scientific terms, then applying it to buildings (as objects, spaces, and environments) and people who occupy these buildings. To understand people's behavior, the book highlights several key psychological concepts such as accordance, competence, costs and rewards, as well as Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

This Part is concluded with Chapter Five, *Functionalism Updated*, in which authors base their description of the function of architecture on Maslow's hierarchy of motivations and needs. Throughout the text, human motivations and thus architectural functions are divided into two main categories: basic functions and advanced functions. Basic functions include shelter, safety and security, identity and affiliation, and esteem functions. Advanced functions include cognitive functions, aesthetic functions, and self-actualizing and self-transcendence functions. Context is also accounted for in terms of the variability of functions.

Part III, *The Functions of the Built Environment: Theory and Practice*, elaborates in greater detail than Part II on the application of Maslow's theory and how architects address its components. It is divided into two sections: basic functions, and advanced functions. Chapters Six to Twelve fall under the former, while Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen fall under the latter.

Chapter Six, *The Accommodation of Activities:*

*Behavior Settings and Architecture*, is based on the premise that, coinciding with the widespread impact of globalization are culturally distinct activities that govern the sorts of behaviors that buildings would accommodate. In this chapter, several issues in the design of activity systems are discussed: organizational designs and activity patterns; human and competing activity systems; the segregation and integration of activities; and, cultural variability. With shelter placed at the base of Maslow's pyramid, providing shelter has always been the basic function of buildings, as discussed in Chapter Seven, *Shelter and Salubrious Environments*. People create environments in order to achieve the utmost comfort within the shelter. Therefore, architects must consider the people's fauna and flora needs as well as their needs for machines.

Chapter Eight, *Physical and Psychological Safety and Security*, Lang and Moleski discuss that privacy requirements are defined differently in different cultures. These requirements fulfill feelings of physical and psychological safety and security, and thus must be considered by architects. From a different perspective, Chapter Nine, *Architecture, Financial Security, and Profit*, looks at buildings and the built environment as major capital investments by property developers, where investors expect financial rewards. At the other end of the socioeconomic scale, tenure of property is sought.

Chapter 10, *Identity and Community*, as the name suggests, highlights the interplay of identity and community within the built environment. While buildings reflect the identity of a community, it is interesting that this chapter warns that the built environment does not notably result in a sense of community. In the

same line of thought, Chapter 11, Identity, Individualism, and the Unique, deals with the identity of the individual. In addition to possessing a collective identity shared within the community, people also have their unique individualities, which are expressed differently in different cultures. Like people experiencing the built environment, architects also express their individualities (differently, and relative to their cultural backgrounds) through their work).

As the final Chapter in this section, Chapter 12, Buildings as Signs and Status Symbols, corresponds with the self-esteem level in Maslow's hierarchy of motivations. Both self-respect and receiving recognition from other provides people with a sense of dignity and pride. In terms of the built environment, the authors confer that buildings signify social status as well as provide a sense of social belonging. The degree of recognition sought after by each person is unique. Such concepts are necessary for architects to consider when creating the built environment.

Under the Advanced Functions section, Chapter 13, The Cognitive Function of Architecture: The Environment as a Source of Learning, deals with two types of cognitive needs: knowledge for its own sake, and expressing what is learned, which are both culturally relative. When creating built environments, it is necessary to allow for self-discovery and creativity. In addition, Chapter 14, Experiential Aesthetics and Intellectual Aesthetics examines the modes by which people experience the aesthetic value of the built environment. The authors discuss the qualities of a building that enhances people's aesthetic experience.

In Part IV, titled Externalities: Buildings in Context, context is defined as the cultural and geographical environment in which a building is set. This section is based on the premise that there is direct relationship between a building and its context, both impacting one another. Chapter 15 in Part IV, The Function of the New as a Shaper of Its Environment examines the impact of buildings on their contexts. Buildings may have economic or social effects, as they may also impact the biogenic environment, the feeling of security, and the sense of place. Finally, the book concludes in Part V's Chapter 16, Architectural Theory, Functional Theory, and Design Methodology, where the authors emphasize that architectural theory has moved beyond the ideological standpoints. Now, "functional theory feeds into the designing process and learns from its results" (Lang and Moleski, 2010; p.314).

While many scholars have continuously criticized the field of environment-behavior research or environmental psychology and their contribution to design professions, the work presented in the book can be regarded as a response to such a criticism. In essence, it bridges the gulf between knowledge of environments and people and they way in which such a knowledge can be utilized in researching, interpreting, and designing the built environment. This is a must read contribution and would be an excellent text for both undergraduate and graduate students in architecture, urban design and allied fields. In addition to fulfilling the need to synthesize knowledge about people into knowledge about environments, the book is also of great value in terms of offering cross cultural examples from developed and developing contexts and

presenting a wide spectrum of perspectives and important determinants in designing future built environments.

---

### Ashraf M. Salama

*Ashraf Salama holds B.Sc., M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in Architecture. He is Professor of Architecture and Head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning at Qatar University, Until recently, he had held a Reader in Architecture position at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. He taught and conducted research at Qatar University (2006-2008), was Associate Professor at KFUPM (2004-06), and was the Director of Consulting at Adams Group Architects in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA (2001-04). He is licensed architect in Egypt received his training at Al Azhar University in Egypt and North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA. Salama chaired the Department of Architecture, Misr International University in Cairo (1996-01). He has published numerous papers and authored and co-edited five books on Architectural Education: Designing the Design Studio (USA), Human Factors in Environmental Design (Egypt), Architectural Education Today: Cross Cultural Perspectives (Switzerland), Architecture as Language of Peace (Italy), and recently, Design Studio Pedagogy: Horizons for the Future (United Kingdom). His latest book "Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism" was released in December 2009 by Umbau Verlag in Germany. He is member of the scientific boards of several intl. journals including Open House International, Time Based Architecture International, and the Chief Editor of "Archnet-IJAR." Professor Salama's effort continues to develop tools and mechanisms for fostering the educational process of architecture and enhancing design studio teaching practices. He can be reached at [ijar@mit.edu](mailto:ijar@mit.edu).*