

# Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand and the emergence of a functional interpretation of the world

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## Abstract

It appears to be a matter of course to substantiate architecture by means of its function. The intent to erect a building raises questions regarding the purpose, utilization and utility of buildings. Beyond that, the question of architecture's benefits is a topic of architectural theory. In the Vitruvian tradition, commodity emerges as *utilitas* [next to *firmitas* (firmness) and *venustas* (delight)], as one of the three criteria with which the scope of architecture's subject matter can be defined. In this sense, a functional view of architecture is nothing new. Consequently, however, the reassessment of the functional argument that Durand undertakes at the beginning of the nineteenth century becomes of interest. Durand advocates an understanding of architecture that is based exclusively on its usefulness. In light of nascent modern thought, he no longer attempts to reconstruct traditional models of architectural explanation of the world – the profundity and validity of the Vitruvian conception of *venustas* is transposed. Instead he advocates a model that is concerned not with signifying, but with functioning.