

the public from the private realm have become confused. The revival of mixed-use buildings and mixed-use zones has begun to exacerbate the problem and begs a different kind of urban order. As it jumbles land uses again, the city becomes more typologically chaotic, with residential, institutional, commercial, recreational, and industrial architectural types cheek-to-jowl. Bolder architectural figuration, size, and color are needed to stand out from the more variegated cityscape, much like a church or city hall stands out in the mixed-use fabric of an Italian hill town. A raised megastructure or megaform is one strategy to stand out in the sprawling urban/suburban smear, which Kenneth Frampton likens to the natural wilderness that architecture once was expected to tame and civilize.

It is also important to be clear about what functions are foreground and background in individual buildings that mix uses, especially if any of the uses are important public ones. If, for instance, a public conference center or civic hall is embedded in a commercial or residential building, its entrance elevation should be expressed as more important and dignified.

Location by type

Getting the right architectural type in the right place becomes more critical than getting the right use in the right place. Uses move around, transform, and become obsolete at a faster rate and in more unpredictable ways than architectural types change. It is clearly good urban practice to mix and remix uses, in both mixed-use buildings and mixed-use zones, but not to mix up architectural types or to confuse their hierarchy of importance. A grand hall or iconic tower should be reserved for important locations in the city as much as for important functions. Big boxes, even if they house institutional uses such as a church, should not be built on honorific sites. The architectural type trumps the building type in the mixed-use, Postmodernist city, unlike in the functionally zoned or Euclidean-zoned Modernist city, where the building type was the increment of planning and development. For instance, the “loft building” becomes more important than the more generic “apartment building” or “office building.”

Variety by type

There has been a decrease in the absolute number of architectural types, especially in suburbia. As a

growing range of functions is housed in generic big boxes, tilt-up warehouses, and pre-engineered metal sheds, there are fewer and fewer architectural types with which to shape and articulate the built environment. It could be argued that this dumbing down of the palette while scaling up in size is a straightforward way to deal with increasing programmatic complexity and mixing under one roof. However, a smaller menu for architects, engineers, and urban designers makes for a less informed, less articulate place. Ultimately, it makes for an urban monoculture, however rich or lean the architectural mix inside the big boxes or however much their syncopated facades falsely mimic main street. Genuinely new architectural types that accommodate and express new conditions, sensibilities, and purposes need to emerge, much as the gas station, the motel, the airport terminal, the live-work loft, the storage rental building, and the retractable-roof stadium emerged during the last century.

Construction by type

When this simplified palette of buildings are not built to last because of short-term investment strategies, the city soon is as shoddily built as it is architecturally mute or fake. Important and honorific architectural types, because they tend to occupy the most important sites and to outlast specific uses, are usually designed and built with more care and expense. The more dispensable background architectural types, such as big boxes, which typically occupy less privileged locations, can be designed and built more cheaply. Taken together, the strategy of type and of foreground/background buildings offers some hope for reversing the decline in the quality of the built environment.

Typology and tradition

A purely functionalist architecture also makes for historical sterility. The break with tradition that Modernism sponsored, including but not limited to eschewing typology, was simply too abrupt. Modernists scoff at the notion of tradition, telling us that traditions are invented, thereby implying they can be as easily replaced as they are discarded. But as Roger Scruton contends, a “real tradition is not an invention; it is the unintended byproduct of invention, which also makes invention possible. Our musical tradition is one outstanding example of