Architecture as Urbanism: A Major Course Correction for Architecture and the City

Written Paper / Verbal Presentation

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The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen a remarkable emphasis on architecture characteristically designed as distinct from its setting. Sometimes referred to as ‘the object building syndrome,’ published examples—especially works by the acknowledged avant-garde—celebrate distinctive individualism as prime paradigm for the new, thereby encouraging architects whose practices reside outside the limelight to follow suite to whatever extent their clients and budgets permit. The ultimate effect has been to render large areas of cities as a kind of architectural zoo, with disparate species side by side, all in the name of diversity. So the question ultimately becomes, will there occur a sweepingly reactionary change in direction to this currently pervasive paradigm, and if so, what will it be? This paper posits that certain organizations and movements currently growing will, combined with other forces, seek to return cities to a more coherent fabric through the establishment of a new paradigm that encourages
the design of buildings as more integral components of the city—that is to say, architecture as urbanism.

While broader global economic, commercial, and cultural forces reinforce what is happening today, there are at the same time growing forces in opposition. These include environmentalism, critical regionalism, the refinement of passive and active energy design in architecture and urban design and planning, attempts to restore vital urban density and to curb seemingly limitless sprawl, a return to an emphasis on pedestrian domains in contradistinction to automobile dominance, and a general quest for traditional canons of aesthetics. Illustrations of designing that stresses architecture as integral to urban fabric, including photographs of existing contrasting conditions, will be included. The essential argument is that reactions to the dissolution of urban cohesion will seek to better humanize the urban environment, even at the expense of today’s pervasive paradigm of architectural individualism.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Norman Crowe is an architect who lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He holds degrees in architecture from the University of Oregon and Cornell University and is registered as an architect by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the State of New York. He is an emeritus professor at the University of Notre Dame, where he taught courses in design, urbanism and environmental issues, and was Founding Director of Graduate Studies in Architecture for the School of Architecture. He is currently an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico. His writing includes Visual Notes for Architects and Designers, co-authored with Paul Laseau (New York: Van Nostrand-Reinhold, 1985, and a revised and expended edition, Wiley & Sons, 2012), Nature and the Idea of a Man-made World (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), Building Cities: Towards a Civil Society and Sustainable Environment, co-edited with Michael Lykoudis and Richard Economakis (London: Artmedia Press, 1999), and Travel Sketches of John McHugh (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2012). His professional work has included collaborative urban design proposals for South Bend, Indiana; Viseu, Portugal; Sidon, Lebanon; and Las Vegas, New Mexico. His early practice included architectural firms in Lund, Sweden, Ithaca, New York, and Colorado Springs, Colorado.