CITIES OF THE MIND

It is not often that we hand over half The Architectural Review to a visiting fiend. We do so in this case because Colin Rowe is not merely a longstanding AR contributor, but is at once entertaining and distinguished, and holds views which we substantially share. 'Collage City' is concerned with the aesthetic problems of city planning. During the last 30 years or so we have been living under the shadow of the notion of 'total planning', of the city conceived as a single, planned design. Though there has never been the opportunity of carrying out this notion in all its fulness, there have been many partial opportunities and the notion has provided the excuse for an immense amount of city destruction.

Colin Rowe takes the view that the Western city is above all a compact of small realisations and uncompleted purposes. Though there are self-contained architectural set pieces, like the plume in a pudding, which create small homogeneous environments, the overall picture is one in which architectural intentions constantly 'collide'; and he suggests that we should learn to take more pleasure in this wholesome fact of architectural experience than as yet we do. The only rider that we would wish to add to this doctrine is that there are certain 'collisions' which, as it were, enhance the mutually colliding parties and others which destroy them. Modern practice, with its exaggerated disconcern for the pre-existing, has given rise to too much of the destructive sort of collision. For fruitful collisions there must be among architects a revival of the topographic sense.

Colin Rowe turns from the aesthetics of city making to the aesthetics of architectural style and proposes the idea of the architect as a 'bricoleur': that is, a man who picks up items which have been cast away and puts them to new uses. We think this an apt metaphor for a sane architectural attitude; the more so for a generation which is seeking to recover for their art its traditional richness and particularity.