ST. COLIN ROWE AND THE ARCHITECTURE THEORY WARS

Although it is largely unnoticed in the outside world, a multi-factional theory war has been raging for some time within the architectural community over the very nature, purpose, and meaning of architecture and the city. The context of these battles is, of course, late modernity. Our globally expanding media and advertising saturated culture, with its increasingly specialized division of labor, immoderate habits of litigation, and explosion of technological gadgetry, poses significant challenges to the historically generalist and slow-to-change practice of architecture. It is hard for architects to make themselves heard these days, and for many years now architects have had to compete not only for jobs, but to justify architecture itself. This surely accounts not only for the recent explosion of architectural theory, but also for the ferocity of the factions in the theory wars. For well more than thirty years now partisans of architectural modernism, functionalism, structural expressionism, sustainability, neo-rationalism, post-modernism, contextualism, Manhattanism, neo-traditionalism, New Urbanism, critical theory, and deconstructivism all have been vying to stake out architecture's turf in a culture increasingly indifferent to architecture conceived as anything other than commercial advertisement, and the city as anything other than an entertainment zone.

Among the most hotly contested spoils of this war (and a testimony to the diversity of its riches) is the intellectual estate of Colin Rowe. Because Rowe had little built work to his credit, he is not as widely known outside the architectural community as he should be. Nevertheless, Colin Rowe was arguably the most influential architectural theorist and educator of the second half of the twentieth century, a judgment confirmed in 1995 by the Royal Institute of British Architects, which in June of that year awarded him their highest honor, the prestigious Royal Gold Medal.

Born in England in 1920, Rowe spent the greater part of his adult life in the United States before his death in Washington, DC in 1999. One of the reasons for the general contention over the significance of his work is that Rowe's nearly five decade career was marked by two distinct areas of concern and periods of intellectual activity. On the one hand, Rowe left a significant modernist legacy traceable to several essays in his first book *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (MIT Press, 1976). This collection of articles, written between 1947 and 1961, deals primarily with modern art and architecture; and in these early essays Rowe identified implications for modernist architecture (and suggested directions for modernist architects) in both the representation of space found in Cubist paintings, and the making of space in some of the early houses of Le Corbusier. Among the then young architects inspired to pursue the investigations suggested by Rowe's writings on modernism were current “starchitects” Charles Gwathmey, Richard Meier, John Hejduk, Peter Eisenman, and Michael Graves, the so called “Five Architects” who, with a contributing essay from architectural historian Kenneth Frampton and an introduction from Rowe himself, published their early work in an influential 1972 book of the same name.

On the other hand, by the mid-1960s Rowe had found himself rethinking the purported virtues of "the city of modern architecture" on both moral and aesthetic grounds. He subsequently characterized himself as having "graduated" during this period from the ideology of architectural modernism, though he always retained an interest in and admiration for many of modern architecture's (as opposed to modern urbanism's)

aesthetic achievements. The new theoretical position to which he moved eventually came to be known as "contextualism," and this position represented in part an attempt to reconcile the social and aesthetic virtues of traditional urbanism with the aesthetic of architectural modernism.

This change of sensibility was recorded in Rowe's second book, *Collage City* (MIT Press, 1978, co-authored with Fred Koetter), which grew out of the urban design studio he taught at Cornell from the early 1960s until the late 1980s. And while Rowe's modernist legacy continues to be influential, the contextualist legacy of *Collage City* has proven perhaps even more so. This is no doubt due in considerable part to the academic studio location of Rowe's theories, a setting that helped create an entire generation of architect / educators---the so called Cornell School---who subsequently have been exploring with varying degrees of intellectual rigor various implications (including both post-modern and traditionalist implications) of issues first raised by Rowe, and passing those concerns on to yet another generation of students and practitioners. From Cambridge to Chicago to Eugene, dozens of Rowe's former students (many of whom also maintain active architectural practices) have since become architecture school deans, department chairs, and prominent scholar / educators in their own right, a fact underscoring just how far reaching the influence of Colin Rowe has been.

Architectural modernists, post-modernists, and traditionalists each appear therefore to have some claim to be legitimate descendants of Colin Rowe; as do environmentalists (whose watch word in recent years has been “sustainable design,” an idea currently being promoted politically as “smart growth”), though in a much more indirect way about which I will have more to say later. And lately there are others claiming to be Rowe's heirs, an aspiring architectural avant-garde for whom "legitimacy" has not until recently been an issue, of interest because they represent an architectural manifestation of the "diversity" partisans of our larger multi-factional culture war. These are the critical theorists orbiting around New York architect Peter Eisenman, who have become apologists for what one might call the neo-avant garde (or for what they themselves for a brief time called New Architecture[1]); and their significance comes less from their influence upon architectural practice than their influence upon architectural education.[2]

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[1] The designation New Architecture comes from Jeffrey Kipnis's essay "Towards A New Architecture," which appeared in a 1993 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN monograph entitled *Folding in Architecture*. The title of Kipnis's article is a knowingly ironic reference to Frederick Etchells' 1927 mis-translation of the title of the first English publication of the Swiss modernist architect Le Corbusier's classic 1923 polemic *Vers Une Architecture (*literally, towards an architecture, or towards one architecture), and Kipnis’s essay is one of several by different authors that refer directly to Colin Rowe's work in the course of attempting to address and promote a variety of avant-garde themes. In autumn 1994 a more than slightly weird effort by the Eisenman party to plunder and salt Rowe's intellectual legacy appeared in issue 7/8 of *Architecture New York* / *ANY*, where in the guise of a *festschrift*, editor Cynthia Davidson and guest editor Robert Somol cast Rowe as Lear, and themselves as Goneril and Regan.

[2] Architecture schools today [i.e., the late 1990s when this essay was written] are largely though not exclusively divided between embracing critical theory and embracing sustainability as the ideological "next best thing." In some instances, critical theory presents itself (usually implicitly, but always ironically) as the best foundation [sic] for sustainability; and sustainability in turn

That the partisans of these different ideologies all claim a connection to Rowe is not necessarily irrational, nor indicative that they have completely misunderstood his work; but it does suggest they are focusing upon those aspects of Rowe's work that suit their own ideological proclivities, oblivious to a larger complexity of vision perhaps present therein.[3]

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sometimes presents itself as a kind of critical theory. Critical theory however, by its own logic---e.g., its views of the primacy of the will-to-power, and of the "constructedness" of nature---is notoriously poor soil for a theory of sustainability or, for that matter, of a just social pluralism, each of which is arguably better grounded in traditional western religious views of the created character of man and nature and their relationship to each other and to God.

[3] Or some may just be ideological opportunists attempting to build careers by tormenting a lion in winter. One of the more amazing deceptions (or self-deceptions; or confusions) of the critical theorists has been their propensity to present themselves publicly as simultaneously “anti-foundational” and “socially concerned.” Their enterprise is self-consciously Nietzschean, displaying that sensibility characterized by Paul Ricoeur as a "hermeneutic of suspicion," and by Nietzsche himself as "the art of mis-trust." The critical theorist refrain is familiar and predictable: architecture is always and everywhere a manifestation of political power (in our day Euro-centric, racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.); power is the only game in town; what is commonly regarded as justice disguises power interests; what is celebrated as charity conceals the resentment and will-to-power of the weak; what look like "communities" are provisional affiliations that knowingly or unknowingly mask the self-interest of individuals, etc.

Of course, if the critical theorists are right about all this (or even if they only think they are), their architectural enterprise has a serious public relations problem. For this is a bandwagon upon which only a fool would jump—unless, of course, one sees oneself as the driver. This may also explain the otherwise incongruous "justice and compassion" political agenda of some New Architecture apologists, an agenda comparable perhaps to the phenomenon of poorly civilized men who become "sensitive" to women's issues as a sexual gambit. Nietzsche, I suspect, would have mercilessly ridiculed any such "just" or "compassionate" agenda undertaken sincerely; though undertaken insincerely he might well have admired it as a strategy.

But if the motives of the New Architecture apologists are suspect, it need not be only by virtue of the cogency of their own recent theories of suspicion. Suspicion is, after all, an ancient and useful human attitude. The *Gospel According to Matthew* reports Jesus advising his followers to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves," a semiticism suggesting that Christians are not obligated to be naive about the character of their adversaries (or themselves), only to try to love them.

What then is the New Architecture *really* about? Several things, it seems; or, by its own logic, anything. From the standpoint of its apologists the New Architecture seems to be about emotivism and difference, about an architecture that, in the words of [former] Columbia School of Architecture Dean Bernard Tschumi, "means *nothing* [original emphasis], an architecture of the signifier rather than the signified;" or of an architecture that (in words Kipnis has used to characterize the work of Peter Eisenman) "no longer seeks to embody any specific meaning...but rather to create a formal and material environment capable of engendering many meanings." And such an architecture would indeed have affinities with an individualist / therapeutic society such as some say ours has become.

From my point of view--which holds that architecture truly does engender many meanings but *always* (at least) represents Power, and aspires to represent Legitimate Authority--the New Architecture aspires to embody and symbolize an authoritative cultural narrative that grants to

In what follows, I propose to consider and dispute recent critical theorist readings of Colin Rowe; to in turn discuss Rowe's work in terms of an ancient and living intellectual tradition that both informs and is implicit within it; and finally to outline briefly that tradition's understanding of both nature and human nature, and its implications for a "sustainable" city and landscape. In moving from the theories of Colin Rowe to this ancient intellectual tradition, I am not assuming for myself Rowe's blessing; but neither am I willfully, nor even "playfully," mis-reading him. I think the legitimacy of my assessment of Rowe depends in part on whether Rowe would in some significant way recognize himself in my characterization of his work. Moreover, rather than seeking to "deconstruct" that work, I am suggesting a larger intellectual and cultural context within which Rowe's own urban ambitions---and, *mutatis mutandis*, better environmental stewardship---might have a better chance to succeed.

Colin Rowe and the New Architects

Gilbert Chesterton once wrote that man may be defined as the animal that makes dogmas; and that there are two kinds of people: those who are doctrinal and know it, and those who are doctrinal and do not. Together with Alasdair MacIntyre's observations that we are by our nature tellers of stories and by our history tellers of stories that aspire to truth, these summarize much of what is true about critical theorist notions of narratives and texts, without falling prey to their anti-realist conclusion that all such narratives and texts are necessarily "fictions." In Chesterton's and MacIntyre's socially grounded / philosophical realist view, all human theories and narratives are constructs; but they are constructs capable of discerning and revealing truth, albeit not necessarily the whole truth. Theories and narratives can also, of course, be false; and particular theories may be judged more or less true by their ability to account adequately for larger rather than smaller bodies of facts.

In architectural circles, Colin Rowe's prestige among and influence as a teacher and theorist upon at least two generations of architects are about as self-evident as facts can be. But as Talking Heads singer David Byrne once staccatoed ("Cross-eyed and Painless") there is this peculiar thing about facts:

> Facts all come with points of view /
> [but] facts don't do what I want them to…

---which suggests that, like all facts, the particular fact of Rowe's influence derives its significance from some kind of theoretical context.

Colin Rowe was not commonly (or happily) associated with the critical theory / New Architecture project; but given the facts both of Rowe's pervasive influence and the

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each person permission to live an experimental life. In this view, making architecture necessarily entails complicity with Power; and would raise as a moral issue the question of Authority---power deemed trustworthy for the pursuit of shared ends---among New Architects, did the latter not view their enterprise in differential and emotivist terms. For the logic of difference and emotivism necessarily leads to the collapse of "morality" into aesthetics. Questions of "values" become questions of taste; and by this logic one cannot help but see the desire for a *New* Architecture as a fetish, an aesthetic hunger for "newness" for which any justifying theory is just frosting.

nature of today's theory wars, it is hardly surprising that New Architecture apologists have theories that purport to explain the substance and significance of Rowe's work. New York architect Greg Lynn, for example, placed *Collage City* (1978) in a theory continuum that began with Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) and ran through Mark Wigley's and Philip Johnson's *Deconstructivist Architecture* (1988). According to Lynn, a common theme of these books is

> the production [through collage] of heterogeneous, fragmented, and conflicting formal systems [that attempt] to embody the differences within and between diverse physical, cultural, and social contexts…[4]

Lynn having thus linked Rowe to deconstructivism, other New Architecture theorists note that throughout the last quarter century of architecture and urban design a primary compositional strategy among architects of various theoretical persuasions has been that of collage, which in late twentieth century architectural theory has been a methodology identified first and foremost with Colin Rowe. According to the critical theorists however, the allegedly ground clearing work of deconstructivism has now--in less than ten years--run its course. Jeffrey Kipnis declares collage to be "exhausted;"[5] and Kenneth Powell finds it "inadequately retrograde" [sic] with respect to the novelty and diversity agendas of the New Architecture.[6] In other words, although these theorists allege that Rowe was important for a recent deconstructivist design methodology now spent, their ultimate attitude toward Rowe may be summarized most succinctly as: Thanks, Colin; see ya later. Whether or not Lynn, Kipnis, and Powell are aware that their own position exhibits a residual Hegelian historicism considerably older even than Rowe, we shall soon see that there is more than a little irony in this theory war turn of events.

My own reading of Rowe, though also likely to have raised the eyebrows of Rowe and to raise those of his admirers, is unlike the New Architects' theory insofar as it is genuinely sympathetic to Rowe's own professed urban and architectural objectives. These objectives may be summarized as a moral and aesthetic commitment to the social and formal orders of the traditional city; and this city is to be understood as a common enterprise through time embodying the individual and collective memories and hopes of its citizens---in part and not least through architectural gestures sometimes properly retrospective and sometimes properly innovative. Moreover, if and where I depart from Rowe, it is in service to these aforementioned objectives, shoring up his arguments at precisely those points where their disrepair threatens his architectural and urban purposes.

Note first therefore that although Rowe originally advocated collage as a design methodology appropriate for the formal ordering of the anti-totalitarian city,[7] *Collage City*

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[4] Greg Lynn, "Architectural Curvilinearity," *Folding in Architecture*, page 8.

[5] Jeffrey Kipnis, "Towards a New Architecture," *Folding in Architecture*, page 42.

[6] Kenneth Powell, "Unfolding Folding," *Folding in Architecture*, page 7.

[7] See especially *Collage City*, pages 118-149.

makes clear that he harbors no illusions about either the possibility or the desirability of what one might call the new "city of difference" that appears to be an animating ideal of the New Architects.[8] For if Rowe is rightly linked with the idea and practice of urban collage, his less remarked upon anthropology (by which I mean nothing more and nothing less than his view of human nature) together with his view of the city imply a severe and emphatic critique of the New Architecture project, a critique that is ultimately both ironic and *theological*. The critique is ironic because Rowe's work to an extent inadvertently *does* lend itself to the New Architecture's agenda of the new and different; and it does so largely because of Rowe's refusal or inability to be theological.

Every theology implies an anthropology. Stated differently, every theory of God implies a theory of human nature. And although it is debatable whether every anthropology implies a theology, Rowe's own anthropology is in certain key features clearly biblical (both Jewish and Christian), and therefore at least suggests certain theological questions. But first we must consider: In what ways is Rowe's anthropology biblical? Briefly, in his view of man (male and female) as a being endowed with free will; whose moral fate is not determined, but who persistently demonstrates an inability to perfect himself in virtue; whose daily existence is animated by both memory and hope; who desires and finds goodness in both individual freedom and communal membership; and who in his collective existence in history is capable of both progress and regress in his attempts to discover and attain his well being.

Being a master of the oblique and indirect reference, Rowe does not articulate outright the anthropology outlined above so much as he suggests it in *Collage City*'s Introduction and first chapters. These chapters critique the truncated view of human nature and the determinist philosophy of progress that together underlay modernist urbanism, the inadequacies of which prompted Rowe's aforementioned rejection of modernist ideology. And it is clear from the argument of *Collage City* that one of Rowe's primary intellectual ambitions was to promote both literal and metaphorical urban space for the individual human being. *Collage City* was a protest against "the [architectural] rape of the great cities of the world"[9] then occurring under a rubric of "urban renewal" grounded intellectually in a politically coercive, pseudo-scientific, allegedly universalist ideology called modernism.

Admittedly, the New Architecture crowd purports to share Rowe's anti-universalist intent. Nevertheless, they differ in that Rowe neither shares the individualist view of human nature that informs the *nouvelle* architectural and urban agendas, nor enthuses over its urban consequences. That Rowe finds hegemonic individualism no less a threat to the good city than hegemonic universality is indicated in his 1984 tribute to traditionalist architect and urbanist Leon Krier, where Rowe writes that

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[8] To the extent that we are already moving as a culture towards such an urban ideal, C.S. Lewis nearly fifty years ago in his introduction to *The Screwtape Letters* provided a prescient account of its emerging social reality, as "a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self importance, and resentment"---except, of course, that Lewis was purporting to be describing Hell.

[9] *Collage City*, page 8.

> in the last thirty years or so, we have witnessed environmental nightmares of which, in the liberal world of 1900, it was impossible to conceive. That admirable High Bourgeois and slightly Jewish *ambiente* which initiated Modernism has forever gone away. We are entirely separated from its ethos. Instead we live in a hedonistic condition of vulgar debauch, satisfying to neither sense nor mind. All standards are diminished by an horrendous *laissez-faire*; and it is in this predicament that a concern such as [Krier's for the traditional city] deserves respect.[10]

If one takes Rowe's writings and career at face value, neither his aversion to modern urbanist universalism nor his aversion to what I am calling the New Architecture individualist city of difference are due to any constitutional antipathy to "the new." Instead Rowe avers because his more complex anthropology requires a more complex urbanism. Rowe's preferred city is a common enterprise that exists for and makes possible a common good, viz., the physical and spiritual well being of its individual citizens. It is therefore not only a place of individual freedom, but also of obligation and belonging. In this city there is by necessity (as a fact) some correspondence between moral order and formal order, and ought to be by affinity (as an aspiration) some correspondence between goodness and beauty. And it is precisely because the moral order of the good city ought to take into account the *fact* of perennial human desires for freedom and belonging, for diversity and unity, that Rowe makes his eloquent urban formalist appeal

> for order and disorder, for the simple and the complex, for the joint existence of permanent reference and random happening, of the private and the public, of *innovation and tradition* [emphasis added], of both the retrospective and the prophetic gesture.[11]

Refusing Theology

Whereas Rowe's critique of modernist urbanism is grounded in an implicit biblical view of human nature, his proposed corrective urban design strategy refers explicitly to Jewish and Christian views of history and eschatology. That corrective strategy is widely and correctly understood to be collage, but it is collage of a highly specific kind: the grafting of ideal forms or recognizable fragments thereof (symbolizing and embodying "hope") into pre-existing urban contexts (symbolizing and embodying "memory"). Rowe explicitly rejects the coercive and politically prescriptive utopia of Hegel, Marx, and modernism, in the hope of regaining the social and aesthetic benefits of the pre-Enlightenment classical / religious utopia ("*Revelation* plus *The Republic,* or the *Timaeus* plus a vision of the New Jerusalem") that functioned as "an object of contemplation...a detached reference...an informing power...more of a heuristic device than any form of directly applicable political instrument."[12] Unlike the critical theorists therefore, Rowe's approach

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[10] Colin Rowe, "Revolt of the Senses," *Leon Krier: Houses Palaces, Cities* (London, Academy Editions, 1984), p 9.

[11] *Collage City*, page 8.

[12] *Collage City*, page 14.

to collage is "utopian;" but it is emphatically *not* the utopia of modernism. Rowe's utopian collage[13] is a method of and piecemeal approach to the design of urban and architectural form that preserves and extends the traditional city's dual purposes as both a "theater of memory" and a "theater of prophecy," simultaneously permitting citizens "the enjoyment of Utopian poetics without...the embarrassment of Utopian politics."[14]

Here, however, is the rub. For after premising the entire argument of *Collage City* upon a critical and informed (albeit implicit) biblical view of human nature, Rowe concludes by praising collage as "a method deriving its virtue from its irony, because it seems to be a technique for using things and *simultaneously disbelieving in them*"[15]—a small concession to his own mandarin skeptical temperament, but one with some large and (both culturally and for Rowe himself) dismaying implications. For in many circles irony has come to be virtually conflated with art, if not with intellect itself; and this early profession of irony's virtues has inevitably---and in the eyes of some traditionalists (though not me), damnably---linked Rowe to post-modern culture, and been not the mask but rather more like the boots the critical theory crowd have worn to walk all over Rowe.

Leon Wieseltier, long time literary editor of *The New Republic*, sagely observed that irony used to have an aspect of courage, when inconsistency was an occasion for pain--as it surely was in the culture of modern architecture from which *Collage City* was written and Rowe was in the process of leaving. Nevertheless, we find at the very climax of this remarkable and intellectually courageous work of architectural and urban theory (i.e., *Collage City*, a work both self conscious of its philosophical and theological foundations, and clearly committed to high---though not necessarily aristocratic---cultural and aesthetic standards) what is, in context, a curious though not entirely unpredictable refusal *entirement* of metaphysics and theology. Unfortunately for both Rowe's high standards and his avowed urban purposes, this refusal has proven problematic. For must not Rowe's own professed dismay at being associated with deconstructivism and New Architecture be due in part to their apologists' brazen lifting of intellectual fragments from Rowe's work to unbelievingly collage into their own? And if one has high urban purposes and standards, is not the ultimate problem with advocating the disbelieving use of things for purposes of architectural and urban collage *precisely* that there are a nearly infinite number of collagistically useful things (utopian or otherwise) in which to disbelieve?

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[13] Given the trivialization of "post-modern" architecture that has occurred subsequent to the publication of Rowe's theories, and especially the flaunting of fragmentation and collage, the utopian substance of the collage methodology that Rowe advocates cannot be emphasized too strongly. Indeed, it is tempting here to think of collage itself as a prescriptive metaphor rather than, or as well as, a prescriptive method. Rowe himself compares his understanding of collage to Samuel Johnson's definition of wit as "the unexpected copulation of ideas, the discovery of some occult relation between images in appearance remote from each other" (*Collage City*, page 148). Are not wit and collage both however simply special and distinguishable instances of a currently most unfashionable understanding of mental activity in general that sees all new ordered and creative thought as the product of an active mind's encounter with some thing or things external to it? Calling Aristotle; anybody home…?

[14] *Collage City*, page 149.

[15] *Collage City*, page 149, emphasis added.

This raises what seems to me an unavoidable question. Given Rowe's apparent rock bottom and *un*-ironic commitment to a certain kind of traditional urbanism, can the practice of *bricolage* be a genuine urban virtue and benefit if it is employed without what Rowe calls "utopian" reference and belief? Such belief was and is ostensibly absent in the work of the critical theorists. Nevertheless, the critical theorists have happily advocated and / or employed collage to produce "heterogeneous, fragmented, and conflicting formal systems [that attempt] to embody the differences within and between diverse physical, cultural, and social contexts;"[16] and have claimed they are just following Colin Rowe's lead in doing so. So let us ponder this perhaps not so amusing irony: in the absence of "utopian" belief, *Collage City*'s ideal character type, the unbelieving ironist / *bricoleur*, may not be capable of mounting a coherent intellectual defense of the formal order of his preferred city against critical theory's individualism and glorification of the will-to-power.

I have argued that Colin Rowe's anthropology, and much of his view of history, was biblical. Why was it not explicitly theological? Is it because Rowe conscientiously held his views of human nature and history independent of the theology of the religious traditions within which they originated? Or is it that Rowe simply *assumed* these views, and held them as habits of mind rather than examined convictions? And how is it that late in his career Rowe saw his work used to explain and justify an architectural movement the intentions of which he understood to be so clearly contrary to his own? About all this I can only speculate; but with respect to his anthropology, his urbanism, and his absent theology, it is tempting to understand Rowe (and his many Cornell School *protégés*) as the last of the Anglo-American Enlightenment urbanists, and the critical theorists' city-of-difference as Anglo-American Enlightenment urbanism's unintended but logical dead end.

However liberal and humane in intent their own politics, and however literally urbane the habits of traditional urban space-making evident in their projects and built work, neither Rowe nor his *protégés* have been able so far to articulate a theory of things rationally capable of sustaining the formal order (and thereby the moral order---or perhaps it's vice-versa) of the traditional city as a common cultural enterprise. They have clearly and articulately defended both the traditional city and the validity of innovative urban interventions; but they have not so clearly and articulately explained *why* these deserve to be defended. As a result, both their written and architectural work represent a kind of holding action against, but inextricably entwined with, the culture of individualism embodied in (among other things) critical theory / New Architecture. And however admirable and tolerant this receding Anglo-American Enlightenment urbanism worldview, like all humane worldviews its vigor depends upon the teaching of urban virtues grounded in coherent urban *doctrines*---good habits of city-making rooted in reality tested theories about the nature of building, the nature of the city, and (not least) human nature. Lose these doctrines, and the eventual loss of the habits seems certain to follow.

This loss has in fact been proceeding apace for some time, dramatically so since 1945.

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[16] See footnote 4 above.

As expressions of it, I could cite both mainstream media and various avant-garde architectural affirmations of an emerging "post-urban" condition (usually a celebration of the formal fragmentation of so called "edge cities"). Such affirmations are important---and depending upon your point of view, unfortunate---because they represent both popular and theoretical justifications for fifty-year-old sprawl habits of building and land use still being developed. But let me instead refer to something more immediate and personal.

My family and I lived modestly but comfortably for nearly twenty years in the same traditional Chicago neighborhood. It is pedestrian friendly, ethnically diverse, and lower middle to upper middle class; and is a convenient, affordable,[17] more or less beautiful, and occasionally sacramentally "charged" place to live, work, shop, learn, worship, play, and even drive. It has many of the formal features of what Colin Rowe regarded as good urbanism---*but virtually every one of these features was created before 1930*. American culture simply no longer produces such physical environments, except (very rarely) as enclaves for the wealthy. And not only do Americans seem decreasingly tolerant of the physical and social densities of traditional urbanism; we also seem increasingly tolerant of the significant *inconveniences* that contemporary suburban life requires in exchange for the cultural ideal of the single family home and two car garage on the (minimum) half-acre suburban lot.

Now, only in part here is my point to question once again this suburban ideal. Tocqueville warned long ago of an American tendency (which he regarded as inherent to democracy) toward individualism, and of its dangers not only to American democratic government but to the souls of Americans. Nevertheless, although post-World War II suburbanization is perhaps the quintessential physical expression of this tendency, the free associations that Tocqueville identified as the remedy for individualism flourish (more or less) in the suburbs as well as the city; though in the suburbs you're more likely to have to drive to whichever ones require greater propinquity than e-mail. My larger point is that physical environments reflect the character of their makers; and that the character of their makers reflects some better or worse, some more coherent or less coherent, some more true or less true understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world.

It is thus not inconsequential for the future of traditional urbanism that some of the most influential arguments on its behalf---arguments such as Colin Rowe's---are grounded not in a metaphysic or theology representing a culture of shared *belief*, but rather in an agnosticism emblematic of a culture of shared *unbelief*. Intellectuals can and do abstract and make distinctions between particular academic disciplines; just as architects can consider separately the durability, convenience, and beauty of buildings; or baseball managers consider separately the arts of hitting, pitching, and fielding. But the genuine scholar, the good architect, and the seasoned baseball manager all understand the complex interrelationship of things both within and beyond their disciplines. Architecture and urbanism are only apparently and partially independent of theology and metaphysics and the communal and ritual contexts from which these arise; and persons who seek to sustain and extend the pleasures of traditional urbanism will

[17] This was true when written in the late 1990s, but is less so now since the neighborhood was “discovered” by the urban gentry.

learn sooner or later that individualist culture can consume but will not produce a public square.

Thus Colin Rowe and the last Enlightenment urbanists perhaps resemble no one so much as their eighteenth and nineteenth century philosopher counterparts (Immanuel Kant most famously), many of whom had lost their religious beliefs but nevertheless retained their religiously derived habits of morality, and sought to justify the content of that morality on rational secular grounds. For just as certain habits of Christian morality persisted in nineteenth century high culture long after the Christian beliefs in which they originated had eroded, so did traditional urban formal preferences and habits of mind persist into the late twentieth century among the Anglo-American Enlightenment urbanists long after the decline of traditional urban civilization---i.e., a civilization of communal commitment---and the rise of therapeutic individualism began to manifest themselves physically in cities and suburbs after 1945.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche's primary intellectual achievement to expose the emptiness and futility of the Enlightenment moral philosophers' enterprise; and philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981) and subsequent works has made a powerful and provocative case that Nietzsche must be seen as *both* the foremost critic *and* the individualist culmination of Enlightenment "rationality." (In just this way, incidentally, I think that Peter Eisenman's post-humanist / post-rational architecture is also simultaneously both post-modernist and the culmination of modernism.) It should not surprise anyone therefore that critical theorists, Nietzsche's late-twentieth century intellectual heirs, have been leading a formal and intellectual attack upon both the traditional (religious) city and to a lesser extent the modernist city of secular rationalism. But is the critical theorist view of human nature, and of the city that follows from that view, adequate to the facts of what Rowe (referring, in a moment of unguarded dogmatism, to the human propensities to both remember and hope) has called our "known psychological constitution?"[18] MacIntyre is only one of a number of contemporary post-Enlightenment thinkers who find the Nietzschean attack upon Enlightenment rationalist morality convincing, but Nietzsche's own aestheticist morality and anthropology deficient precisely at the point that it dismisses the pleasure of agreement and the ubiquity of human associations as nothing but masks for the will-to-power.

These conclusions have led MacIntyre first to a reconsideration of Aristotelian moral philosophy, and subsequently to a reconsideration of theology. I suggest there are corresponding practical and theoretical implications for architecture, the city, and the way human beings understand nature. And it is in this complex and nettlesome issue of the public, physical, and environmental consequences of theology and communal faith that I think the work of Colin Rowe continues to be germane.

Thinking Theologically: Why and How

Colin Rowe was a self-proclaimed aesthete, and professed no religious belief. Regarding urban issues, however, Rowe's writings reveal him to have been---whether by habit or intellectual conviction—an out-of-the-closet moralist. I here contend that both Rowe's moralism and his aestheticism require some kind of

[18] *Collage City*, page 49.

metaphysic, in the absence of which his moralism is indeed *merely* aestheticism---which as a consequence makes his work intellectually vulnerable to opportunistic post-modern *bricoleurs* for urban purposes quite contrary to his own.

From *Collage City* we know that Rowe regards the human propensity for hope as a hard fact, a constituent element of human nature; and Rowe appears himself to possess that theological virtue. Regarding faith however ("the assurance of things hoped for," as the *Epistle to the Hebrews* would have it), Rowe demurs, "having not…that gift." At issue here is less the private matter, however important, of the state of Colin Rowe's (or anyone else's) soul than the very public matter of whether "the enjoyment of Utopian poetics" in architecture, urbanism, or culture generally can long survive the absence of some shared religious belief and its intellectual articulation. So the pertinent question here is a variant of Philip Rieff's in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*: not whether habitually civilized men like Colin Rowe can believe, but quite precisely whether habitually unbelieving (or indiscriminately believing) generations of men and women to follow can become, literally, civilized, i.e. "of the city."

The would be contemporary culture of individualism tends toward what C.S. Lewis has called "the abolition of Man;" and is what Rieff has called an "impossible culture"---impossible anthropologically, in that every known human culture requires measures of legitimate authority, measures of external constraint, and measures of internal repression / sublimation that individualism aspires to abolish. But the human aspiration for freedom, which individualism represents in exaggerated form, exists in tension with equally perennial human aspirations for both justice and belonging. And given *these* facts, surely more remains to be said about the implications of Rowe's observations about the favorable cultural and aesthetic effects of a long term, shared, and implicitly religious vision of utopia on the one hand, accompanied on the other by the sober recognition that utopia is not entirely achievable by human beings in human history. For if the aforementioned vision is the source, inspiration, and objective of most traditional urban culture, the latter recognition is the safeguard against those presumptuous fanaticisms (religious *and* secular) that seek to establish, by coercion if necessary, utopia in its fullness here and now.

This "more to be said" is, strictly speaking, a task for theology; and any theology worth taking seriously will itself take seriously precisely these two issues (i.e., the inspirational vision and the cautionary recognition), as biblical theology---Jewish and Christian---has long done. Any serious theology will likewise attempt to articulate the extent to which human beings and human institutions (religious *and* secular) are and are not competent to govern ourselves, each other and the world. But there is something else. If architects, and especially architectural theorists, are themselves to be intellectually serious, they would do better to not shrink from the theological questions raised by their own aesthetic and intellectual explorations and preoccupations.

This is especially so for those who value Colin Rowe's view of cities and urban culture. If it is true, as Yale professor of architecture Patrick Pinnell once suggested to me, that most architectural theory aspires to theology, it seems equally true that theology uninformed by faith tends toward thin gruel and small beer. The 19th century Christian existentialist Soren Kierkegaard wrote of faith as a "leap," a favored metaphor for college sophomores and doubt-plagued secular intellectuals ever since. But if it may be allowed

that a robust faith is in part non-rational, and in any case certainly not something that modern secular rationality can cook up at will, neither faith nor the actions it inspires are necessarily irrational. Indeed, though they obviously cannot limit themselves to the epistemological canons of modern science, there are venerable biblical traditions that understand faith itself as a kind of knowledge. To describe the character of religious faith and how it is acquired, as well as the Other toward Whom faith is directed, is also a task for theology; and it is possible to theologize from a number of starting points: from the traditional "faith seeking understanding" of St. Anselm, but also from the peculiarly modern vantage point of a partial, empirically-formed understanding seeking (or at least open to) the fuller understanding of faith.

Anyone theologizing from within a Jewish or Christian context will have to account sooner or later for the category and status of revelation, and for the authority of extraordinary religious experience. But both within and outside the Judaeo-Christian orbit are modes of natural theology that are inductive rather than deductive, that work as it were from the bottom up rather than the top down, attentive to the possibility of what Peter Berger (in his prescient and still provocative 1968 book *A Rumor of Angels*) has called "signals of transcendence." This approach is surely not for everyone, but may be especially well suited for intellectuals habitually suspicious of "organized religion" who have nevertheless grown uneasy about the cultural, urban, and environmental consequences of secularist habits of thought. Not everyone comes to faith like St. Paul, knocked from a horse and temporarily blinded on the road to Damascus. Some are moved toward faith slowly if not fitfully over a lifetime, from a preponderance of accumulated evidence, drawing inferences through what John Henry Newman called the “illative sense” and ending their days with a calm certitude about things it is by definition impossible to know with certainty.

The starting points of any natural theology would by definition be grounded in everyday "socially constructed" consciousness rather than any exceptional religious experience. Such points might be located (as I have tried myself to suggest here) in architecture, urban theory, and design; or in philosophical anthropology, physics, or cosmology; or possibly even the structure of language, as Nietzsche himself backhandedly acknowledged in his telling comment, quoted by MacIntyre, that "I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar."[19] And while religious faith originating in and nourished by attentiveness to such experiences would hardly constitute proof of a sacred order in which human beings and the natural order are participants, at the very least a certain care and humility in our observations of the world and of all that is Other would represent a necessary first step in our escape from the metaphysical solitary confinement of individualist culture and its consequences---not least its anti-urban consequences and its utilitarian view of nature.

Nevertheless, even from this more tentative and "inductive" starting point, it is worth looking again at established theological traditions, *not* presuming at the outset their authoritative status, but rather because they represent some four millennia of sustained human reflection upon issues and experiences that continue to press upon us even now.

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[19] Quoted in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), page 67.

As Peter Berger (contemplating exactly this circumstance) has written:

> It is not only insufferable arrogance to think that one can begin theologizing in sovereign disregard of [theological] history; it is also extremely uneconomical. It seems rather a waste of time to spend, say, five years working out a position, only to find that it has already been done by a Syrian monk in the fifth century. The very least that a knowledge of religious traditions has to offer is a catalogue of heresies for possible home use.[20]

There are few architectural thinkers from the past half-century whose thought is as suggestive as Colin Rowe's; and I hope it is evident from the preceding how my own conviction that Rowe's ideas are best sustained, taught and enlarged in an extended tradition of western metaphysical realism is in fact consistent with Rowe's own life's work. It is necessary to make this argument in part because it has become fashionable for the neo-avant garde to dismiss Colin Rowe's ideas about nature, human nature, and urban formal order as *passé,* sometimes by critics incapable of understanding Rowe in the first place, but sometimes by critics who understand quite clearly the foundational and anti-individualist implications of Rowe's work. But it is also necessary because even traditionalists can be subject to intellectual laziness, and may too easily forget how Rowe's ideas can work to enrich both traditional architecture and traditional urbanism

Perhaps only in the peculiar media culture that is ours is it necessary to think of reclaiming the work of a seminal thinker such as Rowe so close to his own lifetime. Nevertheless, the retention today of Rowe's notions of the willfulness of human nature, of the creative act as grounded in history, and of the city as a theater of both memory and hope, probably requires their relocation within a larger metaphysic that includes coherent accounts of human historicity, creativity, imperfectability, memory, hope, and their relations to each other. It has been said that Thomas Aquinas's synthesis of Aristotelian natural philosophy and biblical revelation was a historic reclamation of Aristotelian thought tantamount to a baptism of Aristotle. Whether or not a similar relocation of Rowe's work to a theological context would constitute another such baptism, here I merely note that much more than either late modernity or post-modernity, both Jewish and Christian theology provide a metaphysic congenial to the architectural and urban theories of Colin Rowe.

My own hope is that it is for a more spiritually and intellectually promising land, and its aesthetic manifestations in our earthly cities and landscapes, that Colin Rowe labored, possibly unintending; or, like Moses, that he was leading the way toward territory into which he himself never entered, on behalf of future communities among whom he will be long and deservedly honored. And if in tribute I may conclude in the manner of *Collage City*: This would be to say that in spite of his own refusal of theology, the intellectual implications and the architectural and urban legacy of Colin Rowe continue to unfold. Which is further to suggest that because of the anthropology and metaphysic of the city it espouses, and the theology of nature it implies, the work of Colin Rowe---far from being dismissible as an outdated theory of design---may rightly endure as a touchstone for the best of future thinking about architecture, nature, and the city; perhaps even

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[20] Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1968), page 78.

fueling Rowe's concluding hope for a "reality of change, motion, action, and history," but now directed knowingly towards that enduring, free, diverse, and all inclusive Jerusalem which by any other name remains the object of our longing.

An earlier version of this essay was first published in August 2000 in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, & Society*, Volume 20, Number 4.