Architectural Feud! The Link Between Adhocism, Collage City, and the Radical Picturesque

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This paper explores a disciplinary feud between theoretical figures of 20th century architectural discourse, and discovers an overlooked and forgotten architectural discourse on the city. The participants of the feud included Nathan Silver and Charles Jencks (authors of Adhocism) on one side of the fight, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (authors of "Collage City") on the other, and Reyner Banham who entered the fray in the middle as a mediator. While the feud was quite stinging-it consisted of an accusation of plagiarism from Nathan Silver-it was completely forgotten. This was because the fight occurred in the letters to the editor section of Architectural Review in 1975, with each jab and blow delayed across three different editions. Yet it is worth looking at since it links these two unexpectedly comparable projects-namely Adhocism and Collage City—with a very unlikely yet similar third project brought into the discussion by Reyner Banham. This third project was Hubert de Cronin Hastings's theory he described as a Radical Picturesque which he details as an architectural manifesto for designing and reconstructing the post war English city. Radical Picturesque was described in Hastings's article "Townscape" and published in Architectural Review in 1949. The article's namesake and surface-level ideas lead to Gordon Cullen's book The Concise Townscape (which was indeed inspired by Hastings's original article), but it can be argued that the original text coupled with Banham's link to Adhocism and "Collage City," was not fully nor sufficiently realized in Cullen's book or subsequent iterations of the Townscape movement. These three theories for the design of the city, when looked at together, has the potential to shed new light on 20th century architectural discourse on the city. This paper seeks to illuminate the original ideas that were a part of the Radical Picturesque in order to reinsert an architectural project on the city that was lost to dominant postwar architectural discourse.

INSTIGATING A FEUD - HOW COLLAGE CITY PROVOKED A FIGHT

In 1975 Architectural Review published an abbreviated version of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's book Collage City. The editorial board of Architectural Review¹ introduced the article and enthusiastically voiced their support of Rowe, calling him a "visiting fireman," a "longstanding AR contributor, [who] is at once entertaining and distinguished, and holds views we substantially share."² Their use the term "fireman" was intentional, and communicated their collective opinion that both the discipline of architecture and the design of the city were in a state of crisis. Over the past few decades the publication had published multiple articles that defined the problem as a lack of design that had lead to visual disorder as the city rapidly changed and expanded. Articles like "Outrage," for instance, catalogued in great detail the problematic elements and structures within the postwar city.³ Likewise, the "Townscape" series, which spanned multiple years, encouraged better planning methods that took into account a nostalgic view of the English city, utilizing it as a source of design precedent. By 1975 the publication sought new strategies and methodologies for how architecture could approach the design of the city, and therefore Rowe had been called in to formulate a pathway out of this self-identified conundrum. The editors welcomed Rowe's theory, and saw "Collage City" as a possible remedy, stating:

"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 fullness, there have been many partial opportunities and the notion has provided the excuse for an immense amount of city destruction."

The "total planning" doctrine the editors are responding to was a dominant thread of discourse within the disciplines of architecture and urban planning. These projects, ranging from masterplans to megastructures, were united behind a similar ambition, one that CIAM 8 described as a "need for integration and co-ordination of all city planning activities to stop chaotic growth."⁴ Architectural Review, acting as a widely distributed medium that could communicate and influence specific points of view within architectural discourse aligned with Rowe's ambition to conceive of an architectural project that could take on the problem of the city. "Collage City" also created an alternative approach to "total planning," not only scaling down architecture's response to the postwar city, but articulating a design language that created friction with the mainstream planning doctrines of the time. The editorial board explicitly state that Rowe "holds views we substantially share." ⁵ It could then be assumed that

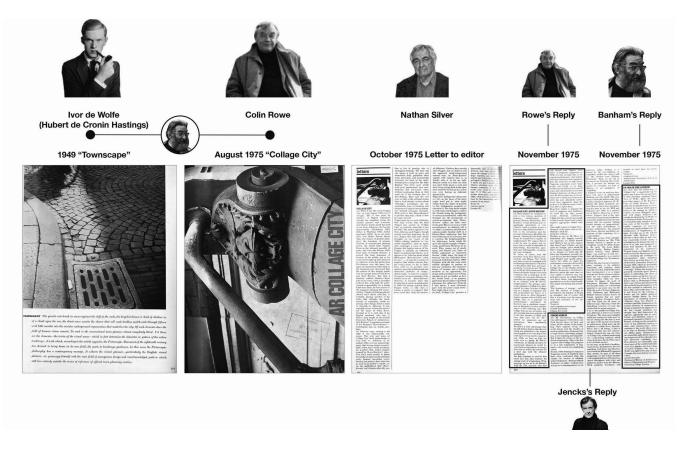


Figure 1. Diagram showing the timeline that includes the feud between the authors of "Collage City" and Adhocism.

Rowe was also in agreement about there being a crisis within the discipline as it pertains to the design and influence of the city. With the article split into different sections that begins with "Utopia: Decline and Fall?" and "The Crisis of the Object: Predicament of Texture," we can assume that Rowe took his role as "fireman" seriously.

FEUD: THE ACCUSATION BY NATHAN SILVER

Despite this alignment and endorsement of "Collage City," and despite the spirit of collaboration over a common discursive problem that was evident in the editor's introduction, a letter to the editor was published in the next issue of *Architectural Review*, in October 1975, accusing the Rowe's article of plagiarism. The author of the letter, Nathan Silver, claimed that Rowe and Koetter's "Collage City" shared too many of the same concepts and ideas with his book *Adhocism*, which he co-authored with Charles Jencks. Silver's letter begins:

"When I saw the words "Collage City" on your August 1975 cover I thought, 'Ah! A new piece by Charles!' I flipped backwards through the magazine noting the familiar pictures and comments that Charles Jencks and I had used in our book Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation (Doubleday 1972; Secker & Warburg 1972; Anchor paperback 1973)."⁶ He continued on in his letter to glibly accuse Rowe and Koetter of plagiarism in an abrasive, sarcastic tone. The accusation was embedded within a make-believed narrative that Jencks had repurposed some of their ideas from *Adhocism*, repackaged these ideas in the "Collage City" article, and used the pseudonyms of Rowe and Koetter. The letter questioned the originality of the ideas and design methods articulated in the article, and demanded that they should have cited *Adhocism* in multiple instances. The letter was less a provocation in the realm of a disciplinary dialogue about the city, and more of a personal attack.

In *Adhocism*, Silver and Jencks constructed an architectural manifesto that imagined a new design methodology arising from informal moments of design, including the act of improvisation. Given this informal method of design it was promoting, it is curious that Silver is so adamant about when ideas should or should not be attributed among his colleagues. Why, for example, is Rowe's "Collage City" article not seen as an opportunity for collaboration and promotion of similar design ethos? Especially one that, to use the rhetoric of *Architectural Review*, was critical of "total planning" doctrines, a point of view that *Adhocism* could be described as sharing. For instance, in *Adhocism*, projects by architects are displayed next to assemblages that occur within everyday experiences. As a result, it targeted and brought criticism to what could be described as "heavy handed" design methods and urban planning techniques that imposed new

forms on the city with a priori functions. They state in the first chapter that adhocism "cuts through the usual delays caused by socialization, bureaucracy, and hierarchical organizations."⁷ They go on to proclaim:

"Today we are immersed in the forces and ideas that hinder the fulfillment of human purposes; large corporations standardize and limit our choice; philosophies of behaviorism condition people to deny their potential freedom; 'modern architecture' becomes the convention for 'good taste' and an excuse to deny the plurality of actual needs."⁸

Their solution was a design methodology that allowed for a kind of activism-like expediency applied to the design process. This was intended to bring the design intentions of the individual citizen into the realm of formal architectural design. They also identified this method of design within the techniques and subject matter addressed in the art of collage and assemblage, both of which made use of ready made objects from everyday life that were then arranged with other media to create a new composition. When utilized as a design technique, collage and assemblage enabled the designer to link together disparate objects that would not normally be seen as working together to solve a problem. To Silver and Jencks, these ad hoc constructions, when applied to different scales of design, provided a democratized set of novel solutions to problems at a localized scale. This admiration of collage and use of ready mades, and the theory that served their argument, was where Silver took the most issue with "Collage City." In his accusation, Silver was claiming that Rowe's use of collage, among other theoretical and conceptual ideas, was a concept shared with adhocism, but this link was left unreferenced. What is evident is an admission that they had similar ways of producing an alternative design methodology when compared to mainstream design doctrines of the time. It could be speculated that the extreme response Silver had to Rowe's article was tied somehow to the high stakes involved in staunching the effects caused by the "crisis" of modernism, which Adhocism and "Collage City" were both responding to, and perhaps starts to shed light on why his response was so vehement.

FEUD: THE REBUTTAL BY COLIN ROWE

However, Silver's letter did not occur within a vacuum. His little quip suggesting that "Collage City" was actually written by Jencks as a practical joke as a way of discussing his accusation of plagiarism did not go over well with Colin Rowe. In the next issue of *Architectural Review*, dated November 1975, Rowe published a vociferous response in his own letter to the editor. He of course denied Silver's accusation exclaiming, "Many thanks for equipping us with a very curious specimen of flippancy, vindictiveness, and hysteria. But Mr. Silver, so cute the heavy joke so appallingly protracted, so coy ('Charles') and so vicious, is just a little more than difficult to believe—both in his accusations and his personal recklessness."⁹ The personal brawl was progressing, while the discursive elements of the actual books was seemingly put on hold. Rowe goes on to claim, in his own sarcastic tone, that the

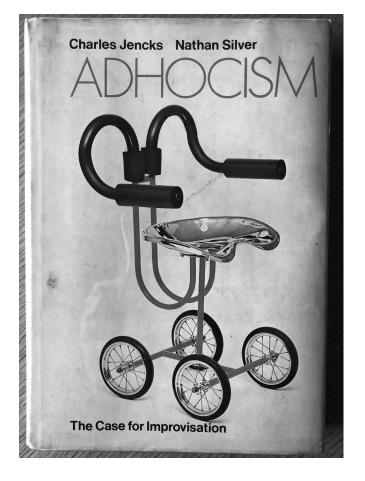


Figure 2. Cover of the Book Adhocism with an image of a dining chair designed by Nathan Silver. It demonstrates the ideas in the book related to the imrovisational assemblage of everyday objects.

ideas in his and Koetter's article soon to be published book had been in development for years:

"Meanwhile, briefly to abandon the style of snippiness and bitchiness, we could also say that, around several American institutions, Collage City has existed long enough to have become legend and to have acquired appropriate ballad back up:

'Last night I slept in Collage City, Dreamin' of the places dear to me, Hadrian's old home, Little bits of Rome...'

Needless to say, to Mr. Silver we abundantly and happily concede our squareness (so unlike himself and 'Charles'); but we also suppose that himself and 'Charles' are not quite the swingin' gurus which Mr. Silver clearly imagines themselves to be."

Rowe recognizes this accusation as a personal attack and his rebuke reflects that. However, what is compelling is that he is able PAPER



Figure 3. A page from the article "Collage City." The title heading reinforcing Rowe and Koetter's critique of the Modernist postwar project on the city, and aligning with *Architectural Review's* critique of "total planning" doctrines.

to turn around the personal jabs and shift the discussion back to the disciplinary ideas. For instance, in the "ballad" he invented, he positions his project within the history of the city, tying specific locations to specific architectural elements. "Hadian's old home" and "Little bits of Rome" hint at where he is looking for antecedents for a new architectural project that is placed in the city. Rowe is pushing the conception of his idea further, even in a letter to the editor that was defending his academic honor.

However, it does not take so much energy to empathize with Silver's accusation given that "Collage City" utilized such a similar design technique, not to mention the theoretical references that were mentioned in the original letter. Even as an abbreviated article the idea of a collaged city had at its center not only a critique of other architectural projects from this time period, but a design methodology of bricolage—the arranging of found elements placed next to each other within a three-dimensional collage. "Collage City" utilized elements and forms from the history of the city, ranging from what were called urban furniture at the scale of the human, to architectural objects that were at the scale of the single building, to patterns of linked structures at the scale of the city. Their use of the city as a source of antecedent, or progenitor of architectural form is one way "Collage City" differentiates itself from other projects from this time period, including *Adhocism*. While the ideas are similar yet different to *Adhocism*, the dialogue did not simply end with Rowe's letter.

FEUD: A NUDGE TOWARDS RECONCILIATION (JUST A LITTLE NUDGE)

Published on the same page as Rowe's rebuttal is Charles Jencks's letter. He must have anticipated Rowe's reply and takes a more reconciliatory tone than Silver, but still questioned why "Collage City" did not at least cite Adhocism in some way, given they are in a similar architectural dialogue.¹⁰ However, Jencks does acknowledge that there are common interests between their respective projects, and seems to be trying to steer the feud back into a more disciplinary, versus personal, fight. While he does have some critique of "Collage City," it is mostly regarding the way it has articulated its argument in regards to using historical elements and parts of the city as a contemporary project that addresses the needs of the postwar city and architectural discipline. He sums up his thoughts in the following statement towards the end of the letter:

"As to the parallel of Collage City and Adhocism, I believe it is mostly fortuitous. The ideas and examples which are common to both were 'in the air' during the '60s, that is, were one part of the modern movements in architecture which made up the tradition to which Rowe, Koetter, Silver, and I all belong. I find it distressing that this isn't acknowledged."

He ends his letter by saying, "With property developers still around, we can't have too much collage." He seems to be stating that there is enough room for both of their projects.

FEUD: THE SYNTHESIS BY REYNER BANHAM

To make sure that the argument does not spiral out of control with future letters to the editor, and to save the last bits of decorum that had nearly disintegrated between Silver and Rowe, Reyner Banham intervened. Banham had been an editor and major contributor to *Architectural Review* in the preceding years. His intervention came as a voice of reason, a statesmanly mediator. Most importantly he identified a third project, one that neither *Adhocism* or "Collage City" acknowledged, but who Banham claims they are both indebted to. This project also happens to be an overlooked architectural project on the city, one that was not only lost to this feud at the time, but was lost in the years after.

His letter, published on the same page as Rowe's denial and Jencks's response, claimed that they were both indebted to "the mythical figure Ivor de Wolfe." Banham only slightly clarifies this cryptic reference to this Ivor de Wolfe, claiming that in an Architectural Review article of 1949, he had, like Rowe and Silver, already proved that he was "equally suspicious of universal utopias and equally delighted by the juxtaposition of fragmentary designs."¹¹ He never names the article's title, but he does drop hints by claiming that Rowe had been skeptical of the "townscape movement" for years. He then implies that the initial ideas that have been attributed to townscape were initiated by this lvor de Wolfe in 1949. Thanks to Reyner Banham, this feud links these three projects together, uniting them against a common foe—wholistic large-scale urban planning schemes and master plans—and also highlights that they were dealing with similar compositional techniques for designing a response.

IVOR DE WOLFE'S RADICAL PICTURESQUE AND THE ENSEMBLE

Although Banham does not name the article, a quick search through Architectural Review articles from 1949 reveals one called called "Townscape" written by Ivor de Wolfe.¹² A little more investigative digging also reveals that the name Ivor de Wolfe was a pseudonym used by Hubert de Cronin Hastings, who was chief editor and owner of the publication.¹³ The article was split into two parts. The first was an essay called Townscape, a manifesto detailing a new concept of urban design based on the eighteenth century English compositional technique of the Picturesque. The second part was a "Townscape Casebook" written and illustrated by the architect Gordon Cullen. It contained twelve pages that included photographs, illustrations, and diagrams that illustrated the ideas laid out by Hastings (as de Wolfe). As if foreshadowing the publication of Collage City, the examples found within the casebook were all sourced from the existing city.

While the title of the article is "Townscape," the term only appears once in the text, despite becoming a whole design movement made popular by Gordon Cullen's book "The Concise Townscape" published in 1971.¹⁴ Cullen's townscape takes a conceptual swerve from the original article written in 1949, taking an historicist interpretation of urbanism in part a result that came out of the fact that *The Concise Townscape* did not deviate from the historical examples. It was a near facsimile of that original Townscape Casebook. What Cullen ended up practicing, and indeed what the townscape movement ended up becoming, "diverged" from the original ideas outlined by de Wolfe in 1949.¹⁵ It is therefore worth looking at the content of the essay in order to realize its original intent.

Hastings (as de Wolfe) makes an argument for a new mode of urban design that would embody what he called a "radical picturesque"—radical meaning that this type of architectural project would be embedded in source its form from the city; and picturesque since it resurrected the compositional techniques from the original picturesque movement. Radical Picturesque then becomes Hastings's response to other urban planning schemes of the time. Hastings subtitles his essay:"A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy founded on the true rock of Sir Uvedale Price." Sir Uvedale Price was the English progenitor of the seminal 1796 compositional treatise *An Essay on the Picturesque* whose principles of composition were to be utilized in Hastings's radical pictures que theory. $^{\rm 16}$

Hastings's argument for using the picturesque as a theoretical foundation for a new architectural project within the city is based on his desire to find a distinctly English contribution to the proliferation of the generalizing affects of the "International Style," thereby positioning his theory in dialogue with other dominant urban theories of the day. While he was searching for an alternative solution, he did share the main ambition behind those other projects. He, like many architects who were critical of the postwar city, saw the field of urban design and planning and the city itself in a state of crisis. The city was, to him, devoid of common design sense and had become a "visual refuse heap, if not insanitary, inelegant, with the shameless utter inelegance of an upset dustbin."¹⁷ At the same time that the city was spiraling into a state of visual chaos, it was also expanding, flattening out into a plane of indifferent urban form. The picturesque movement's ideals allowed Hastings to identify this indifferent territory of the city and its rapidly changing urban environment as a landscape that could be sorted, analyzed, and ultimately rearranged in such a way that it could at least make visual sense.

Hastings is fascinated by the existing city, its history of architectural typologies, and how these can be used to compose new structures that are made up of both new and existing sectors of the city. The radical picturesque is meant to be a theory that allows architecture to inject new visual coherence across the changing city, but use as source material the rich examples of architectural form its history. In order to assemble these elements of the city, Hastings proposed no longer designing in plan view only, but to change the operational mode of design to the elevation and section, the points of views that best make sense of a picturesque landscape. Designing through the elevation also allowed for new construction to work with existing parts of the city, a true element of the picturesque which routinely added landscape elements to existing wild parts of the countryside in order to create a view that was both sublime and beautiful.¹⁸ Hastings was thinking of the ways that a new architectural typology could make a contribution by being visually composed into the existing city:

"But the word Picturesque having since changed its meaning, this essay has stolen from politics another, the word radical, to try to establish more concisely just what the essential characteristic of that visual philosophy was: namely (to put it negatively first) a dislike which amounts to an inability to see wholes or principles and an incapacity for handling theory; but on the other hand a passionate preoccupation with independent details, parts or persons, an urge to help them fulfill themselves, achieve their own freedom; and thus, by mutual differentiation, achieve a higher organization."¹⁹

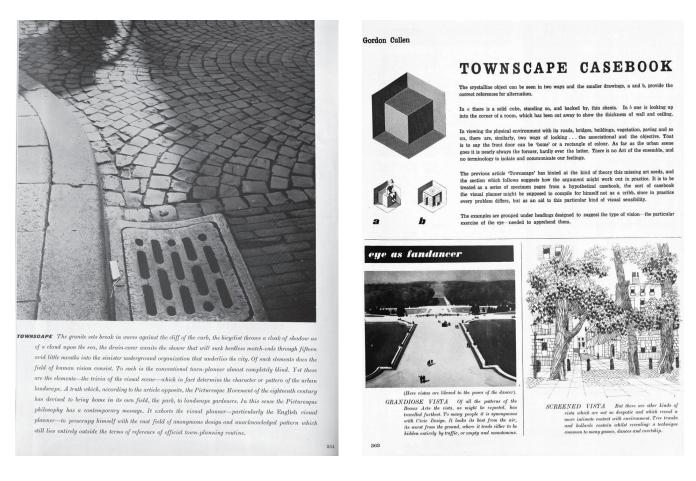


Figure 4. On the left is the cover image for Ivor de Wolfe's 1949 essay "Townscape" that lays out the argument for a radical picturesque mode of designing the city. On the right is the accompanying "Townscape Casebook" written and illustrated by Gordon Cullen.

In order to accomplish this methodology of connecting individual parts of the city together to form coherent visually-composed wholes, Hastings invents the typology he calls the "ensemble." The ensemble is a composition of structures that connect and interrelate in such a way as to display the original qualities of the picturesque movement as argued for by Sir Uvedale Price. The idea is that the discipline of urban design, as it relates to architecture, can find ways that new constructions link to and create a visual composition with the existing parts of the city. These ensembles are not only concerned with interior space but also create new urban figures-plazas, arcades, tunnels and bridges from one structure to another-that all relate together in a visually designed elevation. Radical picturesque shifted the design of the city away from the construction of single objects within the city to the composition of multiple structures at a variety of scales. The casebook provides examples for how this can be achieved. Broken into sections that explore the way the human eye perceives a scene, the casebook provides examples of different architectural elements, forms, and arrangements to illustrate a variety of ensemble effects.

RECONCILIATION: IVOR DE WOLFE'S CIVILIA

In the coming years, Hastings's original ideas for the radical picturesque, as they were laid out in the 1949 "Townscape"

article, were adapted into the townscape movement. However, his original polemical text was not fully realized through this later instantiation of his intial ideas. In fact, it was not until 1971 when he published the book Civilia: The End of Suburban Man: A Challenge to Semidetsia, where we can see his true intentions.²⁰ The book is a fictional narrative about a city that site on top of an exhausted natural resource: an abandoned rock quarry; and rises above into a series of picturesquely collaged images of what can best be assumed are his interpretation of what a townscape project could be. Through the book arises Hastings's ultimate manifestation of the radical picturesque. The images depict collaged concrete buildings, urban thoroughfares, arcades, and vistas, where every view framed by the architectural parts of the project created another picturesque composition of the surrounding landscape that even Sir Uvedale Price would be proud of. However, it could be argued that this book was not the only influence his original text had on the discipline of architecture as it related to the design of the city. The elements of radical picturesque—the use of found objects from the city, the assemblage of an ensemble structure that was designed through unconventional modes of representation—can be seen through both Adhocism and "Collage City" even if neither referenced that original 1949 article or the 1971 book. However, what this book publication does not address are the motivations behind Silver's

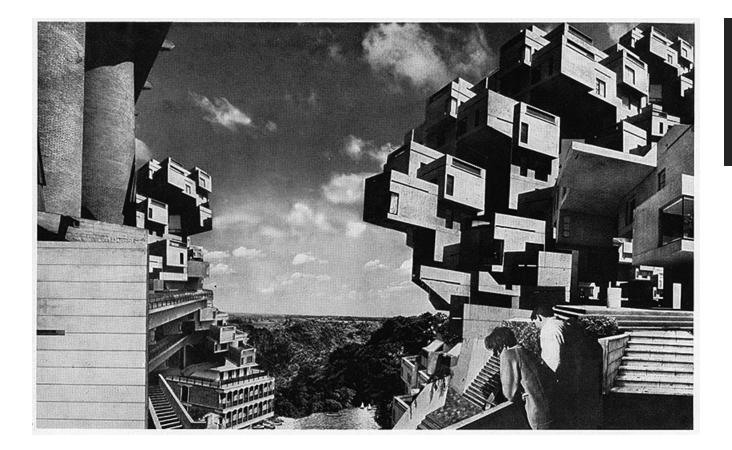


Figure 5. A collaged image from Ivor de Wolfe's book Civilia, demonstrating the design principles embodied by the radical picturesque.

initial reaction to "Collage City," and why there were such extreme emotions behind the originator of its ideas.

CONCLUSION: WHY DID IT MATTER SO MUCH TO SILVER?

After examining the back and forth from the letters to the editor, and tracking those with each person's respective project, the question that remains is why was Silver so angry about "Collage City." Why did they care so much? And what does this reaction reveal about the motivations behind these different architectural projects? These were, after all, figureheads within architectural discourse and academia with established careers. It could be assumed that there was not a whole lot to lose if a colleague has a similar and relatable idea to ones own. Adhocism had already been published, so there was not the issue of one colleague's research supplanting and making irrelevant that of the other. It can, however, be speculated, that Silver and Rowe felt very strongly about countering the dominant architectural project related to the city at this time. Their anger, or to quote Rowe again, the "snippiness and bitchiness" seems to reveal the real anxiety existing within discourse at the time about how to respond to Modernism's seemingly failing track record.

It has already been established that different practitioners and theorists with architectural projects devoted to the city identified

the existing project of Modernism as a critical disciplinary and practical problem. To recap, Architectural Review had, up the point that it published "Collage City," devoted much of its articles to the topic of the city in crisis. Its energy was directed at exploring alternative projects to those of Modernism that it deemed "Total Planning." They also considered Rowe a fireman brought in to help remedy the problem. This kind of rhetoric implies the stakes were high. Silver, we assume because of his letter, read all of this. His reaction then seems to be as high stakes as Architectural Review's. Also, given Adhocism's subject matter, he could be expected to be in alignment with this opposition to the 20th century project on the city whose ambition was to tackle the self-proclaimed crisis of the city with the mega-scaled project. It could be speculated that this reaction illuminates a deep-seated anxiety around how to counter-balance the 20th century project on the city, and somehow redeem architecture's already slipping reputation as it rounded the corner into the last two decades of the 20th century.

What is perhaps most curious about this feud and the possible motivations behind it are how prescient these issues seem today. A world and global city in crisis, and a proliferation of projects and imitators that are all attempting to raise their voice loud enough to have their solutions heard. The stakes are as high if not higher than the post-war urban problem Silver and Rowe were tackling. But Hastings, through his pseudonym of de Wolfe, seemed to predict the current aesthetic of 21st century solutions we see today, even if he was not able to pass along his ideology and project concept. We see the picturesque being used as a rendering style and massing strategy in projects that range from Herzog de Meuron's "56 Leonard Street" project to Evolo Competition entries that stack Safdie-esque boxes, similar to de Wolfe's Civila, and even Stefano Boeri's green-washed towers. One could imagine what Silver and Rowe's letters to the editor would say today, perhaps both chiming in! It would not be qualms with using the same theoretical foundations, but with the lack thereof. Banham would still have to step in, calm the storm, and point everyone, not only Silver and Rowe, to de Wolfe's original article in Architectural Review as a way of infusing the discourse on crisis with a little picturesqueness.

ENDNOTES

- Editors of Architectural Review at this time were as follows: Editor: Lance Wright; Executive Editor: Sherban Cantacuzino; Proaction Editor: William Slack; Features Editor: Colin Amery; Townscape Editor: Kenneth Browne; Planning Consultant: Leslie Ginsburg.
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- 19. I. De Wolfe, "Townscape," Architectural Review 106 (1949): 362.
- 20. Ivor de Wofle, Civilia: The End of Suburban Man : A Challenge to Semidetsia (London: Architectural Press, 1971).