

Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver

An Adhocist Manifesto

2013

Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation (1972) was one of Jencks' earliest responses to the orthodoxy of Modernist architecture and design. Written almost a decade before the Language of Post-Modern Architecture, adhocism advocated the joining of disparate parts and systems, individual creativity and meaning produced through making. This manifesto from the 2013 re-edition of this text co-authored by Jencks and Nathan Silver summarises the main points of this design philosophy.

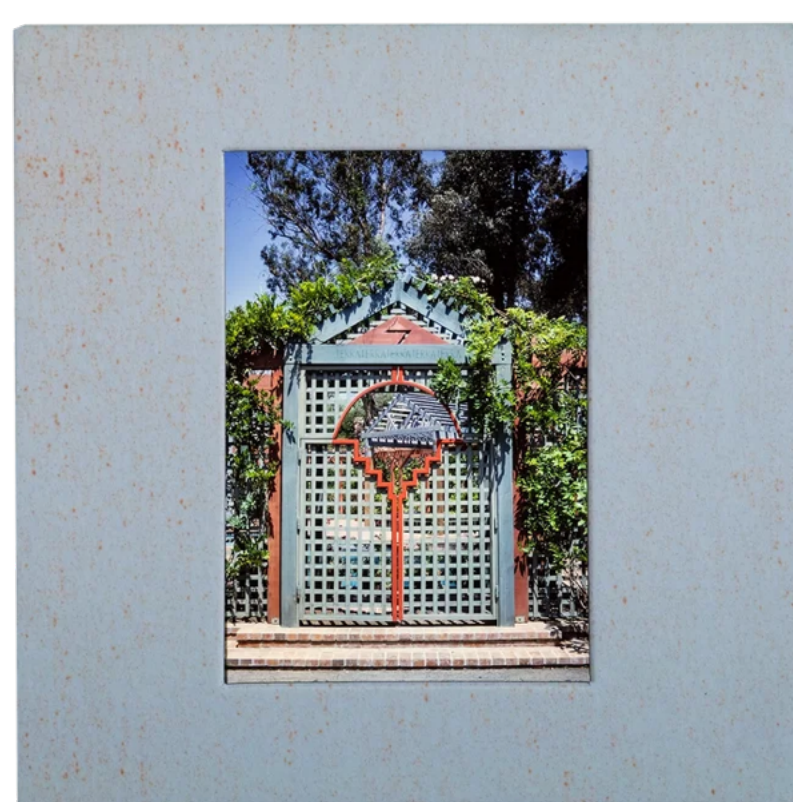
Excerpt from: Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, Expanded And Updated Edition (Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 2013).

The philosophy of adhocism

1. If necessity is the mother of invention, then combining previous systems is the father, and adhocism is the creative offspring. This is true in both Nature and culture.
2. In culture, combinations that display themselves, and explain their use and origins, are especially adhocist.
3. Thus adhocism is the style of eureka. It is the origin moment of new things, when the forms are typically hybrid, and, like all creative instants, the conjunction of previously separated systems. Hence the style must remain heterogeneous to be understood. Like the best surrealism when seen for the first time, it is experienced as an incongruous marriage; often the copulation of incommensurable things. But as species and things evolve, their ad hoc attachments become supplementary, conventional, and usually simulated. Fully evolved this heterogeneity is integrated and non-ad hoc. Yet an evolved time-city can be an intentional palimpsest of layers, as with New York's High Line.
4. At a populist level adhocism is radically democratic and pragmatic, as in the first two stages of revolution. It is also evident after catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina, or the earthquake in Haiti, when people make do with whatever is at hand.
5. At an elitist level it is efficient and perfected in the parts. Like the Mars space program, where each Rover is assembled from the best subsystem without prejudice of stylistic unity, there is tolerance, even love, of mongrel beauty.
6. Adhocism badly done is a lazy put-together of diverse things. It steals from the bank of the world's resources, pays nothing back, and devalues the currency. Plagiarism and theft are redeemable if acknowledged, and if there is added value: the improvement of either the subsystems or the whole. Palladian, as well as Modernarchitecture is based on stolen goods duly footnoted. Academics are usually trained in this confessional art.
7. Philosophically, adhocism tends to be open-ended like an additive list and encyclopedia. Thus it is first cousin to eclecticism, defined as 'deriving ideas, tastes, style, etc., from various sources'. This is from the Greek *eclect*, 'I choose or select' this part from anywhere. Looking for improvement, we choose the best part without trying to stay within a single canon.
8. If misusing a knife as a screwdriver is forgivable adhocism, then the Swiss army knife is its customised, evolutionary offspring. Droog Design is the commercial version, the Japanese Tea Ceremony is the ritualised usage, and Frank Gehry's house for himself typifies the informality. The heterogeneous and informal characterise the cultural genre.
9. Try a thought experiment with the smallest atom: hydrogen or deuterium. Even these simple bodies are a historical smash-up of different units – the proton, electron, and neutron. Only quarks and leptons seem to be nonad hoc. Evidently the rest of the world coalesced from difference.
10. If most everything on earth comes from something else and is compound, then we *live in* a pluriverse. Although the laws may be uniform in our universe today, they evolved during the first microseconds, and may be the bylaws of an ad hoc multiverse.

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