



John Heartfield,
Selbstporträt mit dem Polizeichef Zörgiebel, 1929

Paste Emotion

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The term *collage*, which we employ to denominate the artistic procedure whereby a variety of items are brought together on one plane, is perhaps not very fortunate. It refers to *glue* and leaves out the function of the *scissors* or of the *knife*, the cutting and therefore the cleft, the wound and the blood that spills. Glue is conciliatory, whereas knives can be fearsome. They first came into play with Cubist collage or with the enormous “kitchen knife” that Hannah Höch wielded against Weimar, and continued with Artaud’s dismemberment, and Dali and Buñuel’s razor blade. Terrifying scissors that cut up everything leaving only scraps of things behind. Collage immediately ceased to be an artistic *technique* and became a *process* that made it possible to live in the fragment: Erik Satie included it in his music, Serguéi M. Eisenstein in his films, Bertold Brecht in his theatre pieces, Louis Aragon in his novels... The collage process constituted the only form of negotiating one’s way among the atomized fragments that had imploded within the modern metropolis. But collage — thence lies its modernity— did not attempt to reconstruct lost unity with adhesive, the very real presence of reality, but invited us to live with the suture that precariously united what would never again be a unit. The modern subject perceives a reality of objects and events that do not comprise a structured reality, but fragments lost in irregular orbits, in a space without gravitation and without orbit and, consequently, with no reference to a system. From 1869, with the restlessness brought on by “the fortuitous encounter between a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table”, until 1913, when a bicycle wheel mounted upside-down on a stool in a way closed a chapter in the representation, the years in which modernity ceased to long for the unity lost and rapidly learned to live with its fragments flowed on by. Later, the Long Player was broken down into isolated songs which then became jingles or instantaneous beeps, and the full-length film was replaced by three-minute clips: collage rejects extension and blows the discourse into a thousand pieces. And time, too, as multi-tasking is just the chronological expression of collage adapted to the dizzying production of advanced capitalism.

If collage is stitching, what wound is it trying to close? None at all, I reckon, given that collage is not out to rehabilitate reality using back-to-the-beginnings surgery, but precisely to make itself visible at its juncture points, show the wound for what it is, juxtapose suture and rupture, limit and threshold, and make them *significant* in their separation. Mary Shelley sewed Doctor

Frankenstein’s creature as a modern entity, an inverted shadow of Vitruvian man, which was the canon of the body as a single organism. The creature of Frankenstein lives with scars that do not close, since it stands as a combinatory body, permanently in a state of resignification, open both to love and to terror. Thomas Hirschhorn, born in Switzerland like Frankenstein, recently distinguished between two forms of this cutting: the first is evident and he calls it *easy collage*, based on the availability of the means and the simplicity of the processes, levelled even more in digital actuality; but the second, to which he gives the name *collage truth*, seems to be provocatively addressed toward the core of the arbitrary, toward showing the physical and discursive discontinuity characteristic of the anatomy of collage. Travelling along this second route, instead of trying to reconstruct the single body with the unattached fragments, Iván Gómez strives to draw a new body with different relations between the parts. Something has exploded, but at the same time there is a search for this exploding in a particular structure that signifies once more, as a back and forth of explosion and implosion, and in this regard there is no haphazard disorder, just what is right and necessary to combat the regime of discourse.

We’re talking of body here, but collage is also a space of image, which reshapes its size with it, breaks its boundaries and distributes imagery that is torn, flexible, reversible, mutant and off-centre. Against the iconic identity of a pre-existing image, the artist with the scissors works as a demolishing force, blowing into pieces such an image’s authoritarian logic and inviting us to read the debris of a figure with neither limits nor authority. Collage repudiates the stability of images and walks the frontier. Appropriating what comes from elsewhere, what is alien, collage proceeds to perform the image, destabilize its iconocentric power, suppress its disciplinary status, its autonomy and its autistic code. For what is alien except the entire world; all that does not fit within the bounds of my skin?

Over in the shade it doesn’t burn

From this appropriation arise impure maps that Iván Gómez has been patiently drawing under the generic title *Over in the shade it doesn’t burn*: they are maps without chronology and without homeland, or time or place, because they cover all history and wander the whole world. They belong to no discipline because they feed from them all. Maps to get one’s bearings on the path for devising the counter-images that the unconscious is able to dream so that the distancing from reality is tempered by the desire to be acquainted with its machinery.

These images and sounds that the reader —or, more accurately perhaps, the user— holds in her hands, is not exactly a book of reproductions, but a reading device that contains originals, given that collage admits no reproductions: it comes into being as a reproduction of itself, with a transferred aura, an artefact that lives in the media universe, in the iconosphere, in which the page is the museum wall and the mp3 the concert hall.

Over in the shade it doesn’t burn is a calculatedly elusive title: it adopts the shape of daily language but meanwhile is loaded with mystery and threat; it seems to be advice but is also a warning, it hints at a proper path but seduces nevertheless with darkness. While I was preparing this text I re-read *The atrocity exhibition* by J.G. Ballard. The images reconstructed by Iván Gómez instantly reminded me of the shreds of narrative that the North-American writer sewed together in this unusual novel. It strikes me that users of these lines should do the same: alternate meditation on the plates in this book and sessions of listening to its sound track, with pages from Ballard’s book, in which they will come across images like these:

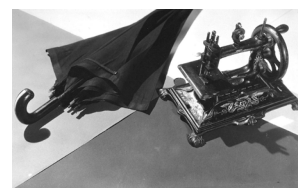
“A group of workers on a scaffolding truck were pasting up the last of the displays, a hundred-foot-long panel that appeared to represent a section of a sand-dune. Looking at it more closely, Dr Nathan realized that in fact it was an immensely magnified portion of the skin over the iliac crest. Glancing at the billboards, Dr Nathan recognized other magnified fragments: a segment of lower lip, a right nostril, a portion of female perineum. Only an anatomist would have identified these fragments, each represented as a formal geometric pattern. At least five hundred of the signs would be needed to contain the whole of this gargantuan woman, terraced here into a quantified sand-sea.” A helicopter hovered above, monitoring the men’s work. “Its down-draught ripped away some of the paper panels. They floated across the road, an eddying smile plastered against the radiator grille of a parked car.”

“Then came the film”, —writes Benjamin— “and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling” . This is the fundamental issue, film, the frame, the edit, the timing of a narrative. But film had made its appearance much earlier. These collages by Iván Gómez are unquestionably far closer to cinematic story than Cubist speculation about modes of representation. They are syncopated montages, fractions of story accumulated upon the white of the page, in apparent disorder, like a film tape piling up on the floor after being projected. And then, how is one to read this flow of images? The assumption is that this text ought to be the guide or at least a clue, but there is no guide possible, no *mode d’emploi* to decode them: readers-cum-spectators will have to make their way among them with the same attention as they pay to the streets of a city they are unfamiliar with, on the alert for smells and sounds, the slightest friction or, as Lawrence Durrell suggested in *The Alexandria Quartet*, the merest hint of air. Anyway, so you can get your bearings in the narrative, the artist has introduced three colours —green, violet and dark red— to point out an indication of ordering in the shape of chapters. What were the rules for composing them? The process can prove to be deceptive, because if crowding and promiscuity seem to predominate at first, various filters promptly make their appearance, systems for the purification of sources, the choice of narrative chains, climax moments and transition intervals. This is an apparently systematic method of options, of decisions, of assembly and relation. It is a method, however, that sets off gaps in the system, holes of chance. The discipline slackens at particular points, flooded by a causal logic that the very work process has unexpectedly produced. This is the key moment, when the artist becomes a spectator of his own work, surprised by some of its surprising ramifications. Perhaps he does not offer assistance to users to follow the concatenation of the plot but, in compensation, they are provided with a range of unsuspected solutions that the author had not envisaged, and they derive from the act of handling the book. So, an open, sound book; overwhelming and stimulating, a book active in its conception and activating when it is used.

Over in the shade it doesn’t burn is a sonorous device due to the musical piece Aitor Etxebarria that accompanies it, composed as an Original Sound Track which forms the central body of the book, but also because Iván Gómez has worked with narrative units that he has sampled in image sessions, altering the volume/size of the samples, equalizing the colour or

the tone, employing *scratch* in some of them. The continuity of the narrative is organized under three headings marked by their colour: green for the subjects related with language, culture, the body and work; violet for personal relations, the love story and its liaison with public space and, lastly, dark red for the most intimate sphere of the family environment and memories. The three chapters conclude with a repeated image of rubbish bins burning. Sampling images of disparate origins, the book binds a tale with the rhetorical technology of writing: metaphors and synecdoches, paradoxes and ellipses. It is neither a graphic essay, nor a novel: it is a text that was born hybrid, in which there is an intermingling of recollections and opinions, a love of knowledge and statistical data.

And what does the story contain? In terms of syntax, we have already remarked on its exploded structure; as for the vocabulary, the case before us is both complex and exciting, because users will find inside a whole world of words, taken indiscriminately from art and architecture as well as from the most varied disciplines that have left a trail of images throughout history, taking in anatomy, chemistry, medicine, palaeontology, engineering, geography, astronomy, mythology, and more. Even so, as an aperitif, to stimulate your curiosity and the urge to roam its pages, we offer a brief list —following the Spanish alphabetical order, which disturbs the way they appear in the book— of some of the images to be discovered as they are deposited in this unordered archive: astronauts, trees, aviators and holes, the elderly, battles, bombs and flags, lambs and surgeons, bodies, swings, stretchers, small paintings, sweets, streets, horses, cars and heads, horns, many columns and corpses, drawings and doubts, storefronts, statues, swords, stars, shotguns, various foetuses, many factories, flowers and families, spectacles, shouts and cranes, bonfires, big propellers, ice, intestines, insects, cages, wild boar, lions and wrestlers, books and flames, the mad, medals, hands, the scent of fear, children, clouds, many eyes, some stones, thoughts, legs, poets, psychiatrists, faraway planets, dogs, fists, operating theatres, ruins, satellites, hats, chairs and tables, snakes, smiles, high towers, sharks, workers, towers, glasses, open windows.



Man Ray, *Hommage à Lautréamont*, 1933.

J. G. Ballard, *The atrocity exhibition*, published by Jonathan Cape, UK, 1970

Benjamin, Walter, *Artwork essay*, published by Schocken/Random House, ed. by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn.