

Similar and Different and Good Looking: Reading Intelligent Clashing

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For some time I have followed the work of artists whose making is arranging found images. These arrangements often evoke personal and social memories. For me they are reminiscent of bedroom walls, family photo albums, the inside of American High-School lockers, notice boards, pictures of the insides of peoples study's or artists studios, the offices of graphic designers and specifically magazine designers who lay out the arrangement of pages/images in grid formations. It is the practice of arranging found images and the decisions of this (dis)organisation that interests me.

Intelligent Clashing locates this practice within a digital space of browsing, scrolling and (re)searching. Curate, which means both to arrange and to care, is a fitting term for the methodologies of Rhiannon Silver's practice of displaying found images. Silver, arranges images found online by groupings. This categorisation is personal and can be determined as much by when the images are found as it can by their contents. Usually arranged through a kind of symmetry or harmony of things, visual rhymes like colour, shape and content. These images are different sizes, and follow an evolving grid formation whereby the addition of new images can alter the spaces and arrangement of images below. It's top-down form means that to browse the images is to scroll vertically down the page, a reading practice that is specific to online spaces. The images spread across the page and look unorganised (because of their different size) but there is order in Intelligent Clashing. In addition to looking the view can also interact as all the images are also hyperlinks to the source web page, when clicked a new window opens to show the place in which the image was found by Silver. Through this essay I would like to locate Intelligent Clashing within a lineage of artists who use this practice of finding and arranging images and how we, as both viewer and navigator, read these collections.

Part One: Maps

My interest in this practice is its dependence upon various methods of display. When amassing large quantities of images how these images are viewed and read, independently and collectively becomes the work. In fact we rarely view the images as independent works but only as fragments of a larger whole. I'm thinking here of artists like Wolfgang Tillmans and Tobias Buche whose contemporary approach to photography considers the display of their works as sculptural installations. Similarly Gerhard Richter, Aby Warburg, Christian Boltanski and Joachim Schmid are all artists who have created works using found images and who are dependent upon grid formations in order to organise their collections. They all create work in

which the viewers role becomes active, instead of looking at art we are sifting through 'things', material images that have histories and memories. According to Rosalind Krauss, grids function in two ways, spatial and temporal:

The spatial sense [...] states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its co-ordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organization, it is the result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree. Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves. (Krauss 1986: 9).

She further states that the grid maps the surface of the work onto itself, that the aesthetic and the physical are the same plane, 'co-extensive, and, through the abscissas and ordinates of the grid, coordinate' (Krauss 1986: 10). This coordination is the difficulty of works in which many elements make the whole. How can it 'work' as work, as art and as collection?

Although *Intelligent Clashing* rejects a narrative reading it is still read sequentially because of its arrangement that includes a beginning and an end (a top and a bottom), which is both chronological and ambiguously categorical. Interestingly, *Intelligent Clashing* is an ongoing arrangement, its chronology records itself as images appear when they are found and the place of their finding is linked. Images are categorised chromatically, symmetrically – through shape, visual rhyme and synchronisation, and spatiality, as when a new image is uploaded the arrangement can shift and change. The grid provides one way of organizing these images, and our reading of this organization is through a negotiation of materials, the image and its space as well as its content. Krauss has said that, 'The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion or fiction)' (Krauss 1986: 12).

This release into belief is what makes me want to read *Intelligent Clashing* as a form of collage. Not photo-collage as such, or montage for that matter, but an understanding of collage that may help our reading of the liberation or emancipation of material and its mass accumulation and arrangement.

I am drawn to understanding *Intelligent Clashing* as a form of collage, because collage has always been cobbled together with found things 'feeding off the pollution of visual culture' (Gioni 2007: 11). Furthermore, collage is also concerned with both dissipation and conservation, the arrangements of *Intelligent Clashing* conserves the collection of images whilst at the same time creating space for new meanings through the juxtaposition of sources within the symmetry of form. The

navigation of material and the direction of thought that their work 'moves' towards is part of a historical lineage that can be said to begin with Dadaist collage. An appropriate example of the development of Dadaist collage in relation to Intelligent Clashing is Hannah Hoch's mass media Scrapbook (1933) which can also be considered along-side the development of photomontage. Hoch's Scrapbook is a collection in the form of a scrapbook and mimics the mass media print pages from which the images are taken, it is significantly similar to Moholy-Nagy's *Painting Photography Film* (1925) which contains similar arrangements with less intricate layouts (See Lavin 1993). Unlike her collages Hoch's Scrapbook placed images next to each other without cutting or altering the image. This was a collection of curated arrangements stuck into the pages of a book. When looking at the work now I'm struck at it's similarity to Intelligent Clashing, playing with found images in subtle and sophisticated arrangements that speak to us through the poetics of the visual essay. Intelligent Clashing is not narrative based but works by tabular systems of organization and anti-order, it plays with ideas of the archive and histories of photo-collage and photo-montage and places itself between art forms to work with art history and visual history to dismantle myths of unity and to provide an understanding of connective reading. We can understand collage as a text to be read, placing one thing next to another, constructing through the deployment of found objects, terrains of personal and social memory.

Intelligent Clashing has got something to do with the simple pleasures of everyday design; the arrangement of the home and the art gallery; hair styles; the back of the head; 1980's clothing and t-shirts; new things that look like old things; the aesthetics of the 1990's; plants and cacti; saturated colours; braided hair; rope; book illustration and design; cat things; baby things; found images of found things; women; woman; Aztec patterns; wallpaper; rugs; throws; fabrics and towels; pottery; exotica; technicolour; flower arrangements; geometric jewellery; children's art; folk art; outsider art; crap art; food art; stripes; things that hang; the representation of the home; interiors; california; knitwear; symbology; magazines you can't buy anymore; and hands.

Part Two: Atlases

Art Historian, Photographer and Artist, Aby Warburg is well known in the former role but it is only more recently (in the last ten years) that his work in the latter aspect, as an artist, has been noted, and he has been acknowledged as having made a major influential work. His work *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927) consists of more than sixty panels and over one thousand photographic images to create a large, portable, moveable and sculptural photographic archive. Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, created just after the Dadaist collage movement, continues the tradition of working with large amounts of found photographs and reproducible photographic prints

and placing them in grid formations, and in a 'sometimes' seemingly 'non-specific' 'order'. Warburg's Atlas follows the idea of the mnemonic as something that aids memory, by constructing in images a social and material memory. Its relationship to a textual practice of reading is inherent in its placing one thing next to another, constructing, through found objects, terrains of personal and social memory 'texts'. Reading this Atlas is similar to the practice of reading other atlases and maps. Reading becomes about navigating; creating meanings through associations (juxtapositions, separations, gaps and seams), and discovering/uncovering relationships between these things. Both the differences and similarities. Kurt Forster describes Warburg's Atlas:

There, cheek by jowl, were late-antique reliefs, secular manuscripts, monumental frescoes, postage stamps, broadsides, pictures cut out of magazines and old master drawings. It becomes apparent, if only at second glance, that the unorthodox selection is the product of an extraordinary command of a vast field (Kurt Forster In Buchloh 1999: 124).

This command over a vast field is partly what the Atlas is about. We might consider how Intelligent Clashing commands the vast field of online imagery, embracing the digital practice of accessing data through massive indexes and archives (often) arranged by images. Constellations of images can provide a different kind of access to conveying knowledge and insights textually and pictorially. Work like Warburg's and Intelligent Clashing are spaces where collections and their arrangement were/are developed over a prolonged period of time and that somehow transcend linguistic categorisation and avoid the representation of language.

Buchloh (1999) considers the relationship between Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas and Gerhard Richter's Atlas (1962). Richter's Atlas is a collection of images that evolve more like a book, each 'page' framed, it relates more to the family photo album than to the sculptural work of Warburg. Although, aesthetically, the works offer similar placing of photographs in grid formations, the content of the images and the sequence(s) in which they occur are strikingly different. When exhibited in 1998 Richter's Atlas consisted of more than five thousand images displayed on around 650 framed panels. (Bruno 2002: 332).

Warburg and Richter's Atlas' are often considered as archives but they are also difficult to accept as such. Derrida's discussion of the archive in *Archive Fever* (1995) states that the word 'archive' comes from 'Arkhe', 'where authority, social order [...] in this place from which order is given' (1995: 1). Because the archive is a place, a house, a domicile, 'The archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of [...] memory. There is no archive without a place of consignment without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority' (Derrida 1995: 11). If these works are archives then they are also archiving thoughts

and memories of their creators as a form of control and a radical visual statement. Control here, paradoxically, is not the primary quality that we read in the works; it is their anarchic, arbitrary, emancipation of photographic reproductions that is interesting. Tobias Buche has, in the last ten years, created formally and structurally similar works that deal with very different subject matters. Buche (born 1978) uses simple structures that subvert the institutional display boards and signs of museum displays to present large collections of photocopied images from mass media, pop culture and the internet developing a personal and global history. Buche's arrangements are anarchic ('Anarchy is order' (Proudhon In Marshall 1992: 234). and feel visually similar to Intelligent Clashing due to their white backgrounds, random size formations and image orders. The relationship between order and disorder becomes problematic, because unlike an archive, in these works, to steal a quote from Objectivist poet George Oppen 'Things explain each other, not themselves' (Oppen 1975: 134). How we understand things explaining each other and not themselves is to do with a close and openly referential reading of images. A reading which according to Derrida is 'a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces' (Derrida 1979 / 1991: 257). Intelligent Clashing is able to refer to its network of traces literally through its interactivity as a digital space.

I have arranged a selection of artists in relation to Intelligent Clashing, whose work; systems of displaying found and reproduced photographic images and objects, is similar in different ways. Intelligent Clashing; simultaneously reproduces and extends this historical trajectory as it continues to arrange and rearrange Silvers collection of different and similar and good looking images.

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