

Question 4: Collage, montage and assemblage have had a significant cultural impact on imagemaking' (Wigan p52 2006). Discuss

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As an artist, do you ever just look at things lying around your house and wonder if you can give them a new meaning? Reinvent its purpose and give it a chance to be something better than it once was?

Throughout history many creatives have done just that, using their imagination to look at objects from a different perspective in order to convey opinions and express emotion. Collage, montage and assemblage are some popular techniques that are still used to create 2D and 3D pieces of art.

Collages are made of ripped or cut up materials like magazines, photographs, fabric or anything that's usually only used a few times before its forgotten about. They're then placed in a specific way and stuck down onto a surface, creating a new image. "Collage challenged ideas about the types of material from which art could be produced and the ways in which works in visual media drew from, and connected to, reality" (Brown, 2019, p.545).

The difference between collage and montage is how the individual images are put together and what they are. A montage is going to include a collection of images that all relate to each other in some way. Once again, they're then stuck to a surface but in any random order. Montage can also be found in other art forms such as films. They describe it as "cutting and recombining film in order to create relationships between images from different times and/or places" (Colangelo, 2015, p.14).

Finally, assemblage is when a selection of random objects that are used to create one final piece. These individual objects can be anything that you find or items bought specially. Your final outcome doesn't have to look consistent. "assemblages can be complex, and can be composed of a constellation of sub-assemblages, each of which is composed of concepts, ideas and techniques that are so well established" (Jones, 2017, p.87).

Each technique allows you to explore and experiment with different mediums and methods, individually affecting the art of image making.

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Usually society thinks of art as pretty pictures that are created to be hung up, looked at for 3 seconds and have no lasting effect on the viewer. The Dada movement went against this entirely. The German creatives formed “an artistic movement which attempted to replace cool calculation and logic with spontaneity and irrationality” (Pagan, 2015, p.22). Dada was created as a response to the First World War, satirical collages, some depicting leaders at the time, were portrayed in a manner that suited the political views of the artists. For example, ‘Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the First Epoch of the Weimar Beer-Belly Culture’ by Hannah Hoch.

Their anti-war opinions were further strengthened “with Dada supporting the extreme left-wing Spartacists” (Middleton, 1962, p.410), a group in Germany that wanted to overthrow the government. Their beliefs on war influenced their methods of creation. Sometimes positioning their materials all over the place to reflect their opinions of how they thought the war was senseless and quite ridiculous.

One artist that was rejected from the chance of being included in the Berlin Dada collective was Kurt Schwitters. Due to his links with expressionism and Dada’s disagreements with that particular movement, one of the founders didn’t think Schwitters was fit for the role. Although this happened, Schwitters still continued to make art. Being inspired by Dada and cubism, Kurt invested his time in creating collages with scrap paper he’d find, replicating the irrational yet symbolic aspects Dada had shown in the past along with hints of influence from Russian Constructivism. “Evolving out of the creative principles of non-objective painting of suprematism and the abstract cubism of Vladimir Tatlin, constructivism first aimed at the making of sculpture-like objects related to a technological age of invention.” (Railing, 2007, p.367). This way of art encouraged many to create with emotions in mind, making art more personal and unique.

Dada and Schwitters were both inspired by the political state of their country. They encouraged image making to become more rebellious and influenced by the individuals feelings. Their art didn’t have to make sense or look perfect; they just had to express how they felt.



Figure One: *Still Life #12*

After the Dada movement to fade out towards the end of the 1920's, about 30 years later a new movement would allow collage to be seen in another way. Pop art transformed the way we see everyday objects. "By introducing ordinary, inexpensive industrial products into the magical world of art, they have added meaning and increased their value" (Dede, 2018, p.1075). As an artist this allows you to expand your imagination and invent new purposes for things you would like to recreate through your image making.

Pop artists glorified average items and arranged them in a way that made you realise the beauty that can be created by what we take for granted. Pop art's main influence is hinted in the name. Pop culture is the catalyst for new ideas that the movement wants to celebrate. "Mass media is the main source of pop art. All the subjects chosen by the pop-art artist are images in the mass media, television, radio, magazines and newspapers" (Dede, 2018, p.1075). This creates a blend between "high" art and "low" culture.

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Mixing the two together shows that there doesn't have to be boundaries in art, it dissolves hierarchy that has been brainwashed into society.

One notable artist would be Tom Wesselmann. His work is slightly different from your stereotypical pop art. We usually see this movement use repetition with vibrant and saturated colours "Pop art used bright colours highly because of its ability to grab the attention quickly" (Marinana Custodio, 2020). With this combination of everyday items and bright colours, the audience is able to relate to the piece of art while also seeing its main subject in a fun and creative way.

However, in Wesselmann's collages, focusing mainly on his 'Still Life' series, neon hues aren't as common. While still maintaining the original colours of the consumer goods, he incorporated bold colours throughout these images. There is something so eye catching about his art. Maybe it's his use of perspective on a 2D surface. It looks unusual but draws your eye across the scene, allowing you to recognise different features within each piece, for example, figure one, '*Still Life #12*'. Still life images usually capture the subject in its purest form; sometimes creative control is given to the artist to place the subjects in certain positions. "Still life can be a celebration of material pleasures such as food and wine, or often a warning of the ephemerality of these pleasures" (Tate, 2020). Mixing these aspects with pop art's obsession for consumerism, Wesselmann creates a narrative that fits the description of society's ever-changing interests.

Ultimately, pop art has changed the way we view our subjects. Average items are now celebrated and have been given a new appearance that reflects their popularity within our culture.

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Figure Two: *Damn Them All*

In the 70's and 80's we saw the punk subculture emerge with its anti-authority attitudes. As well as the fast paced and aggressive music that came from this community, an intimidating image was also formed. "Punk culture is based on an ideology that emphasizes questioning conformity and creating a space for individuality within community" (Drass, 2016). Punks would embrace this individuality through a DIY ethic. They felt like they didn't need expert help in order to get things done, for example, "people within punk culture created their own independent record labels, music stores, performance venues, and fanzines as part of their quest for authenticity" (Drass, 2016).

This empowering mindset was inspiring to the anarchist youths of these decades and also helped influence art.

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Montage was a popular method that allowed punks to convey their opinions while showing off their character. Their art usually contains bright colours or bold writing in order to bring attention to the message within the piece. The typography would usually be constructed using letters from newspaper articles. Jamie Reid was the man who popularised this. He was well known for making cover art for The Sex Pistols. One of Reid's influences was the Dada movement and how it helped create anti-aesthetic art.

Punks and Dada had some things in common with each other. "A big reason why these two movements are so similar is due to the fact that both movements were created out of social outburst" (Berryman, 2010). Both of them disagreed with the authority at the time and wanted other people to know this.

The artist's final outcomes would appear to look rough with torn up pieces of paper, staples, safety pins and anything they could find that would emphasise their DIY statement.

They would completely go against the clean and polished aesthetics of art created by capitalist companies or "high" culture to show society that they were rejecting the norms of authority. "Use of subversive, anti-establishment, anti-capitalist slogans created shocking often deliberately offensive juxtaposed images" (Scottishschools, 2020).

They wanted to take back control by doing things themselves, and making authentic art to get their voice heard was a way of expressing this. It impacted image making in a way that made it fun to break the rules and go against the crowd.

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Collage, montage and assemblage seem to be popular methods of creation within the dada community. Maybe it's because of its abstract exterior. You can interpret the art easily and can create messages both literally and metaphorically with things that are easily available to you.

Another artist influenced by Dada's messages would be John Heartfield. He used his art to notify the people of Germany what was really happening to their country; he used his art as a warning. His art was then featured in a magazine, the masses to become more aware of the fascism occurring around Germany at the time. Rejecting Nazis and anything anti-capitalist through his art, Heartfield was targeted many times by German authorities. "The contributions of the arts in social and cultural space become extremely important in conditions of fragility" (Schuster and Ortega Breña 2015). As people are naturally curious beings, we would want to find out more if we were confronted with a message that we weren't exposed to in the past. This is why these montages have had such an impact on society and the way we continue to create.

Heartfield's montages developed a narrative that was to expose the Nazi propaganda. One thing that aided him in creating symbolism within a piece of art was the typography used. Typography can be another way of expressing feelings through the power of words, "the quality of our treatment of letters on a page can influence how people respond to our message." (Wong, 2011). The style, colour and words, whether they're satirical or serious, can influence one's thoughts about the concluding message the artist is trying to put out.

Over time, montage has helped provoke the public and empowered them to speak their mind. It's an easy and creative way of trying to amplify a message and persuade others in a way that would spark curiosity, ultimately making some sort of impact.



Figure Three: *Odalisk*

Assemblage is the 3D form of montage and collage. Rather than having one flat surface, the items used to create the art can be stuck to one another to create an entirely new shape. One artist known for his unique assembly of objects is Robert Rauschenberg. This artist was part of a neo-dada movement. It's essentially aspects of the original Dada but instead it's the pop culture of the 50s and 60s (instead of topics about anti-war). An example of a piece inspired by the themes of parody within Dada would be '*Odalisk*'. This assemblage features a large lamp that's sinking into a pillow underneath it. The lamp shade has been covered in a range of media. "*Odalisk* parodies an entire pictorial tradition of female representation" (Centre Pompidou, 2006) by using each feature as symbolism, for example, the woman in this image is meant to be the lamp. One of the innuendos in this piece is that the lamp can be turned on. However, this can be taken seriously if there is lack of knowledge about the actual meaning of this piece.

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Rauschenberg's assemblage pieces were called "combines". These pieces consisted of items he would normally find on a day-to-day basis but they would then be manipulated with paint and other objects he could get his hands on. "Rauschenberg also took an interest in sound, and in his later *Combines*, he developed analogies between music and visual arts" (Centre Pompidou, 2006). For image making, this creates a bridge between different types of art and allowed the message being conveyed to be seen as more important than it originally was. It engages the audience and enhances their experience.



Figure Four: *Indestructible Object (or Object to Be Destroyed)*

Man Ray was also known for his surreal creations. Surrealism plays a big role within assemblage as the end result of the combined objects is out of the ordinary most of the time. Some of the inspirations for surrealism are dreams and our subconscious. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud is well known for theorising about both of these. Surrealists were influenced by Freud's writing as they believed that their creativity came from within their subconscious. "The exploration of the unconscious mind through art could free the individual from the constraints of modern society" (Hibbitt, 2020), allowing them to make art that was even more true to their feelings and unique to the individual.

As well as being random at times, surrealism can hold meaning through symbolism. Take Figure Four, for example. This is a portrait of Ray's girlfriend after they broke up. It wasn't meant to be her but he changed it last minute after their separation. The original name for this piece was "Object to be Destroyed", several had been made, but the name had to be changed so no one would actually ruin the

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piece again. "The composition and color alone may symbolize the idea or feeling which the work evokes, yet this visually created feeling combined with the subject matter can create an entirely new experience"(Barnard, 2019). This portrait is could symbolise Ray's sadness, knowing that this object was made to be destroyed, it symbolises his loss of hope for the future. He feels like his relationship was pointless. Alternatively, it could represent his acceptance that nothing lasts forever, including the relationships we have with people.

This influences image making to become more metaphorical. It opens your mind to how objects can easily be personified and experiences in your life can be the influence for a possible narrative to go with the art.

As well as Surrealism, Ray was also inspired by the Dada movement. He was actually part of the Parisian group and enjoyed the freedom it gave him.

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Throughout history, the human experience has impacted art just as much as art has had an impact on the human experience. Societal influences have changed the course of action within the art community and leads creatives in different directions, exploring all areas of life. Alternatively, people have changed society with the power of their feelings, shown through art.

Collage, montage and assemblage have all had their individual impacts on image making, mainly focusing on themes of availability, individuality, rebellion but also morale. These themes were already present within image making however, these three methods of creation have strengthened the importance of them.

Our individuality is what drives us to create pieces to help us become closer with one another. These art styles clearly represent emotion through symbolism and have conveyed unique experiences, allowing a community of people to resonate with the art, while also relating with other people.

Collage, montage and assemblage promotes confidence and empowers the individual to be as authentic as they can. Its impacts on image making are just as great as their impacts on culture and society.

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