

CUTTING AND SCREAMING

The creation of the multimedia work “co-” as homage to John Heartfield

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SCISSORS as method

The first time I saw a photomontage by John Heartfield was in 2016. I saw a man with a puzzling expression on his face, using a pair of scissors to “work on” the photo of a second man positioned in front of him. The picture is titled “Benütze Foto als Waffe”, or “Use Photo as a Weapon”, and is a self-portrait of the artist himself cutting through the neck of Berlin Police Chief Karl Friedrich Zörgiebel with scissors. I became curious, not only due to the radical political message, but also because of the self-referentiality of the artistic method displayed on the picture. And so I began to explore the catalogue of works by the anti-fascist resistance artist Heartfield and his contemporaries. My own work has been influenced by the principle behind many of his works. New realms of meaning revealed themselves to me in his assemblages of leaps in time and visual contradictions – a transparent hypertextuality, in which the reference and that which is referenced can coexist. Jacques Rancière explains the dialectic montage in similar words: “The dialectical method invests a chaotic power in the creation of little machines of heterogenous matter. By fragmenting continuums and separating terms that call for each other or, conversely, by assimilating heterogenous elements and combining incompatible things, it creates clashes.”* I wanted to go a step further in my work, in order to develop a heterogeneity and clashing of various media that would be interlinked through certain parameters, even while, from different angles, they appear heterogeneous and unrelated foreign. The title “co-”. (from the Latin prefix for “putting together”) is in itself the description of what happens at methodological level in this piece: a dialectical reconstruction achieved by combining cutting and montage. The composing was a threefold parallel process in which I composed the music, shot the video and wrote the text so that I could cut the material and piece it back together again. I was also looking for various external material – quotations, Heartfield’s posters, etc. – in order to build a historical distance as opposition, a technique that Heartfield himself used, as evident in his work “Der Krieg. Ein Gemälde von Franz v. Stuck. Zeitgemäß montiert von John Heartfield” (1933) [The War, A Painting by Franz v. Stuck. Contemporarily assembled by John

Heartfield]. Over time I have come to realize that the more I look at my work from a distance, the more references and influences I find that relate to aspects of photomontage – an insight that I would like to share as I write this text.

THE MOUTH as mechanism

The mouth is the central object of my work, which interlinks all thematic and media levels. A mouth that articulates language, that smiles, screams, kisses, bites, eats and spits. Symbolically speaking, the mouth could be interpreted as a sign of freedom or, alternatively, as a sign of protest against a lack of basic rights. The mouth “speaks” of degrees of freedom as we gaze upon an image of the two hands of a stranger pulling up someone else’s cheeks to form a fake smile on their face, or on an image of a mouth shut with masking tape, above it, paradoxically, the words “SPEAK” or “TELL”. For me, the mouth is also the point at which all media converge. In my piece, the text is silently simulated by a mouth through lip movements, and later interpreted by the musicians. The intonation of the spoken sentence is transcribed in the instrumental lines, and the total and multiple deconstruction of the material is cancelled again symbolically by the mouth. The Heartfieldian practice of cutting is, in the case of my piece, also placed in the time axis. During the era of the Dadaist art-



1 – Film still from “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu

ist Heartfield, what a mouth could say was to a large degree characterised by satire – for against the backdrop of a reality defined by censorship, satire holds the only possibility of protest, of freedom of speech. Our present day is largely defined by the fact that although a mouth is free to express anything, in the face of the excessive flood of information it loses its ability to remain audible above the noise.

That is why my work “co-” is an homage in many respects: an homage to the Heartfieldian spirit, to his artistic method and to satire itself. Satire is a cultural heritage that shadows us from the past, but which we can hardly use anymore. For the most exaggerated form of satire that exists is found in everyday life itself. The anatomy of Heartfield’s works lives from the juxtaposition. This principle of contrasting content and of a clash of unrelated references was a key method of putting together the material in my composition. At certain points, for example, I attempted to overcome or refute the actions in the video, only to be in unison with them later on. The musical materials that are connected with text were separated from each other and assembled in places where they contradict each other etc. Heartfield’s title “Benütze Foto als Waffe”, or “Use Photo as a Weapon”, reveals the artistic means as an instrument of resistance. At the same time, the mouth as a tool of artistic articulation is the instrument that allows an individual idea to become a collective opinion and action. The latter brings with it a potential risk



5 – Film still from “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu

THE SCREAM as musical impulse

Musical montage, or the montage of musical quotations, has been an established technique since the last century, as evidenced through the emblematic works of composers like Charles Ives, Luciano Berio, Bernd Alois Zimmermann or Olga Neuwirth. Musical heterogeneity based on musical quotations also plays a big role in the works of Heiner Goebbels, who took it a step further by blurring the boundaries between formats. Another example of such multimedia works is the “Piano Concerto” by Simon Steen-Andersen. All of the examples cited show that like photomontage, musical montage provides a semiological potential for the encoding of messages. In the case of my piece, the musical quotations are self-referential. Rather than cited excerpts from the compositions of other composers, they are fully composed materials that come from the language intonation of the text quotations. The cutting and assembly of these musical quotations into an unrelated foreign location leads to dialectic montage as a result. The potential of the ensuing heterogeneous and contradictory messages is demonstrated through the synthetic function of the dialectical montage. In the context of my piece “co-”, the scream as a message and musical impulse is viewed from several different perspectives. It is a scream of protest or a scream that covers up the screams of others, or a scream in thoughts – the most terrible of all, as it cannot be heard. Also important to me is the musical silence that I have built into the tension-laden moments of the piece. As a musical “impulse”, it is in its acoustic abstinence often the most effective refutation, since it generates the greatest tension in the formal flow of the work.

28

Bari. Sax. Speak normally: the beauty of me is that I am very rich

Vc. *f* *ff* *mf* *mf* PAUSE CLICKS

Video "the beauty of me is that I am very rich"

37

Bari. Sax. Shout: Sa-ti-re *ff* PAUSE PAUSE CLICKS 36 36

Vc. Tap with Plectrum Pick screech *mf* *f* *ff* PAUSE PAUSE CLICKS 36 36

E. Gtr. + keyclicks plus voice + sound rough articulation "schatter" voice + ord. → rough art. growl *f* *ff* *ff* shout: Zeit! Hold *f* *ff*

1:27-1:29 "Satire" 1:29-1:32 poster 2, head covered

2-4 – Extracts from the score of “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu

THE TONGUE The message of the tongue twister

She cannot live there where she cannot move and she cannot move there where she cannot speak, because he says that she cannot have the right to move and since she cannot speak she cannot say that she cannot live and even if I say that say that she should have the right to move because she cannot live he says I shouldn't speak and they say nothing about her right to move, only about his right to speak and my right to speak.

And she cannot live.

The piece develops through certain moments of tension. One of them is a very painful visual image, namely that of a tongue being cut. It creates a tension that is not resolved, because the consequences of this action are not shown in the end. The act of cutting is the motif that defines the piece, both at technical level and in terms of content. Here it is condensed into an image, and opens the transition to the last part, as a kind of coda, with the text that focuses attention on the topic of freedom of speech. The text – a “tongue twister” – is played from tape and uses polysyndeta and deliberate tautologies to generate a certain rhythm and meter. The musical elements in this section are mainly articulated sounds with an abundance of percussive parts accompanied by consonants spoken by instrumentalists. The text encompasses the overall idea of the piece, dealing simultaneously with the defence of freedom of speech and the problem of the exploitation of that freedom in order to disseminate anti-democratic messages.

Just as in the past dialectic montage and symbolic photo-montage held the possibility of furthering the development freedom of speech, today it is necessary to come up with similar possibilities of further development in order to separate the truth from the obstacles of the one-sided media frenzy. The image of the tongue being cut follows us still.

* Jaques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*. London 2007

6 – Extracts from the score of “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu



7 – Film still from “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu



8 – Film still from “co-”. © Anda Kryeziu