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Collaging as a Method for IR in the Anthropocene

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Introduction

The image of methods as being mainly (or even exclusively) about statistical techniques is surprisingly tenacious in the discipline of international relations (IR). Notwithstanding the long tradition of qualitative and critical scholarship and the equally longstanding struggle of those working in this tradition to reclaim methods—epitomized at least for me by Hans Georg Gadamer’s imposing and magisterial *Wahrheit und Methode* (Gadamer 1990 [1960])—it remains common, even among critical scholars, to associate methods with measuring, counting or statistics. Unfortunately, critical scholarship that distances itself from the obsessions of counting often replaces it with some other cookbook like notion of methodology (Leander 2017). Such reductive understandings of methods are generally problematic. For an IR, be it critical or otherwise, that is (or should be) acknowledging its responsibility in the Anthropocene, its disciplining effects are debilitating. It transforms

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methodology from the heuristic device it should be into a policing technology that blinds and blocks, impeding IR scholars from working with the Anthropocene.

Disrupting this narrow understanding of methods and its effects by showing that there are alternatives is therefore of fundamental importance. This chapter focuses on one specific alternative: the method of collaging. The core argument is that adopting collaging as a method makes it possible to situate IR scholarship fully in the Anthropocene. This method allows IR scholars to contribute to the multi-disciplinary efforts that go into *co-producing* an understanding/image of the Anthropocene. It makes it possible for sustained critical IR scholarship to *re-problematize* the performative consequences of these images and also generates awareness of the possibility and forms through which IR scholars might engage in *re-designing* politics in the Anthropocene. The prefix re- highlights that it is doing so working *with* existing problematizations and designs rather than against them or starting anew. This chapter shows how collaging as a method achieves this, making a collage with feminist, design and science and technology studies scholarship as well as with artworks (by Rosana Paulino, Stefan à Wengen and Tatiana Bilbao). This chapter does *not* dwell at any length on the faults or limitations of alternative methods by which IR scholars might wish to engage the Anthropocene. There simply is no space, and it is more useful to highlight what can be gained through the approach of collage rather than engage in settling academic argument by gladiatorial combat.

Collaging the Anthropocene

It is easy to find the Anthropocene “wanting in precision” as Braidotti puts it (2019, 82). A steadily expanding wealth of definitions and conceptions are vying for our exclusive attention. This is annoying for IR scholars who would like a clearly defined problem that they could contribute to solving using their specific form of disciplinary knowledge and the methodologies associated with it. However, one of the reasons the Anthropocene is so “wanting in precision” is that it has become an umbrella term capturing a wide range of approaches acknowledging the importance of facing Gaia and therefore of “re-naturalizing politics” (Latour 2017). The other chapters in this volume (including Chap. 1) discuss and introduce many of these varying images and their contexts, assumptions and stakes. The point here is simply that this plurality of understandings and the related proliferation of terms have important methodological implications for IR scholars who may want to (and perhaps

should want to) contribute to the discussion about the Anthropocene. They have to let go of the idea that their contribution would be focussed on a neatly defined problem—*the* problem of the Anthropocene—and instead realize that what they will be contributing to is the process of describing and defining the Anthropocene. Worse still, what they will be contributing to is not an exercise of finding a singular description or definition for an equally singular problem but to a plurality of descriptions through which the Anthropocene is being delimited and defined from a great variety of disciplinary perspectives.

One of the most striking aspects of these descriptions (in emphatic plural) defining the Anthropocene is the awareness that these processes cannot be mono-perspectival. Rather, scholars collaborate across materials, sources, forms and disciplines ranging from those in the natural sciences to the humanities and arts. For Latour, this is an opportunity to be seized. For the first time, the natural sciences are inviting the humanities to collaborate and inversely the humanities are eager to engage with the natural sciences. “Facts of the world unite!” rallies (Latour 2017). The drawing together of disparate disciplinary insights facilitates the making of images of the Anthropocene where each image is composed of pieces from very many perspectives and disciplines and the images themselves are connected, but only partially and imperfectly. An argument from geology or literary theory may form part of several images, but there is no guarantee that it will be part of all of them.

Gone with the idea of a unified, singular Anthropocene is also the idea that “inter-disciplinarity” is desirable because it allows each discipline to bring its specific piece to the construction of an image in the singular. The proverbial elephant of inter-disciplinarity can no longer fill its pedagogical functions. Drawing on an Indian story about six blind men trying to describe an elephant, the story has become a favourite analogy, justifying inter- or multi-disciplinary scientific endeavours. The blind men all say different things about the elephant as they get hold of its different parts (the trunk, the leg, the body, the tusks etc.). While contradictory, each man is correct, and each contributes a piece to the picture of an elephant. However, in the Anthropocene, where the focus is upon plurality and relations rather than fixed entities, the elephant has ceased to be a singular elephant. In fact, it may not be useful to think of it as an elephant at all.

“Trans-disciplinarity” is not of much avail when it comes to grappling with something plural and emerging. It operates as a form of mono-disciplinarity running across different fields. It may be, for example, a biological evolutionary approach, a Foucauldian approach or a quantum physics that transverses disciplinary boundaries. Transdisciplinarity rests on the idea that there might be one specific logic that connects across the foci of varying disciplines.

However, this mono-disciplinarity will always be rather too unified and singular. It reproduces a single image of the Anthropocene. It just does so across disciplines. In the process, it ignores the plurality and multiplicity and hence the core of the current discussions surrounding the Anthropocene. With the Anthropocene, we are facing the “destruction of the idea of the globe” as a singular space and instead the emergence of “multiple worlds” or “pluriverses” (Latour 2017; Law 2015). The images of the Anthropocene coexist, even if they are contradictory and indeed incompatible as do waves and particles in Quantum Theory. These images of the Anthropocene are different realities, *not* relativistic imaginaries.

The Anthropocene, IR scholars are groping to come to terms with, is something that looks much more like a series of collages, each composed of a set of heterogeneous and possibly only partially connected or totally disconnected pieces. It is perhaps a world picture of sorts. But that picture looks like a collage. While this image may be neither novel nor unique to the Anthropocene and has much in common with the image of the world advanced by a long tradition of materialist scholarship (e.g. Braidotti 2019, 85–88), the debate around the Anthropocene has crystallized awareness of this. Since the well-trodden paths of inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary methodology do not take us far when we grapple with this plurality and proliferation of difference, perhaps we should ponder other paths?

If the emerging Anthropocene resembles a collage, why not think of our methodologies, by which we are co-producing it, as collaging? Why not think of what we are doing as matter of adding pieces and generating connections, being mindful of what we leave out and what remains disconnected? I prefer this term to most of the other terms that are emerging in the literature on critical methodology; this is because it seems to capture the kind of un-disciplined or anti-disciplinary methodology required to come to grips with the Anthropocene, and not only for IR scholars.

Some of these other terms, including the critical cartographies of Braidotti's (2005) or Latour's compositions (2010), have connotations of the orderly and well organized. Cartographies help us simplify a messy terrain. Compositions draw attention to orderly forms. Others such as Strathern's patchworks (2005) or Haraway's string-figures (2013) refer to one specific materiality—patchworks are made of cloth and string-figures of yarn—and therefore de-emphasize the significance of heterogeneous material (cf. Leander 2019, 2020 for a more detailed perspective). Hence, even if these methodologies have much in common, I collaging most realistically and therefore also most helpfully captures what is involved methodologically when grappling with the Anthropocene. Before doing so, however, I would like to insist on two reasons why the more radical connotations of collaging, in terms of methodological

openness and heterogeneity, are a helpful, perhaps necessary, check on the disciplining disciplinary processes hampering IR scholars from situating themselves within the Anthropocene.

The first reason is that it encourages the modesty that is not only an absolutely essential scholarly virtue—as argued by scholars as diverse as Bourdieu (2000), Bobbio (2014) or Braidotti (2019)—but also a scholarly quality necessary in order to accept the radical methodological openness called for when grappling with our own place in co-producing the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene “is much less addressable by modernist constructions and assumptions; it is more contingent, plural and complex: thereby less amenable to the applications of ‘technological solutionism’ or ‘lessons learned’, which can be generalised and applied” (Chandler 2018, 3). Approaching the Anthropocene (from IR or elsewhere) goes hand in hand with the humbling realization that our own knowledge contributes, but one of the pieces of the Anthropocene which, even if very important and true, remains only ever partial. Methodologically such a realization implies or, more strongly, demands an acceptance of the methodological plurality underpinning these pieces, including when this plurality contradicts our own understandings of appropriate methodology. This approach obviously also requires an acceptance that the methodology underpinning work in other disciplines such as geology, archeology, philosophy or literary studies may have to be accepted even if it plainly contradicts our own methodological convictions. Even more challenging, it requires accepting that a plurality of contradictory and incompatible methodologies in our own field is called for (Stengers 2008). In other words, it requires giving up on methodology as the core tool for disciplinary disciplining, establishing belonging and hierarchies in the field of IR and instead seeing methodologies as opening new avenues and contesting the boundaries of disciplinary fields.

The second reason for taking collaging as a methodology is that by drawing attention to multiplicity and heterogeneity, it also underscores the importance of disconnections and discontinuities, thereby offering a check on the disciplining effect of the IR discipline. Collaging serves as a reminder for IR scholars that also non-action and silence are forms of action with performative effects and that intentions and outcomes are two different things. In that sense, taken a step further, the collage methodology comes with the possibly disturbing realization that even if IR scholars do not intend their knowledge to contribute to the production of any of the possible images of the Anthropocene, they may still be doing precisely that. We live in the age of unintended consequences (Braidotti and Fuller 2019). Or, perhaps we have been in that age for longer than we like to admit (Box 19.1)?

Box 19.1 Rosana Paulino

As Rosana Paulino captures in her many explorations of the racialized, gendered, political subjectivities in contemporary Brazil, the sciences are deeply complicit and need to take responsibility by probing the truths and legacies they have produced. With her installation “Wall of Memory,” of which *The Settlement is part* she recalls the way the sciences have contributed to the digitally mediated, material, visual and sensory memory and present of racial relations entangled with slavery in Brazil (Fig. 19.1). This is not because the scientists involved necessarily intended this. It was the effect of what they did and probably did mostly without thinking they were doing it. The scientists who were involved in the classifications, measurements and documentation were concerned with science and truth *not* with how their work was making up the racialized, gendered subjectivities. Their work however was inscribed, lived on and was transformed in the socio-material relations of Brazil, and eventually picked up in Paulino’s work such as the “Wall of Memory.” As these scientists were complicit in the making of racial subjectivities, so IR scholars are complicit in co-producing the Anthropocene.



Fig. 19.1 Rosana Paulino, “Assentamento” [The Settlement]. Mixed media and video. Dimension variable. 2013, Artist collection. (Image taken at MAR – Museu de Arte do Rio de Janeiro)

Insisting on discontinuities and disconnections, collaging helpfully directs attention to such complicities. IR silences the ways our own discipline is entangled with the Anthropocene and thereby is a form of complicity with the productions of the Anthropocene. War and peace, security and risk, borders and regions or diplomacy and transnational relations are reshuffled or entangled with the Anthropocene, but IR remains silent on the subject. Collaging enables us to direct attention to these disciplining effects generated by the discipline and indeed undercuts the active silencing of those interested in speaking about the disconnections and their significance on the grounds that their methodologies and approaches are unfitting. Instead, it underlines the need to turn IR's silences and disconnections into a central object of investigation and is therefore an important part of ensuring that IR scholars and the discipline as a whole become more cognizant of our contribution to collaging the Anthropocene.

In sum, the point Barad makes about Queer Feminist Theory (QFT) can readily be restated for IR (and that obviously includes critical IR):

For all its entangled history with capitalism, colonialism, and the military-industrial complex, IR [QFT in original] not only contains its own undoing—in a performative exploration/materialization of a subversive materialism—but in an important sense makes that very undoing its im/proper object of study. (Barad 2015, 413 original italics)

Working with collaging enables attending to such im/proper objects. It also, of course, awakens the spectre of a discipline in dissolution that has been a driving force for disciplining moves in IR since its inception as an academic discipline (Guzzini 1992). There are good reasons for this anxiety pertaining to institutional politics and resources, which it is suicidal to underestimate for all IR scholars. However, perhaps considering life in the IR discipline as being at one with this spectre of dissolution may be necessary at least if that life is to be one enabling and empowering IR scholars to co-produce descriptions of the Anthropocene.

Collaging to (Re-)problematize the Anthropocene

It matters which images of the Anthropocene are produced and presented. Each image draws attention to a specific aspect of the Anthropocene. In so doing, it opens up a specific problematization that pulls in different kinds of expertise and makes the world actionable in specific ways. As Braidotti points

out, “what is at stake in the discussions about the Anthropocene is the issue of how power is constructed and distributed today” (Braidotti 2019, 82). It is therefore only logical that the Anthropocene has spurred a wide-ranging variety of Anthropomemes (ibid.)¹ such as the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene, the Anthrobscene, the Plastic-scene and beyond. These Anthropomemes are struggles over how to conceptualize the Anthropocene and attempts to alter the way it is being problematized. Each Anthropomeme resonates with sensibilities concerning marginalized or naturalized out of existence by the other prevailing understandings of the Anthropocene. So too does each more or less explicit definition of the Anthropocene. Braidotti herself, for example, shares with Chakrabarty (2016) and many others a concern with the performative effects of problematizations focused mainly or even exclusively on the preoccupations of dominant interests. Scholarship geared to the Anthropocene is marred by a “distinct bias towards the anxieties of dominant cultures, ethnic groups and classes” (Braidotti 2019, 82). For IR scholars, thinking about how to approach the Anthropocene methodologically, collaging is a way of retaining a sensitivity to this deeply political process of multiple problematizations and the tensions between them. It is also a way of remaining cognizant of the political possibilities of driving wedges into the cracks separating them to shift the images of the Anthropocene rather than attempting to adjudicate which of the multiple images is more correct or fitting. The plurality of problematizations and the tensions they generate become a political resource, to be drawn upon to understand politics and intervene. They can usefully direct attention to “the bias towards the anxieties of dominant cultures” Braidotti mentions and they can be mobilized to counter this bias.

Thinking methodologically in terms of collages is important also for a second reason that goes beyond the way it opens up for thinking ideationally about what kinds of problems are constituted by the Anthropocene. It makes room for the material aspects of this constitution. As with compositional methods more generally, collaging draws attention to the heterogeneous materiality of politics (Latour 2010). It provides a way out of “the humanistic hubris,” the “human exceptionalism” inherent in assuming that humans are somehow independent and separate from their environment, including the way it is expressed in tools, infrastructures and bodies (respectively, Braidotti 2019, 3 and Chandler 2018, 19). Instead, working with collages, focusing on heterogeneity and discontinuities makes it easier to take fully into account the ways in which the human and the humanities are materially entangled. Also understanding, thinking and writing are fundamentally material processes.

¹ She borrows the expression and idea from *The Guardian* journalist Macfarlane.

Changes in our systems of recording—or what Kittler terms “discourse networks”—including the event of the typewriter, the radio and the gramophone alter how we think and write (Kittler 1990, 1999). We have become so deeply entangled with our digital environments that it may be important to begin asking if computers are becoming our “mothers” and how this digital entanglement is transforming “how we think,” read, teach, learn and work and of course how all of this matters for those excluded from the digital (Hayles 2005, 2012).

When we grapple with problematizations of the Anthropocene, including its thematic exclusions and hierarchies, these material entanglements are and remain crucial. They are not only an obvious part of the subject matter of the Anthropocene and therefore something we need to attend to as an object of study and observation. As just suggested, material entanglement is also integral to our observation and thinking and hence to the (multiple) processes problematizing the Anthropocene. For example, when interested in problematizing climate change, we are not only working with a range of material shifts such as those in CO₂ levels, but this work itself is undertaken in a materially entangled manner. The various technologies of measurement and observation through which we observe the shifts, the multiple indicators for comparing them, our visualizations of information are integral to our (multiple) problematizations of the issue. Collaging is useful as it is geared to cultivating this multiplicity of material entanglements that is involved in the multiple and contradictory problematizations of the Anthropocene, including those to which we as IR scholars contribute (including through our silences).

Adopting collaging as a methodology allows scholars to understand and contribute to the (re-)problematizing of the Anthropocene as a materially entangled process. If followed through, the argument about material entanglements logically leads to a need for the materiality of the process of knowing to be accounted for. The implications are momentous. “*In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of responses, of response-ability,*” as Barad puts it (2017, 401 original italics). As Barad makes clear, taking full account of the material enables scholarship to grapple with knowing beyond language, with sense-making broadly defined, and with the place of affect and of the unthought. Scholars find themselves in a context where indeed the “Kantian problematic of the Sublime has become inescapable” (Grove and Chandler 2017, 80). The consequence is that in addition to focusing on the assembling of socio-material, relational networks scholars also have to focus on the aesthetic, affective and symbiotic processes in composing (Austin 2019, 253–255) (Box 19.2).

Box 19.2 Stefan à Wengen

Stefan à Wengen explores such processes. In the series *The Mission* (details in Fig. 19.2), for example, he does so attending specifically to the colonial process. The empty shed in ruins. Nature turned destructive. The absence of people, cultures and languages. By bringing together a range of unrelated elements, Wengen's image recalls the desolation following in the wake of this Mission and of Civilizing Missions more generally. He does so, working through affect and the resonance of the collaging aesthetics. Linear readings of the colonial cannot and will not capture the uncanny resonance of this disjointed aesthetics. At the same time, the disjunctures, the unexpected sculpture and the colouring of the shed and of the sky recall that there is scope for intervention and for agency. The disjointed pieces of the collage might be assembled differently and generate other resonances, opening for other problematizations. Analogously, using collaging methods could helpfully provide IR scholars with ways into re-problematizing the Anthropocene in a manner which mobilizes the material and aesthetic effects of composing.



Fig. 19.2 Stefan à Wengen, "The Mission VIII", 2007; 185 x 265 cm; Acrylic on Canvas; Private Collection, Courtesy: Beck & Eggeling, Düsseldorf

Collaging as a methodology re-problematizes the Anthropocene by drawing attention not only to the politics of agendas but also to the heterogeneous *materialities* and the *affective and aesthetic* processes that are crucial in forming them. The consequence of this for how we conceive of critical scholarship is far reaching. The classical ideal of reflexivity as the core virtue of critical scholarly practice fades into the background. Kant's solution "to barricade himself behind the fortifications of self-reflective consciousness—to withdraw from the world into the certitudes of the mind" (Grove and Chandler 2017, 81) will not bring us very far. Rather, we need to venture into a terrain of the materially entangled and the "unthought." A place of resonance rather than reason. A "weird" place of recursively looping knowing involving material subjects (Braidotti 2019, 83). In this weird place, "what happens 'sticks' with us, like Styrofoam cups or plastic bags that stay in the environment and do not degrade in a human lifetime" (Chandler 2018, 8). In fact, "what happens" does more than stick to our skin or litter nature. The particles of Styrofoam and plastic bags move inside us with the food we eat and the water we drink. They stick with us from within. They become part of us. So does the Anthropocene more generally.

Our merging with the Anthropocene annuls (critical) distance. The prospects of developing and pursuing conventional emancipatory projects anchored in reflexive re-problematizations therefore fade. Where politics is about resonance rather than reason, affect rather than thought and aesthetics rather than logic, reflexivity has a limited purchase. As Chandler posits, "the affirmative politics of the Anthropocene is thus an inversion of the critical focus upon finding hope or meaning in the world ... *There can be no basis for hope*. It is precisely hope—the flight from the reality of the destruction wrought by modernity—that the Anthropocene is held to bring to an end" (2019, 701 italics in original). On the one hand, working with collaging as a methodology leads us to this place where there is no way around the material and affective and of an "affirmative politics" taking this fully into account. On the other hand, collaging also offers alternative forms of intervention that work *with* the material and aesthetic affective. In so doing, it offers a route away from the hopeless place of non-agency, where affirming destruction is the only option available to critical scholarship—a route that leads to rethinking intervention, emancipation and the space for critical scholarship in a manner allowing for forms of hope.

Collaging to Re-design in the Anthropocene

Grappling with the politics of the Anthropocene is challenging for a wide range of reasons, including those just discussed. The challenge, however, has done much more than generate hopelessness and paralysis for critical scholars and others. It has been a major source of political rethinking and activism as Hayles rightly remarks (2017, 34). Both academically and practically, it has galvanized reflection around what it means to act politically in a world where the pervasiveness of the material and aesthetic aspects of politics and agency are fully acknowledged, where “the Sublime has become inescapable” to reiterate Grove and Chandler’s formulation. Quite logically, in such a context, forms of political agency anchored in and working through the material aesthetic have grown in importance. Various forms of art have therefore come to figure centrally both as forms of observation *and* as ways of communicating knowledge across the social and natural sciences. The aesthetic, visual and narrative turns in IR are part of this trend.

The Politics of Design/Politics as Design is an overarching heading under which these trends are discussed (Austin and Leander *fc.* 2021). This is no coincidence. Design, traditionally conceived, engages precisely with the aesthetic materiality of the world we inhabit and re-enact. It is also often associated with forms of political activism. The Forensic Architectures project, for example, has used design to rethink evidence, memory and present-day politics across a range of issues ranging from those surrounding the Israeli occupation of Palestine to migration across the Mediterranean (Weizman 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2019). De-colonial scholars use it to imagine and enact transformative politics affirming a pluriverse of different worlds (Escobar 2018; Mignolo 2012). With regard to the Anthropocene specifically, Fry proposes that precisely because of its material aspects, working with design is necessary if we are to generate “sustainment” and interrupt the processes of “de-futuring” in a context where politics, indeed, is in the design and design therefore *is* politics (Fry 2010).

A final reason IR scholars may wish to adopt collaging as methodology for approaching the Anthropocene is that it is a way of articulating the contribution of IR to this kind of critical scholarship, working through design, that also allows IR scholars to negotiate some of the most obvious pitfalls of designing. The hubris of associating design too closely with the designer in the singular is the most obvious such pitfall. It turns design into something done by an intentional individual who devises grand schemes; the avant-garde activists rearranging politics in their own guise. Such images are problematic

for any approach that purports to seriously give a place to the material agencies or self-organizing systems in the process of designing order (Austin 2019, 257). They are also politically nefarious. They necessarily gloss over differences and effectively quell all worlds but one. By assuming that “we are in this together,” they fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of that “we.”

Collaging suggests an alternative to this focus on the designer. Collages are the antonym of the grand plan. Collaging cultivates a sensibility for the productive effects of textures and to the material expressions, diversity, frictions and contradictions they generate. It is a way of consciously striving to make space for multiple registers and logics. It is a way of ensuring that the noise of a singular understanding of progress does not make it impossible for us to hear the noise of other temporalities (Tsing 2015). As a master of the art of collage put the point more generally,

the collage technique is the systematic exploitation of the accidentally or artificially provoked encounter of two or more foreign realities on a seemingly incongruous level—and the spark of poetry that leaps across the gap as these two realities are brought together. (Max Ernst cited in Berger 2008)

Collaging, in short, works through respect for the material, in a manner expressing emergent, unexpected “foreign realities” beyond logocentric schemata. The image of design associated with it is participatory and critical. It is a form of design ensuring that users are in focus and that they are actively involved. The design itself encourages critical engagement and the transformative developments this triggers (Andersen and Pold 2018, 161–163; Dunne and Raby 2013) (Box 19.3).

Box 19.3 Tatiana Bilbao

Tatiana Bilbao’s architectural designs express such a collaging vision of design geared specifically towards inclusion and keeping a space open for critical work. Bilbao’s overarching aim is to involve the socio-economically disenfranchised in composing their own sustainable homes. To this end, she provides modules that are combinable in ways and in sequences decided by the users. Furthermore, the users finalize the design of the modules themselves as they have a say in the choice of materials, colours and textures. Moreover, they are involved in deciding how the houses they construct will be connected to their surroundings. The ambition is to provide those who cannot afford to buy a house, with the possibility of constructing one over time and changing it to fit but also to shape the evolving socio-material environment and indeed to transform this environment in the process (Bilbao 2018). Not surprisingly, Bilbao often re-presents her own work in collage form (as in Fig. 19.3).

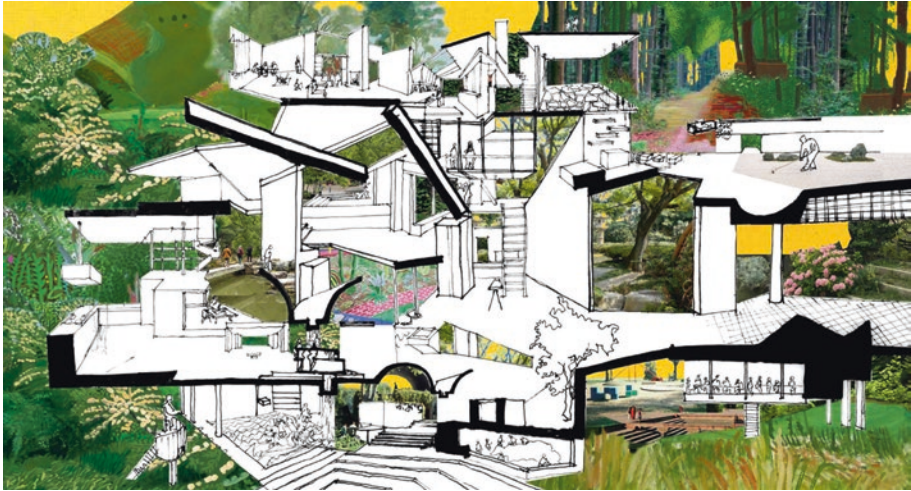


Fig. 19.3 Tatiana Bilbao, “Ways of Life”, (image used for advertising the exhibition dedicated to Bilbao at the Louisiana Museum, Denmark [2017])

Finally, in addition to moving design thinking from the individual designer to the material and the multiple, adopting collaging as a methodology is helpful because it leaves scope and flexibility for negotiating the hurdles of working and intervening in complex and heterogeneous contexts. Working with collaging in other words is a way of accepting that hierarchies cannot necessarily be flattened or disbanded and that, therefore, working with the hierarchies, disturbing them, while “staying with the trouble,” may be necessary (Haraway 2016). We have to display a “willingness to work with, rather than against, the actors in the domain of application; one that is collaborative rather than imperious; modest rather than megalomaniac; and wishing to learn rather than itching to instruct” (Mol 2002, 164). Collaborationism becomes a crucial qualifier for such academic work (Leander 2020).

This emphasis on working *with*, on collaborating, is bound to sound unappealing to many critical scholars. Working *with* implies losing control not only over processes but also over outcomes, particularly if the working *with* is motivated by the need to collaborate in a messy and complex, shifting world of material and affective politics. Gone is the confidence in the ability of critical scholarship to lead and direct. Worse still, working *with* displaces critical scholarship from the safety of the moral high grounds from which it could once upon a time judge the world while designing superior plans for it. Collaboration is ethically problematic not only in war times. Working *with*

necessarily turns critical scholarship into something impure and dirty. When re-designing through collaging, an IR scholar, “like any other political actor, will get things wrong because, rather than in spite, of what they intended” (Hutchings 2018, 188) formulation. However, if the argument above is correct, these are the terms for intervening to re-design in the Anthropocene.

Conclusion

Reflecting on what is required methodologically for IR scholars to engage the Anthropocene is humbling. This is true not only when reflecting on the requirements imposed by any ambition to re-design but also when reflecting on what it takes to re-problematize or even to simply represent the Anthropocene. Humility is called for to rethink the standing of our own methods, their ability to grasp complex material and aesthetic processes, and the critical interventions they might generate and guide. In this chapter, I have argued that collaging is a methodology that is imbued with the kind of humility called for. Collaging works with the ready-made and found in all its ugly or appealing variety. It makes space for the variability and variety of what might be involved. While therefore permeated by the powers-that-be, collaging necessarily remains open about how to understand and negotiate them. This modesty comes at the cost of scientific certitudes sealed by standardized methods, ensured by established disciplines and deeply entrenched authorities. This is and should be unsettling. It challenges the foundations of academic work and authority.

In the present context, this is particularly disquieting as it is grist for the mill of an anti-expert/anti-knowledge populism eager to undermine the authority of science (of all and any kind). It may therefore be important to underline that the radical questioning through collaging, advocated for here, is helpful not only to IR scholars in search of a methodology for grappling with the Anthropocene. Critical scholarship, and associated methodologies, including collaging, may be crucial for defending the sciences more generally. It unsettles stultifying traditional institutional structures, that are both a core impediment to IR engagement with the Anthropocene and a core reason the populist critique of academic knowledge is so persuasive. Critical methodologies, including collaging, are heuristic devices that help us grasp the play of power, including sciences in an age of anti-knowledge populism. Although unsettling and potentially nerve-racking, methods such as collaging are therefore politically vital for IR scholars engaging the Anthropocene and beyond.

Key Points Collaging could help IR scholars reflecting on which methodologies to adopt when studying the Anthropocene. The main reasons outlined in this chapter are the following:

1. Representing the Anthropocene requires bridging radically heterogeneous materials and processes and situating our own observations in the process. Collaging is a methodological approach well suited for this because it is radically anti-disciplinary and imposes modesty and realism regarding our own place in co-producing the Anthropocene.
2. Collaging is helpful for problematizing the Anthropocene. By being attuned to the multiple, the discontinuous and the heterogeneous, it makes it possible to attend properly to the material and the affective/aesthetic aspects of problematization.
3. Since the politics of the Anthropocene is entangled with material, affective and aesthetic processes, critical interventions work with and through their design. Approaching design as a process of collaging distances it from the authoritarian designer and instead ensures that design can remain critical and participatory.

Key Questions

1. When collaging, there is potentially an infinity of materials to draw on and likewise techniques for connecting them. How can we approach this plurality and choose which of these to work with? How do we handle the omissions, tensions and contradictions such inescapable choices implicate?
2. How does collaging help us make “theoretical contributions”? What form can these theoretical contributions take?
3. How should we communicate findings based on collages? What forms of writing and dissemination are best suited for this purpose?
4. By what kind of criteria can we evaluate work done with collaging?

Further Readings

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