

Cut-up, fold-in, fold-out

An examination of the number 4

Four artists, four sensibilities, four views of/on the world, four lives . . . and an infinity of possibilities to create a collaborative piece of work. Last year, four women from various places, of different age and distinct technical preferences decided to work together – a challenging point of departure, an experience that could have failed. The advantage of this possible failure is that it occurs when the collaborative process ends. The way the collaboration develops is therefore an integral part of the resulting artwork itself. The ultimate moment of “collaborative fusion” lied here in the common production day at the art printing studio with its frenzied vapors of freshly printed heliographs and silkscreens. The outcome is haunting, wiping away any obsessive question of who the author of which specific sign might be, whose handwriting appears where and so on. Can the reason for this magical coherence and homogeneity be ascribed to the strong symbolism of the number four? A number that is dangerously conditioned and instantly activates associations such as: the corners of the square; the elements of fire, water, air and earth; the cardinal points of East, West, North and South; the seasons Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter; the four temperaments choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic; the moon phases of Waning, New, Waxing and Full moon; the ages of childhood, youth, maturity and old age? . . . However, all these constellations are not fed by randomness but rather the logic of recurrent cycles.

The combination of four ideas, four handwritings, four conceptual notions can be described as a collage, its most effective operative technique being the cut-up method, which William S. Burroughs described as follows: “The cut-up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera. In fact all street shots from movie or still cameras are by the unpredictable factors of passers by and juxtaposition cut-ups. And photographers will tell you that often their best shots are accidents . . . The cut-ups can be applied to other fields than writing . . . The cut-up method could be used to advantage in processing scientific data. How many discoveries have been made by accident?” (1961/78). It is quite fitting that Burroughs’ cut-up technique belongs more than ever to one of the most popular and convincing artistic strategies because it marries combinatorial play with the unconscious. Against this background, we can learn with less surprise but unleashed admiration that Burroughs invoked computing pioneer John von Neumann to trace the uses of the cut-up method, since these techniques have been employed in many areas of new media such as computer literary practice or game theory.

In parallel with the four collaborative posters, Edith Flückiger, Nica Giuliani, Cornelia Heusser and Hildegard Spielhofer produced four individual limited print series. Edith Flückiger realized with *Alles Seiende* (“All the being”) a series of prints recombining the letters of that very phrase by anagramming, palindroming and alliterating it in manifold ways to create new, undogmatic text fragments that merge with the background of the ornamental substance of the paper itself. In *Body&Schneiderinnen*, Cornelia Heusser sampled to potential infinity of supposition and color combination the programmatic photograph of handicraft workers sewing exquisite batik fabrics – a profession running in continuous danger of dying-off but without losing its pride, and paradoxically serving a goal that will never vanish in terms of the manifold, culturally shaped notions of body covering that can be found from East to West, and South to North. Hildegard Spielhofer gets into an active exchange and demands the viewers to collaborate with the work by exchanging their signature with the heliograph depicting a mysterious scenario: a healthy but rather bored looking woman in her prime, dressed in a white bikini is sitting on a boat with a can of beer in her hand, a sword fish at her feet, and both “staring” in completely different directions, as if they weren’t on the same vessel – where does culture start and where nature end? Nica Giuliani, on the other hand, is reflecting on Marilyn Monroe’s antiseptic personality, or put in more conciliatory words, her artistic figure and the transfiguration of her private persona. Giuliani does this by revisiting the strongest construction symbol of Marilyn’s biography, namely the very first and very last sentences in her numerous biographies, as well as a great deal of iconic images that focus on the birth-mark above her voluptuous mouth on multitudes of photographs.

“Cut word lines – Cut music lines – Smash the control images – Smash the control machine – Burn the books – Kill the priests – Kill! Kill! Kill!” (William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, 1961)

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