

## Collection/recollection

### The idea of collecting as editorial praxis

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Much has been written on the phenomenon of collecting as an ontological category, but not so much on the degree of creativity that is necessary or sufficient for the mere activity of collecting to turn into an artistically creative act unto itself. And it is not often the case that the collector's activities are linked to those of the editor, although both, in essence, devote themselves to quite similar work: at the end of the day, what is an editor if not a "collector" of content carefully ordered and chosen from abundant material to be included in a particular context (and possibly, upon doing so, to expand its individual meaning with new impact)? How does the collector modulate the meaning of all the components that make up his collection by the mere fact of having chosen to include them in it? And, if we no longer speak of "collections" but of the subset made up of personal archives... how can we situate the boundary between the mere juxtaposition of objects included in the personal archive on one hand, and the intentional selection of certain materials through which what has perhaps been carefully brought together and ordered to capture a certain image or provoke a certain impression is presented as spontaneous? What is the relation between the accumulation of materials involved in the creation of any personal archive and the task of "discarding" that seems intrinsic to the editor's role? How can activities that at first glance may seem as opposed as that of the collector (accumulating) and that of the editor (selecting and therefore also dismissing) relate to each other? Up to what point is the editor a collector and the collector and editor? And up to what point do they each play the role of *authors* when weaving unprecedented and even unusual relations among the materials subject to their respective selections?

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to the present, all these questions have seemed particularly relevant and opened interesting avenues for reflection in the field of artist's publications, where pre-established conventions and codes are challenged to force open their boundaries by definition. With their editorial activity, many artists have situated themselves in equidistant positions between the collector, the editor, the author and even the curator, enhancing the ambiguity of the roles played by each of these categories and exploiting their respective potential to the maximum. While artist's publications exploded as a genre in their own right in the 1950s, the most famous precedents in which this symbiosis of different roles occurred include Marcel Duchamp's prominent *Boîte-en-valise* (1936), a kind of portable exhibition contained in a suitcase for which Duchamp himself selected a series of previous works, created "reduced" versions that would be included in it and took charge of "editing it" and distributing it in multiple form.

By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many artists adopted the role of editors for all kinds of publications, with magazines occupying a prominent place. Artist's magazines would often turn into "atypical containers for experimental art equivalent to portable museums or 'delocalised' galleries"<sup>1</sup> that ended up making for some attractive "collections" of unconventional content and formats as their issues progressed. *Aspen*, "the magazine in a box", is famous among the pioneering projects of this kind. Edited by Phyllis Johnson, it was published between 1965 and 1971 and can be considered one of the first truly multimedia magazines: almost all its issues took the form of a container or box - replete with contributions from artists, writers, musicians, philosophers, etc., in various formats:

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<sup>1</sup> Pepe MURCIEGO, "NSMBLDS. Revistas ensambladas en el Estado español", in: *Hojeando... Cuatro décadas de libros y revistas de artista en España*, Madrid, Seacex, 2009.

postcards, sound recordings (on flexible disc) and film recordings (in Super 8 reels), photographs, texts, etc.

In a closer context, the magazine *Dau al Set* would be the first periodical publication project promoted by artists that achieved true relevance. *Dau al Set* was founded in Barcelona in 1948 at the same time as the group of the same name; its promoters were the multi-faceted Joan Brossa together with the philosopher Arnau Puig, the critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot and the painters Joan Ponç (director of the magazine), Antoni Tàpies, Modest Cuixart and Joan-Josep Tharrats, who acted as editor and printer at the same time. All were in charge of *Dau al Set* until 1956, even though starting in 1951, the year of the eponymous exhibition of the group's artists at Sala Caralt in Barcelona, the magazine went from the product of group editing work to the fruit of the personal endeavours of Joan-Josep Tharrats. In an extremely closed cultural context, *Dau al Set* undertook the highly important task of spreading surrealism and disclosing historic vanguards in Spain. Its format was relatively classical (among its collaborators, in addition to the artists, were the most important art critics of the time, like the aforementioned Cirlot, as well as Alexandre Cirici Pellicer and Santos Torroella), but especially starting with issue number 5 there was a juxtaposition of texts, generally written (though not solely) by Joan Brossa, with which the plastic works of the group's artists engaged in dialogue, establishing a relationship with the text that went far beyond mere illustrations.

Established almost two decades later, *Neon de Suro* was published in Palma de Mallorca by the brothers Andreu and Steva Terrades along with other young artists like Tomeu Cabot, Sara Gilbert and Joan Palou between 1975 and 1982. Its editors defined it as a "monographic brochure of disclosure" and its field of action was situated very close to the workings of mail art. Printed in black and white and folded in four, *Neon de Suro* was sent free of charge to a group of recipients and each issue was special, generally devoted to a single artist. Sara Gilbert, one of its editors and founders, was in charge of the content of the first issue and was followed by Miquel Barceló (1976), Mariscal (1977), Toni Catany (1978) and Julien Blaine (1980), among others. Among the issues devoted to various artists the one entitled "Neon de Suro a la Galeria Mec Mec", published in 1977, was especially important due to its relationship with one of the most avant-garde art galleries in Barcelona in the 1970s.

Around the same time, two other periodical publications by artists came about under much less conventional formats. *Texto poético* was published in Valencia between 1977 and 1989 and was promoted by the poet Bartolomé Ferrando. A periodical published at various times, each issue contained very different content: in addition to poetry and prose, there were projects, object poems, impossible actions, etc. The second was the result of the activity of a group of editors, with Lena Balaguer, Vicenç Altaió and Pep Sallés playing prominent roles and entitled *Èczema*. It appeared in Sabadell in 1978 and each adopted a different format based on its content. Its editors would define it as a magazine for poets "that don't get by enough with letters"<sup>2</sup> and it would reach issue number 28 before disappearing for good in 1984. A decade later, one of its editors, Vicenç Altaió, resumed publishing work along with Claret Serrahima, Manel Guerrero, Joaquim Pibernat and Manel Sala to launch *Cave Canis*, which would appear in Barcelona between 1996 and 1999. In the first issue it was announced that *Cave Canis* would only run to nine issues, one for each letter of the title. The magazine consisted of a cardboard box designed by Claret Serrahima that contained the different contributions of the collaborators of each issue, whether texts, CD recordings, multiple works created by artists, etc., and were generally organised around a monographic subject.

However, magazines are not the only place where the activities of editing, selecting, collecting and superimposing intermingle. Another stimulating facet of the many links and superimpositions that can be weaved around these activities is made by those artists who build

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<sup>2</sup> Ricard MAS, *Èczema. Del textualisme a la modernitat. 1978-1984*, Sabadell, Museu d'Art de Sabadell, 2002.

their artist's publications around the concept of the "archive" – understood as a collection of documents – whether involving the artist's own work archive, an archive belonging to someone else or simply a fictitious one.

The publication edited by **Christian Boltanski** in 1988 as a result of his exhibition at the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and entitled *Archives de l'année 1987 du journal "El caso"* brings together a compilation of photographs of murderers, victims and missing persons, all of them published over the course of the previous year by the sensationalist newspaper *El caso*. The series of images published in the book, very blurry and lacking any text to identify them, replicates the installation of the same title precisely (in which the same photographs were displayed even larger and lit by individual lamps). *Archive of Archives 1998-2006* is the book published for the exhibition of the same title that the artists **Montserrat Soto and Gemma Colesanti** held at the Centre d'Art La Panera in 2006. On this occasion, the exhibition itself was created based on the idea of the archive and its different types, from the genetic code to new audiovisual technologies. The categories around which its content was structured included the memory of objects, the memory of death, written memory, oral memory and biological memory, among others.

In the case of *Anatomia Diògenes. Obres inèdites acumulades*, by **Jordi Mitjà**, published in 2009, the material of the archive that the book uses is the author's own artistic career, with Mitjà acting as a "selective Diogenes"<sup>3</sup>, choosing material from art projects that he had created from 1988 to 2000 for the publication. In the words of David Armengol, "this fine and subtle balance between what is appropriate and what has been reinvented by his hand is where his work's potential and the way he understands the practice of art is found"<sup>4</sup>.

These examples illustrate some of the possible answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this article. And yet they are not the only ones and they do not exhaust the rich potential of variables that may generate the crossing and superimposition of roles, formats and codes in the artistic beginnings of collections, publications and archives.

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<sup>3</sup> David ARMENGOL, "Una aproximación a *Anatomía Diógenes* en tres conceptos", in: Jordi MITJÀ. *Anatomia Diògenes. Obres inèdites acumulades*, Barcelona, Crani Editorial, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.