



Archaic methods, subculture sensibilities, outsider aesthetics & Instagram: A humble cultural artifact attempts to resist the almighty algorithm

Calum Robertson

Abstract

This project grew from an assignment to design a potential cultural artifact that could resist the forces of control (often called "taste", reeking of cultural capital and long-gone scholars with their legacies of gatekeeping) within visual culture. During the idea-generating process, I quickly realized how easy, enjoyable and interesting actually creating such an artifact would be - and that I had the means to. So. I created an Instagram account, both to host the artifact(s) and be the artifact itself; a space online to populate and fill with homemade collages reflecting myself, my life, my "tastes" and, most of all, what sorts of materials cross my desk throughout a day (show flyers, magazines, poems, crumpled paperbacks and family photos, doodles and drawings and all that and more). This paper was written alongside the creation, generation and sharing of the account and collages, meaning that analysis informed experiment shaped analysis, and so on and so forth. This written portion of the project describes my experiences with the various stages of enacting this cultural artifact. Accompanying images were taken during this process. Where it will go next, now created, realized and analyzed, is beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly worth observing.

Keywords

aesthetics, visual culture, subversive art, artifact analysis, social media algorithms



And you say that anyone could make it, and I guess that's so.
I guess I ain't Walt Whitman, I guess she ain't Van Gogh.
You can't account for taste, but I know my north from south,
And it's a goddamn folk art masterpiece when she opens up her mouth.
“Folk Art Masterpiece” by Willi Carlisle (2016).

Preliminary Notes

While this project was originally intended to be a proposal for a cultural artifact, I quickly realized how easy, enjoyable, and potentially interesting actually creating this could be. Each written portion contains a journal entry, describing my experiences with the various stages of the project and/or other relevant information about creating and enacting the cultural artifact. Accompanying images were taken whilst creating this artifact. Where it will go after this assignment, once created and realized, is beyond the scope of this project, but certainly worth observing.

Artifact Design

First, a definition necessary for this project: Instagram accounts, and by extension any social media platform accounts, are cultural artifacts. Posting content and engaging with the content of others in these spaces constitute popular cultural practices. This is true because, as Raymond Williams wrote in 1958, popular culture is ordinary; in our current, increasingly interconnected and online world, nothing is more ordinary than having and interacting with and through Instagram accounts (p. 53).

As such, the proposed cultural artifact of this project is an Instagram account. One conceptualized and ran to resist the algorithm, which in this context is the embodiment of control by the hegemonic forces at work within society. The account has an innocuous, even strange and absurd, username that is not connected to myself or to the content of the account: *263u594b*. By randomly picking two sets of three numbers and sprinkling in the letters, it appears to have a structure with intended meaning, though it is just a random collection of symbols, more for categorization purposes than accessibility or branding.

The content posted consists of lowbrow, niche, do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic collages, made by me from various sources such as pages of old books, magazines, old poems and artworks I've made over the years, sticky notes, and other materials one accumulates whilst navigating daily life. These collages, as posted to Instagram, are provided at the end of this paper, with screenshots of each post, under the following heading: Chronological Record of Collages. Throughout this project, other relevant images are provided for further context.

Guided by Folk art, the artworks posted have a sense of the ordinary and the excessively imaginative, existing somewhere between “homemade” and heavily “artistic”. These collages, the content, the media, adhere to punk ideas and the tenets of Outsider Art, being low budget, brash, handmade, exceedingly creative and very unique. The profile picture, a close-up of a drawing from the margins in the notebook I used for this course's lecture (a winged figure; the coarse lines forming the feathers streaks across the page, becoming familiar-yet-unfamiliar through being zoomed in), integrates the ordinary everyday of popular culture and the ‘lowbrow’ artistic style most associated with Outsider Art (Williams, 1958, p. 59).

The goal is for the content produced to find its audience: those who subscribe to Folk art and punk ideas and aesthetics, those who will enjoy and resonate with the content without depending on the gatekeeping algorithms and corporations who dictate who sees what and to what degree. Niche art expression connects with like-minded consumers and creators as an act of resisting control of tastes, likes, mainstream and underground movements, of incorporation of subversive elements into mainstream aesthetics (Hebdige, 1979, p. 257-258). If this account introduces Outsider, Folk, lowbrow and DIY art to others for the first time, then that is what the art intended, truly, with minimal manipulation and involvement by algorithms and digital power structures. The spirit of making and being creative to reach others in a communal manner, so central to the movements influencing this project, will be invoked through active and intentional resistance to, and subversion of, the structures established to control and subversion of the structures established to determine tastes: Instagram, specifically.

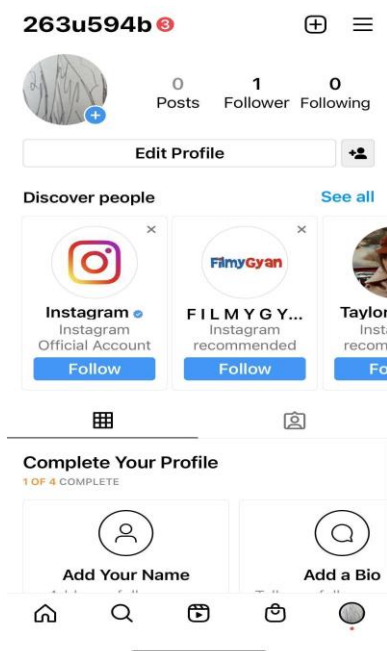
The structure of the account, the parts of the account given to the user to dictate according to their preferences, anything left for me to input and not set by the Instagram app itself, also adheres to the ideas of Outsider Art, punk aesthetics, and the DIY, low-brow, approach to art. There is no bio or name, nor does the account follow any other accounts or like any of the posts

shared by other users. Content is posted without any captions or hashtags. This is all intentional. By not providing identifying information and not interacting with other accounts, the algorithm is only minimally engaged, thus reducing Instagram's control of who sees and interacts with my shared content.

This is counteracted by promoting the account through more archaic, uncontrolled ways. Because popular culture inherently seeks an audience, a consumer, I need to promote this account, to some degree. The first method is through word of mouth. A large portion of the popular culture I like, especially those that were foundational to my identity, I was exposed to by the influence of a friend, telling me about a cool band or showing me an underground movie that they love. I shared the username and mission of the account with the people in my life, close friends, bemused family, interesting strangers who seem to have an artsy, unorthodox vibe to them. Having just begun to do this once setting up the account, it remains to be seen how effective word of mouth might be in sharing my popular culture artifact without depending solely on the algorithm or showing this account directly to the accounts of my friends (data gathered from contact lists elsewhere in my phone). It is worth noting that telling a friend about this gained me my first follower.

Figure 1

Screenshot of the Account Day 1



Note. Day one: no posts and one follower.

The second method I employed for the purpose of promoting the account was to make posters. I made a collage (that I also posted to the account) which incorporated a sticky note saying the following: TO SEE MORE FOLLOW: @263u594b on Instagram (Figure 2). Then, I photocopied about twenty copies, some in color, some in black and white, until my cheap printer-copier ran out of ink (and coincidentally seems to have breathed its last, perhaps inflecting a creative spirit of death and rebirth into the project). Each poster is unique, due to the DIY level I am operating at. Because the printer is cheap, because I am doing this myself in my bedroom, the ink bleeds, or certain pigments run out, making each look different in a very distinct, artistic and Outsider/punk style of variations I couldn't make intentionally. It had to be by chance, something that this project has really relied on. A chance conversation with a friend, mentioning this project, who tells their friend they happened to bump into, who saw a poster and wondered what all that was about – therein lies the spirit of community creativity so common in punk 'scenes'.

Figure 2

The Copies of the Collage Poster



Note. Apparent immediately is the variations added by the copier, such as the red smears and the vibrant, almost molecular appearing, green in the bottom right corner. To provide reference for comparison, Figure 2 is the original of the poster.

I did share a picture of the poster to my personal Instagram account. Now, this act still met the project's anti-algorithm tenets because I didn't share a post from the account. There was no

easy link to click. Instead, those interested had to remember the username (or write it down) and then type it in. By having an unclear, seemingly random username (assorted numbers and letters with no easily discernible meaning, because there is none) attached to a strange, handmade, punk-esque collage, those who saw it, including some who knew me personally, had their curiosity piqued. Those I talked to didn't necessarily understand, but were intrigued by this cryptic artifact. In fact, many resonated with the aesthetic, the Outsider, everyday yet hyper-creative feel of the collages and the account, which evokes feelings of belonging with a non-mainstream style. The tiny ripples of noise my posters generated found others who appreciated it and wanted more. On a very small scale, the posters did achieve the desired goal of disrupting the regular mainstream hegemonic content on the feeds of my followers; the account is followed by mostly people I know, though there are several I don't know who found this project through either a poster, word of mouth, or the algorithm.

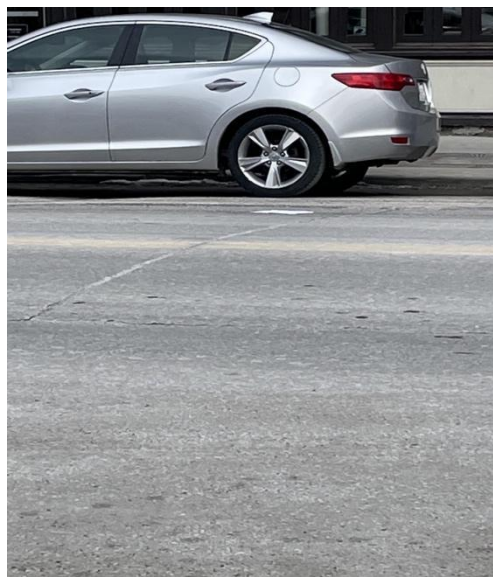
Figure 3

Kensington Poster A



Figure 4

Kensington Poster B



Note. One of the posters, caught by a sudden gust of wind, flew off the billboard. I saw it cartwheel across the road and it looked quite beautiful, as if it were meant to be free, roaming Kensington. I snapped a picture of it momentarily resting in the middle of the road. Right after this photo was taken, a breeze snapped it up. I watched it soar away into a crowd of pedestrians. I can reasonably hope it landed near someone, who noticed it and had their attention grabbed not

only by the poster itself, but by the manner of its arrival. Free-range advertising: you can't rely more on chance than that.

Figure 6

Kensington Poster C



Figure 7

Kensington Poster D



Figure 8

Kensington Poster E



I put up posters on billboards in Kensington, a trendy neighbourhood in Calgary, Alberta, remaining mindful of what I covered, trying to cover flyers for events passed (Figure 3-8). On the University of Calgary campus, I tacked a few to billboards and also taped a few to random walls. Because the Student Union elections were taking place at the same time, I hoped I could slit my posters in between campaign material, and thus avoid the eyes of any authority who might think I was breaking the rules. In fact, I deliberately didn't look up any rules or regulations surrounding placing material on campus walls and billboards. This was intentional, as an act of resisting the physical control of mine and other students' bodies as we move through campus. Restricting what is seen in a very low level, undramatic, unassuming manner is an example of how corporations (in this case, the University of Calgary, an institution and entity of power and control) "structure and articulate territories and populations"; for this project, the population is the student body and the territory articulated is the University of Calgary campus (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147).

The purpose of this account is threefold. Firstly, the society of control will be analyzed. This determines to what degree the yoke of algorithms, and through these algorithms, corporations, embody hegemony and mainstream tastes can be bucked. This disruption will occur with niche aesthetic content still reaching interested audiences, without self-promotion tactics that depend upon the app, giving in to trends, paying for promotion or changing content to suit what is popular. The project will not use these methods as that would be submitting to social control that modulates

not only who sees what I make but also what I make, to garner those views (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141).

I am not fully rejecting the operations of markets as older, non-technological, methods of spreading information (word of mouth and physical posters) combined with an unwieldy username potential that viewers have to type out (the ease of clicking a link feeds the algorithm, so removing that, adding a level of necessary effort and work to engage could impact the account's following) still do play into the society of control, depending on a continuous network that blurs the online-offline distinction (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141). In addition, I am aware that by creating an account, posting content regularly and having other users follow, like, share and interact with the content posted does still feed the algorithm, contributing to solidifying the individuality of myself and my followers into markets of data, "dividuals" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141). There is no way to truly escape the society of control (Deleuze, 1992, p. 139). However, perhaps by not subscribing to all the norms of Instagram accounts, of succumbing to self-promotion the way Instagram intends within its design (hashtags, sharing posts, follow-for-follow) I can provide a degree of resistance that lessens the control, ever so slightly, loosening the grip of corporations, global capitalism and societal aesthetic norms, through actively choosing not to participate in specific online behaviors (liking, sharing, hashtags, again) and putting effort, work, and devotion into offline methods less common in the hyper-digital world (posters, word of mouth, flyers) (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141).

Secondly, this project will dive into subcultures and, through lived experiences of creation and interaction with users from various backgrounds and identities, examine the tension between the noise of subcultures interrupting the quiet of hegemony and mainstream culture and the incorporation of aesthetics and styles drawing upon specific subcultures (Hebdige, 1979, pp. 257-258). This line of inquiry follows Fredric Jameson's (1979) concept of reification, the dominant absorbing the revolutionary thus nullifying the spark, the disruptive noise of it, in addition to scholarship on the function of subcultures, which inevitably, it seems, ends with incorporation.

The third purpose focuses on the material aspect of this project that unfolded early in the development which laid the necessary groundwork: the posters. Analog technology, such as the printer-copier used to make these posters, the billboards wherein I tacked the posters, to and the physical presence of carrying tape, thumbtacks and a bulging file folder full of posters, took more time than sharing a link on a social media account, yet was much more gratifying on a purely

personal level. When in Kensington, taping one poster to a column billboard right in the midst of hipster cafes, indie bookstores, an old movie theater, and thrift stores, a gust of wind tugged a poster off, out of my hands, sending it spiraling into the street (Figure 3-4).

While a physical space does dictate, to some degree, what can and can't be done, that control is resisted in small, everyday ways. I can't escape systems of control completely, not even by going into the street and tacking up posters. However, I can resist and subvert spaces, both online and offline, in different ways. Offline, that subversion is normalized to a degree (de Certeau, 1980). The physical realm is much more susceptible to chance beyond control than online spaces. A poster tucked in the corner between a cafe and a bank goes unnoticed by either proprietor; a few customers, out for a smoke, spot it, are intrigued, and check out my Instagram account. No algorithms dictated what took place here. Even the control of the city, as laid out by those looking down from above, doesn't extend to every nook and cranny (de Certeau, 1980). There is where resistance to control and subversion of the space unfolds (de Certeau, 1980).

There are spaces designated for posters, downtown and in Kensington, to guide and regulate where they're put up. That is an instance of control, of the "view from above" selecting where art, resistance, and promotional material can be (de Certeau, 1980, p. 264). However, that control is limited to establishing the smaller spaces because within the publicly accessible billboards and pillars there is no regulation. I could have, in theory, plastered my posters over all the others, and thus filled the entire space as many others have done. The fact that there are protocols, at least in my own mind, that prevented me from doing so is more reflective of social norms within the community than of control from above, top-down style. Within the billboard spaces, there is a mixture of regulations and resistance, in small ways, at play. The "view from above" cannot control everything, especially low-level, local environmental factors, such as wind, rain, passing observers who might take a poster for their collection or rip it down in vehement disagreement (de Certeau, 1980, p. 264, 270-273). I experienced this unregulated space within regulated territory in the physical space of Kensington while putting up these posters. This process is detailed below.

The difference between promoting through a poster online and in physical space was made quite clear. A post may be taken down by an algorithm or a governing, regulating, body, or it might glitch and not be posted, but it is easy enough to pull back up. There's an impermanent permanence

to online posts, as it feels of the moment, temporary, yet is there, on the Internet, in my phone's memory and your phone's memory forever, waiting to be accessed. The physical world, paper posters, x, are tokens of a permanent impermanence. They feel like they'll be permanent by being physical, tangible, yet a gust of wind tears a poster away beyond my control with no retrieval of data possible. As impermanent as a breeze or heavy rainfall, smearing the ink or shredding the paper. A poster can last on a billboard for years (at Sunnyside train station I noticed posters for 'upcoming' concerts in 2015 which were weather worn but still quite readable) or for only a second. The uncontrollable nature inherent to outdoor, public spaces inflected this project with a sense of something in the moment, more special, because it could be as impermanent, as temporary and transient, as it is tangible, physical, or permanent. All beyond my control, factors of nature and traffic, that I am subject to and have influence on the reception and promotion of popular culture, of this art I've made, that no individual or collective control. At least, not in the tight-fisted, intentional manner that algorithms are controlled and regulated by. No-one owns the wind. At least not yet.

Figure 9

University of Calgary Campus Poster A

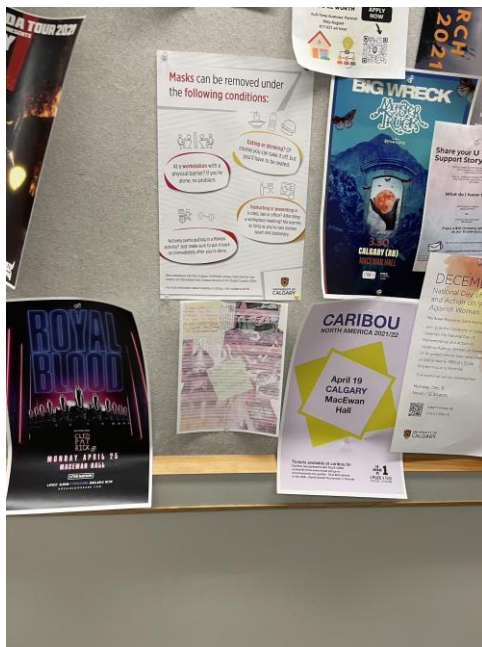


Figure 10

University of Calgary Campus Poster B



Figure 11

University of Calgary Campus Poster C



Figure 12

University of Calgary Campus Poster D



Figure 13

University of Calgary Poster E



As previously mentioned, the University of Calgary structures and articulates control over the space of campus and the population of students moving through and living within, not only through the physical architecture of the space (for example, where benches are, where students can

go without a keycard) but also through the regulation of posted material. In other words, the University controls where posted material is and how students see it (Hardt & Negri, p. 147). Placing my posters innocuously amongst campaign posters probably helped camouflage them, while hopefully still being distinct enough to catch a roving eye. There was a balance, I realized, between wanting to merely grab attention, but the right kind of attention (i.e., interested students, or faculty, and not someone who might want to enforce rules or exercise their authority).

The University has specific protocols in place for advertisers (with specific areas and billboards); presumably they receive a financial gain from those advertisers, thus capitalism in a very obvious form enters the physical space and forces itself to be seen by me and experienced by my body (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147). But what about ‘advertisers’ that aren’t attempting to solicit money and financial capital gain from students? I thought, at first, that I was innocent in my posters, in just wanting to connect with other like-minded people, perhaps along lines of subcultures as a collective, or at least individuals who enjoy aesthetics of the punk subculture, Outsider Art movement and Folk art styles (Hebdige, 1979).

Here is where Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and his theoretical framework on the forms of capital enters (p. 81). Bourdieu (1986) plays an important role in the rationale section of this project while also being essential to examining the dilemma that emerged while promoting this account. Bourdieu (1986) identifies the main types of capital which are at their core all forms of economic value, even while appearing and exercising power differently. Cultural capital, held by an individual, appears to be beyond economic power and capital, disinterested in material profit and solely focused on art for art’s sake, something inherently disconnected from the greedy material world of value and power (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81). The irony here, of course, is that capital is still capital, ideological value is still value; it still constitutes power and is fundamentally connected directly to economic capital by producing power and profit in some form (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81) In the case of the high art world, it is primarily ideological and social status power, though there is an obvious financial connection, too, as art artifacts do have a price for the privilege of owning or viewing (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81).

What I needed to ask myself during this process was why I was doing this. I had to admit that, to some degree, I was doing this to garner some cultural capital by deliberately keeping the account as underground as possible. By not trying to feed the algorithm any more than I have to

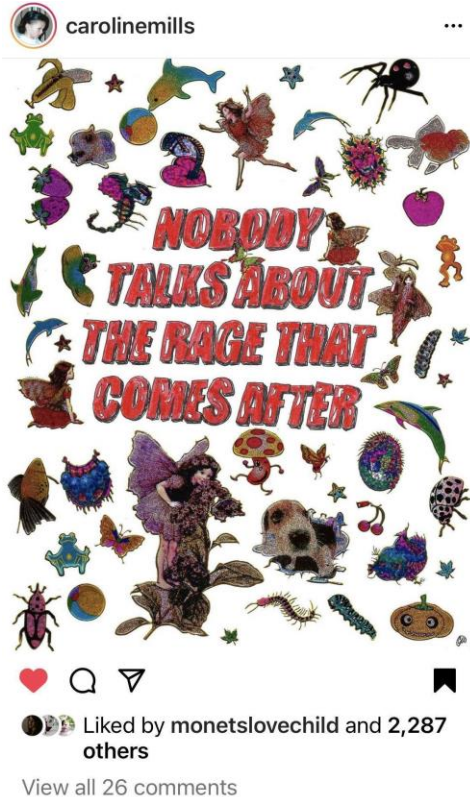
or to make it work for me, I was cultivating a specific type of digital space where those who were like minded would feel welcome but those not interested would feel confused and move on and decide that Outsider Art was simply not for them. But if I really didn't care about views or followers, if I wasn't wanting engagement with my collage content, if I really had no interest in the account's reputation and my association with it, then I wouldn't be posting. I have no obligation to share what is in my sketchbook. I share because I want to share. While there certainly is an element of hoping to collaborate, in a general sense, with other like-minded artists by us all sharing our work and finding each other to foster a subcultural community, I must admit that intertwined with that is a desire for cultural capital, for a reputation as artsy but unexpected, articulate, strange yet charismatic, generated through the collages, through my work. There is a power to be found, however small and everyday, in having artistic merit, off-the-wall aesthetics, and an overall cool and unusual persona, almost, of the account and with myself by proxy.

I am aware of how I, despite my attempts at resistance, still play into hegemonic ideas surrounding art, bourgeois practices and rhetoric, and the capital driven societal reality of the Western world (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81). This does not discredit my artifact as an act of resistance. Resistance implies a rejection to some degree, or at the very least, not a full acceptance of specific culture practices and artifacts. There is no way to fully escape the society of control. But I can subvert the frameworks I must operate within and an awareness of those, of how I play into the worship of capital, pursuit of culture, and acquisition of cultural capital, allows me to more accurately work against those very forces, in whatever small, everyday, ways of resistance that I can (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). Knowing the limits and weaknesses of this project allows me to more effectively support the account's strengths while limiting the impact those shortcomings will have – something only possible due to my awareness of how I, even in resisting, still contribute to and accept elements of the society of control (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81).

Rationale

Figure 14

Instagram Post by carolinemills



Note. Caroline Mills, 2022.

When I sent a friend of mine an Instagram post by Caroline Mills (Figure 14) they responded with the following sentiment: “Like, I don’t get it, but I think it’s just bad art.” The piece truly is odd. Caroline Mills (2022) incorporates found images, such as stickers and drawings from colouring books, with rough sketches and text in a bold letter font. She uses distinctive, bright colours, often deliberately clashing tones and hues. There is an amateurish air to her art, something whimsical and something dark, lowbrow visuals combined with a statement that somehow reads as both intellectual and coarse. Her work fits snugly in the categories of Outsider, lowbrow, and even Folk art – amateurish, excessively creative, drawing on materials and topics everyday, common, yet somehow unexpected.

My friend’s comment regarding “bad art” reflects ideas around what is good art as well as what makes art worth consuming. Another friend suggested this (Figure 14) wasn’t really art

because all the ‘artist’ did was slap a few dollar store stickers on a page and write a brightly coloured inane sentence. Millions of kids do the same practice every day at thousands of daycares across the world. There’s a pervasive idea that Art is something elite, something beyond and above the everyday milieu of culture. This just seems to be refuse collected from mainstream discourse.

This attitude reflects ideas around art and expression that, while seeming to be subversive, are actually quite mainstream and hegemonic in and of themselves. There is a discomfort in viewing works like that of Mills (Figure 14), at least for the first time (likewise with more prominent Outsider and Folk art artists like Daniel Johnson, Bill Traylor, and Mary P. Corbett, who also utilized collages, observational drawing, popular culture references, amateur drawing styles, snappy sentences in block letters and bright colours in a striking visual diorama).

That discomfort I name “noise”, the same phenomena of noise that Hebdige (1979) attributes to Britain’s punks in the 1970s (p. 261). What is expected and what is normal is shaken up, ironically, through ordinary actions, behaviours and materials defamiliarized to those comfortable in the mainstream where they are cultivated as resistant practices (de Certeau, 1980). Disruption of what is expected and what is normal, in a society rigidly controlled that dictates heavily what popular culture is, does, and originates from – that is “noise”, something that challenges the established grip of hegemonic, capital-driven, power-hungry views ingrained in all of us through popular culture (Hebdige, 1979, p. 261; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). I drew upon this type of disruption within consumption and resistance, a paradox balanced, in creating these collages, turning to both academic theories and works of Outsider Art to immerse myself in that headspace, ground myself in the ethos of Folk art, and from there, create my own works.

An antidote to control, or at least a seat of resistance, ironically lies in popular culture as well. Popular culture is ordinary, as are acts of resistance, the everyday converging to accept the way things are while also challenging and subverting those very structures (Williams, 1958, p. 53; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273). This obviously varies based on the media artifact in question and the artifact’s cultural lifetime, as there is always the looming, ever-present, threats of incorporation and reification (Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263; Jameson, 1979, p. 60-62).

Figure 15

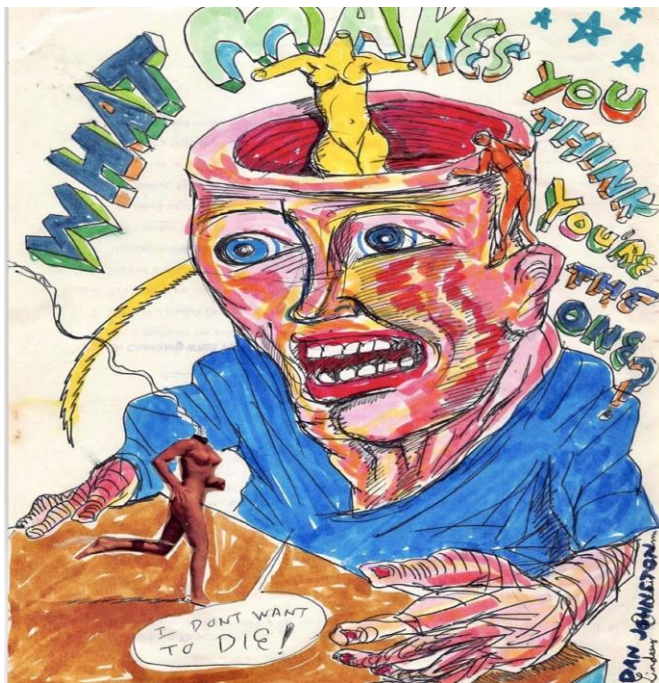
Dotty goes for help because of Addgie...June 18, 1945, Mon. Afternoon.



Note. Mary Corbett, 1945

Figure 16

What Makes You Think You're The One?



Note. Daniel Johnston, 1978.

Figure 17

Blacksmith Shop. Bill Traylor, "Blacksmith Shop," ca. 1939-40 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Note. Bill Traylor, 1939.

Key themes in the pieces themselves and common approaches to making art unite the three artists exemplified above alongside Caroline Mills and the work of this project (Figures 15, 16, & 17). Daniel Johnston (Figure 16) drew on the popular culture he cherished most, such as comic books and the musical group the Beatles, to fuel and inspire both his music and his artworks. Forty years earlier, Bill Traylor (Figure 17) depicted the everyday, ordinary world around him without any formal training or care for the Western highbrow canon, on whatever he could find, often scrap pieces of cardboard. Similarly, Mary P. Corbett's (Figure 15) drawings reflect her surroundings of 1940s/50s America and the popular culture she was consuming, such as Western movies and TV shows, in a brightly coloured style. Like Daniel Johnston and Bill Traylor, her work is intensely creative, ordinary, and refreshingly amateur. The work of Caroline Mills (Figure 14) resonates with the core ethos of the three examples of artists listed above. Her work features characters and references to popular culture, such as comic books, fantasy novels, and celebrities, alongside other symbols of ordinary life. Dynamic sentences, incorporating text into art, distinctive drawings which are not quite cartoons, and an array of vivid colours catch the viewer's attention, garnering an immediate reaction to the semantic disruption inherent to Outsider art (Hedbigge, 1979, p. 270-273).

What is intriguing about Outsider and Folk art is how the works and artists take in popular culture, artifacts, and symbols of the culture industry, which supposedly are purely sensory artifacts meant to just satiate the masses, and transform them into “noise”, something uncanny, familiar yet defamiliarized, shaking up that “same stamp” of mass culture into unique, eclectic and eccentric art pieces (Hebdige, 1979, pp. 260-263; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, p. 40). Acts of resistance are found in two ordinary behaviours central to Outsider and Folk art, of consuming culture and making art in a casual setting (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

There is a resistance to control in these works. Cowboys and superheroes, tokens of the mainstream in the 1940s, 1970s, and today, take on new forms and meanings in the odd company they find themselves keeping in the collages and drawings of Caroline Mills, Daniel Johnston, and Mary P. Corbett. A deeper meaning, unintended by the culture industry, that stamped short form, pleasure-focused, light-level meanings into these characters, into dollar store sticker sheets, or, in Bill Traylor’s case, the material artifacts sold at the general store, is found in each of these works. However, these meanings are dismissed by many upon first viewing, so governed by ideas of “high art” and “art for art’s sake” that draw on associations with expensive, incorporated art (such as Wagner’s operas or da Vinci’s paintings) that they cannot recognize subversion of the very culture industry beast they themselves are, while unaware, feeding into and eating of (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, p. 40; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263).

Control is resisted not by the rejection of hegemonic mainstream culture, but by fully embracing it, taking its symbols on as toys in a toy box to play with, shatter about, attach new narratives, associations and company to, well beyond what the manufacturers (both literal and ideological) ever intended – in a very ordinary, everyday way, part of that amateur appeal so central to the works that become classified as “Outsider” or “Folk” or “Lowbrow” which undermines ideas of social capital associated with “Highbrow” culture, unravelling the supposed tension between high art and popular culture through acts of resistance, noise, that draws on the ordinary popular culture which supposedly nullifies the minds of consumers, thus disproving some strongly held scholarly convictions around art versus popular culture (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944 p. 40; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

Resistance means, in this context, remaining within the established frameworks of control but not submitting quietly and instead creating noise and subversion, seeing how far the leash can

stretch (Hebdige, 1979, p. 261; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273). Unexpected and unanticipated behaviours and uses of popular culture, like in the work of the artists mentioned above, resist control from within these frameworks, wriggling around in the realm of mainstream culture with such fluidity that, by its inability to be easily tied down, classified, commodified, incorporated and sold, it is a resistance force still healthy alive (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263). No matter how many times Daniel Johnson's art is printed on t-shirts, the vast catalogue of his work remains untouched with only the more salient pieces (such as Jeremiah the bullfrog) being made, and even then, these shirts operate as a form of code for like-minded, resistance-inclined individuals to recognize one another, come together, and form a subcultural community right there in plain sight of a chain clothing store (Hebdige, 1979, p. 255-6, 260-263).

Through my collages, I aim to achieve a similar level of disruption. Like the artists above, my collages draw on the everyday and ordinary of life and popular culture, with visuals inspired by and snipped (quite literally) from *Gucci* magazine ads, children's books (*Where the Wild Things Are*), Alphonse Mucha paintings (advertisements now considered high art, a century later), and many other sources including my own photo albums, journals and sketchbooks (Williams, 1958, p. 53). I use a bold visual palette of contrasting and vivid colours. Text, photographs, illustrations, and my own doodles share space on the page. It flirts with imagery considered childish and textual elements bordering on profound. Hallmarks of popular culture in the West are recognizable, yet carry a new aura, defamiliarized to sing in my choir, taking on different connotations without ever losing their original trappings.

The 'Artifact Design' section outlined how the running of the account resists control, through feeding the algorithm as little as possible. Obviously, I still hope, and even need, my work to be seen in order to have cultural impact on any level. Through word of mouth and the posters, the control of physical spaces, of my body and the bodies of others, specifically engaged in the act of seeing their surroundings, is resisted by my unauthorized placement of posters in innocuous places, where it appears they are meant to be (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147; Deleuze, 1992, p. 141; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). Just an ordinary ad at first glance. It is only by peering deeper into what it is, realizing that connection between offline promotion of online material, that the resistant tactic of homemade posters promoting an Instagram account becomes clear (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147; Deleuze, 1992, p. 141; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). For those observing above, never

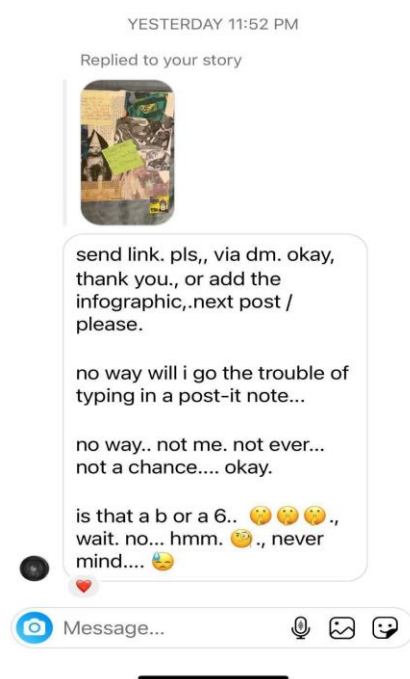
stooping down to view closely, it goes unnoticed, and unchecked (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270). As resistance to control and stifling ideological limitations so often should.

Discussion of Effects

I didn't break any of my self-imposed rules regarding promotion of the account, though I did slightly bend them. I had made the rule that I wouldn't directly share any posts from @263u594b to my personal account using Instagram's share feature. However, I did post to my personal account's story a picture of one of the posters I had made. As a result, a few people followed @263u594b. What was notable, however, was the reaction of one person I know (not very well) who Direct Messaged me an interesting response (Figure 18).

Figure 18

Screenshot of Instagram Message.



Right away, you can see curiosity mixed with apprehension, confusion, and hesitation at the poster – indicative of the “noise” I had created, in just the poster for the account (Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263). Already, what users expected on Instagram, what was usually done (shared posts on stories that could be clicked upon, acting as a direct link to the post and/or account shared) was disrupted. It looked familiar enough, but it wasn't a clickable link. There's no rule against

posting a photo of a handwritten note with a physical visual component to promote an account – not officially, at least. Social conventions dictate that this small, everyday behaviour with few consequences on a direct and personal level not be challenged or changed. The immediate reaction, a rather lengthy message response, was very fascinating to me, as another user had embodied the tenets of control, of Instagram’s social conventions, of what was “normal”. They did follow the @263u594b account about ten minutes after sending the aforementioned message. Whether it took them ten minutes to decipher the poster, type it in, and follow the account or if they got tired of waiting for me to reply with a link, I don’t know. Both possibilities demonstrate that, despite my bucking convention, the desired impact of my everyday tactic of resistance, posting material to share an account without sharing an Instagram approved and facilitated link, was successful in garnering followers, showing my collages to someone new, and in resisting, in a very small, low-level way, the Instagram’s all-powerful control of behaviours, conventions, and content (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

The main limitation of this project is, ironically, foundational to its existence and inception. That limitation is that I am resisting frameworks of control, algorithms predominantly in the online sphere, which actively work to weed out and neuter resistance. By choosing against utilizing hashtags and other conventional behaviours of promotion on Instagram, I do limit the range this project could have by ensuring less people will see it than if I did give in and try to play the game (though there is no guarantee of success, no certainty of going viral no matter how many accounts I follow or trendy hashtags I use). But in doing so, I wouldn’t be doing the work I wanted to do. This project would be something else and all the theorizing and conceptualizing about resisting systems of control, though, and with popular culture, would be just words on a page, not something honestly lived or experienced. Honesty is crucial in Outsider art, that genuine, sometimes vulnerable, depiction of what is ordinary, what is felt, adding to the ‘amateur’ feel, contributing to the charm and resonance these artworks have and continue to carry. I hope a resonance is found in these collages, a deeper connection by the few who do encounter these works – a benefit of this particular limitation, perhaps.

I am unsure if I will continue to post collages to this account regularly. I will have it as a space to post that style of art when I periodically make it. While the Internet feels temporary, it is in some ways a permanent space. This project’s page will remain in place. Hopefully someone will

encounter it, wonder what it is they're seeing, and feel captivated all the same. Maybe they'll make their own art in response. Maybe they'll start to question frameworks of control like "taste" and algorithms. The posters are still up on campus and in Kensington – I visit them sometimes, not deliberately, but I keep an eye out when I'm passing through. If just one person encountered this project and started to think about popular culture and control, about art and amateurism, I would say this project was successful. I have contributed to my own small canon of ordinary people making extraordinary art, subverting norms that maybe aren't all that "normal" in the first place. In the end, I thoroughly enjoyed the process of trying to resist through creative acts. That, I would say, in and of itself is a Folk art masterpiece.

Chronological Record of Collages and Posted Content

Figure 19

Post 1

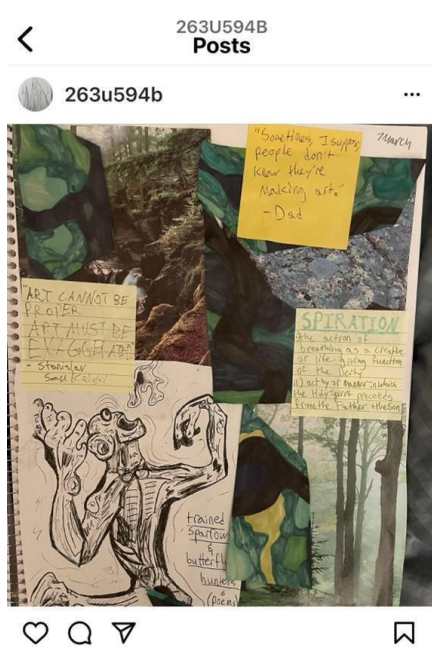


Figure 20

Post 2

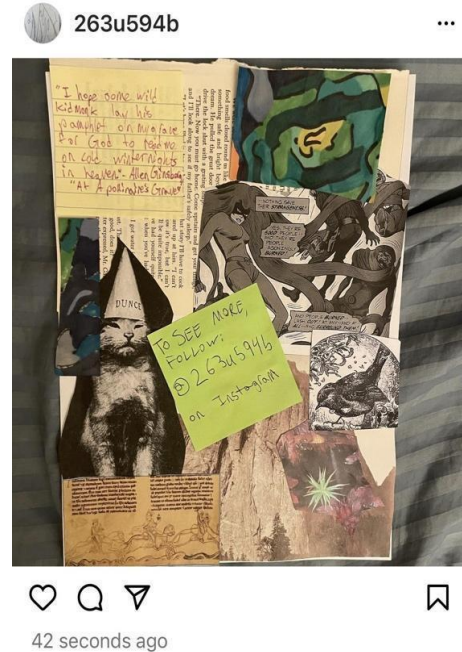


Figure 21

Post 3



Figure 22

Post 4



Figure 23

Post 5



Figure 24

Post 6



Figure 25

Post 7

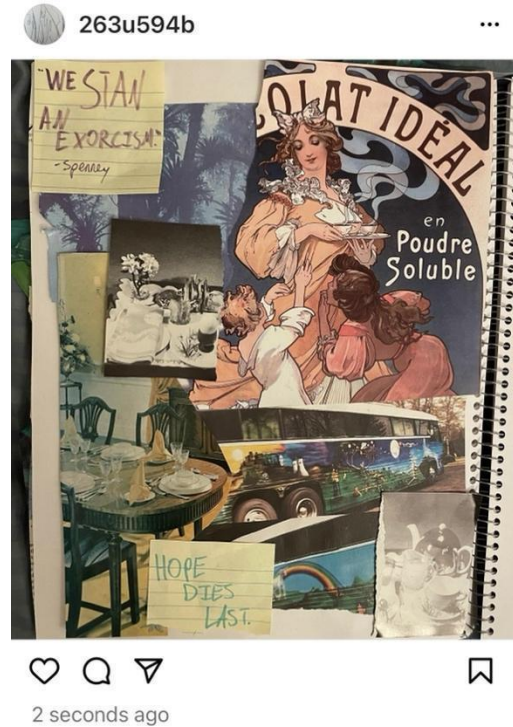


Figure 26

Post 8

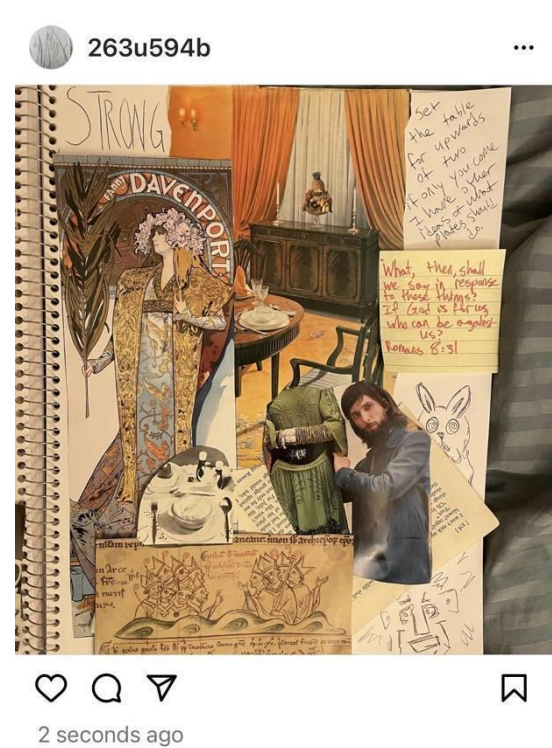


Figure 27

Post 9

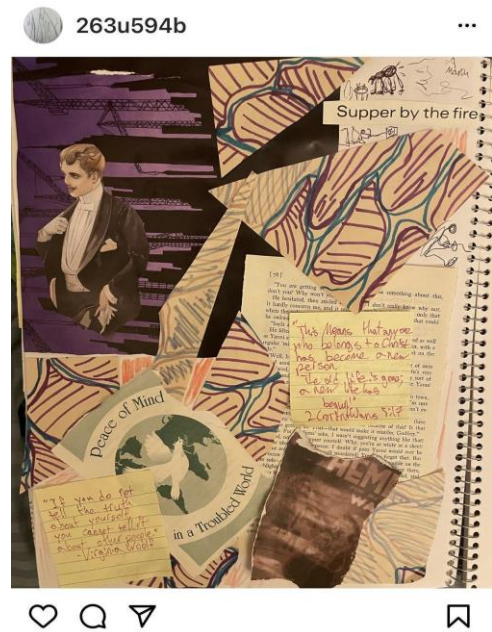


Figure 28

Post 10



Figure 29

Post 11

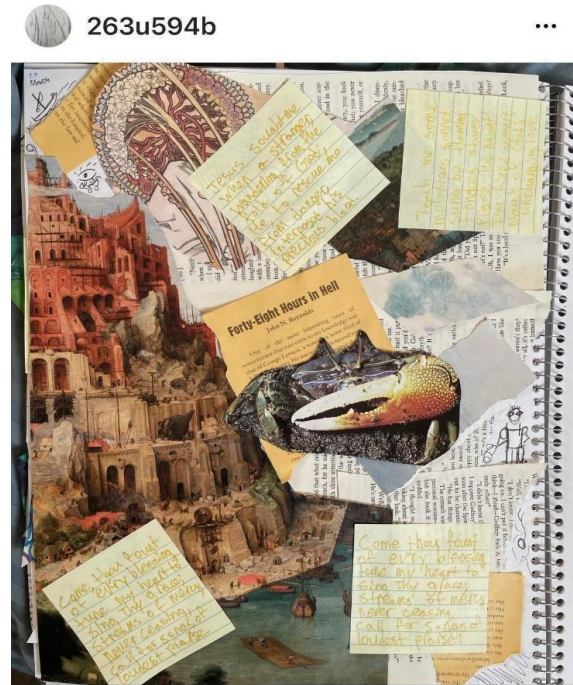


Figure 30

Post 12



Figure 31

Post 13

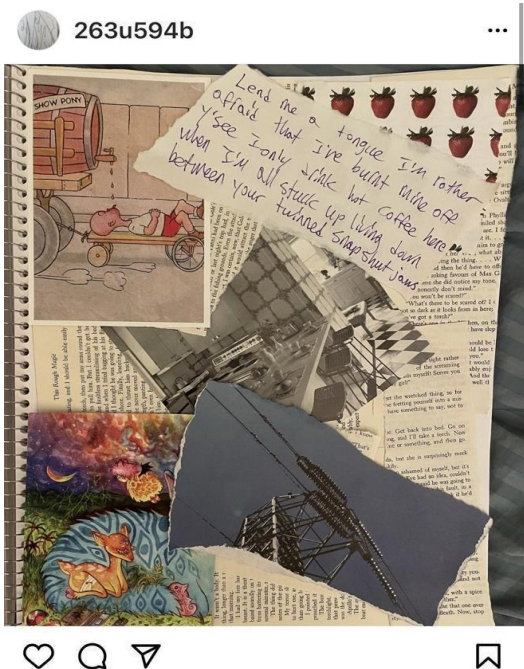


Figure 32

Post 14

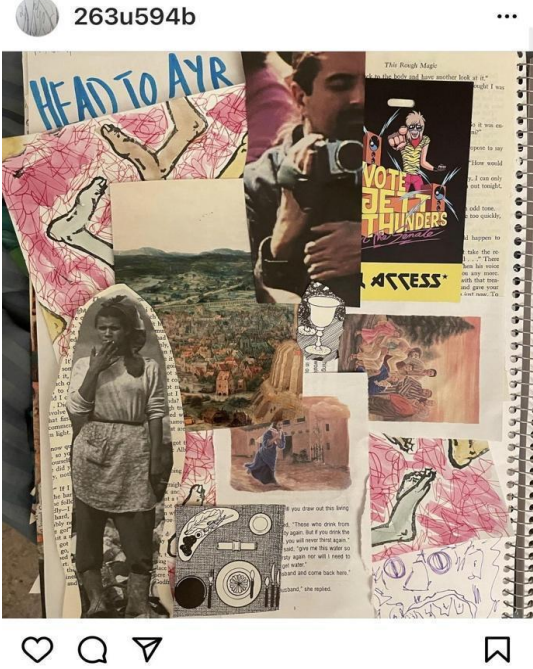


Figure 33

Post 15



Figure 34

Post 16

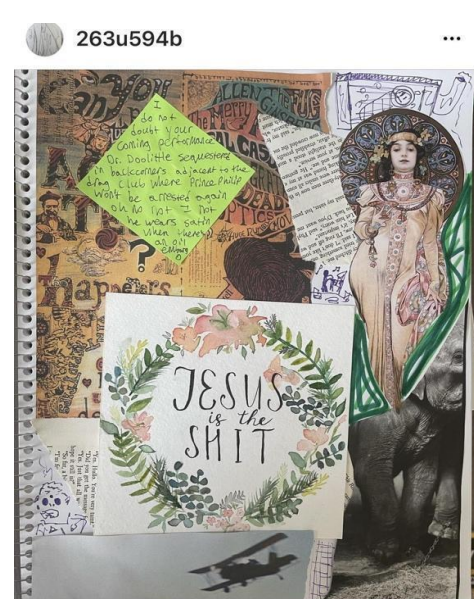


Figure 35

Post 17



Figure 35

Post 18

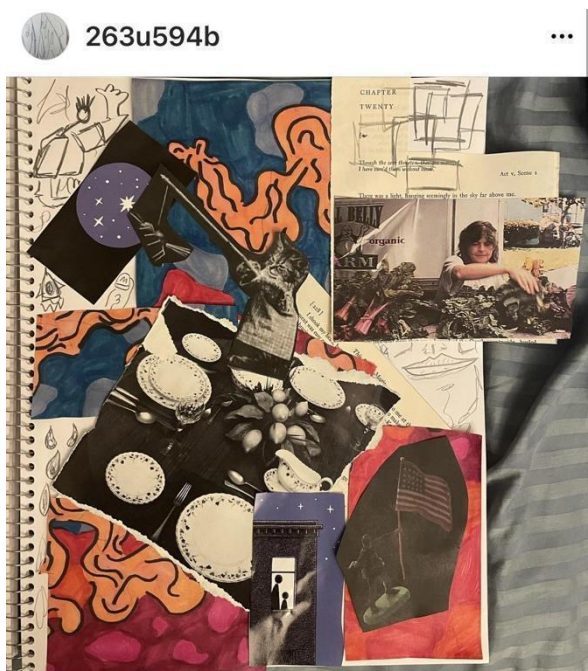


Figure 36

Post 19

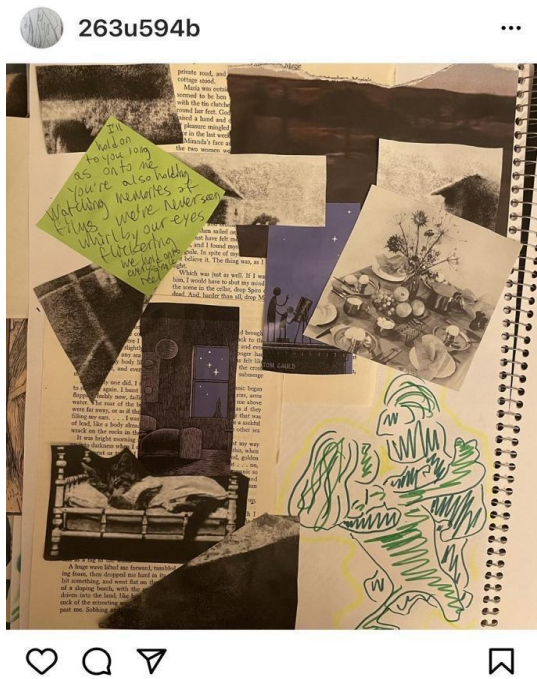


Figure 37

Post 20



Figure 38

Post 21



Figure 39

Post 22



Figure 40

Post 23

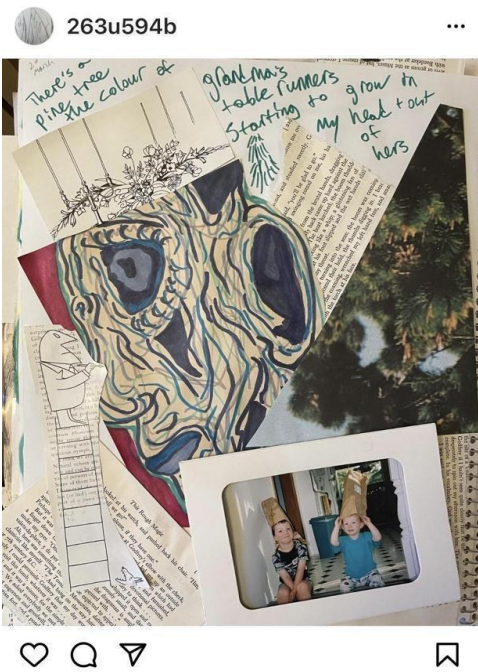


Figure 41

Post 24

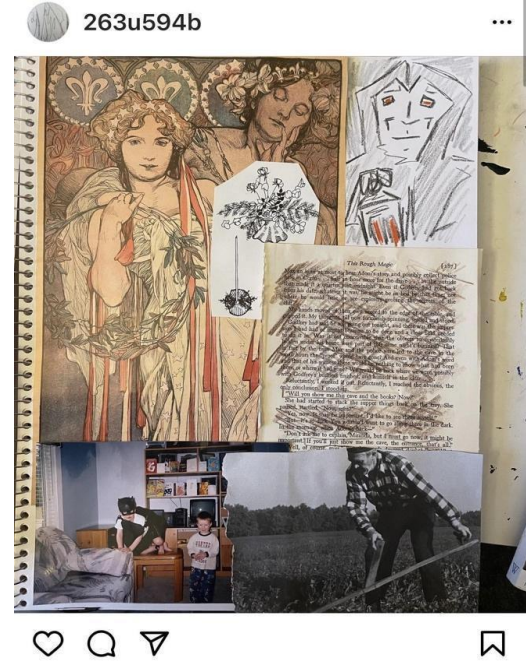


Figure 42

Post 25



Figure 43

Post 26

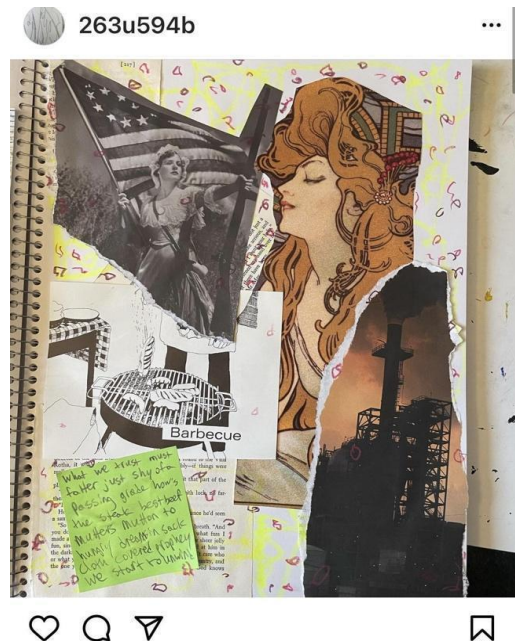


Figure 44

Post 27

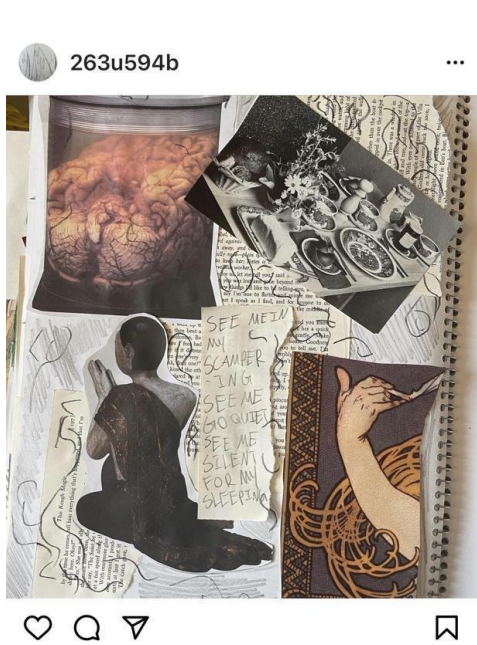


Figure 45

Post 28



Figure 46

Post 29



Figure 47

Post 30



Figure 48

Post 31

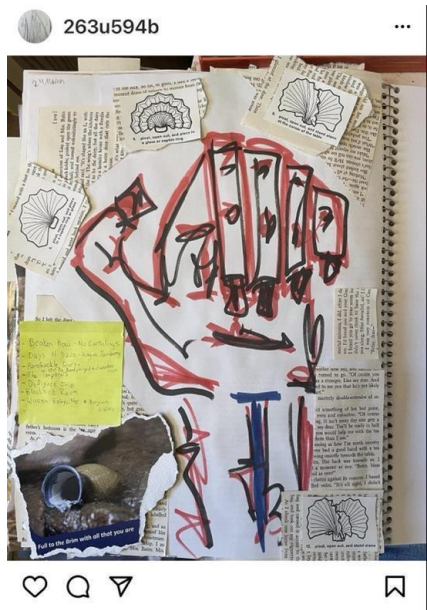


Figure 49

Post 32

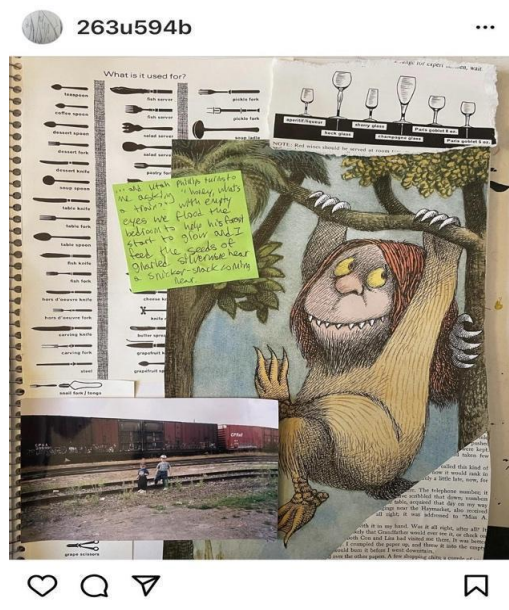


Figure 50

Post 33



Figure 51

Post 34

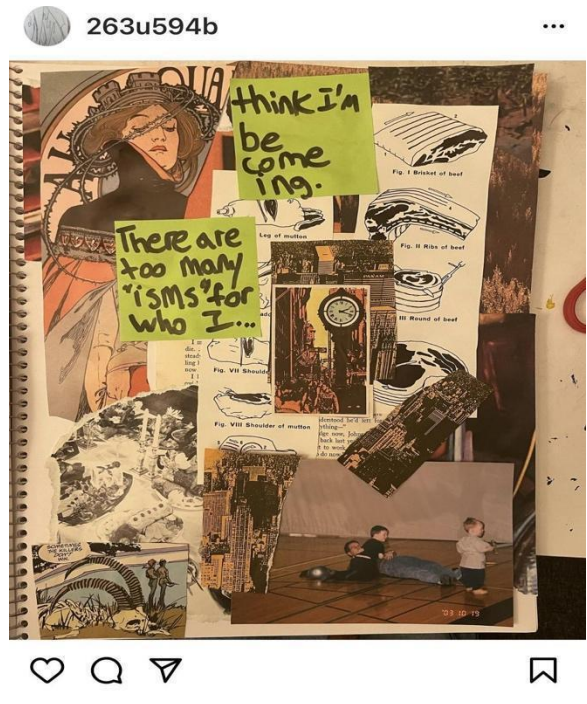


Figure 52

Post 35



Figure 52

Post 36



Figure 53

Post 37



Figure 54

Post 38

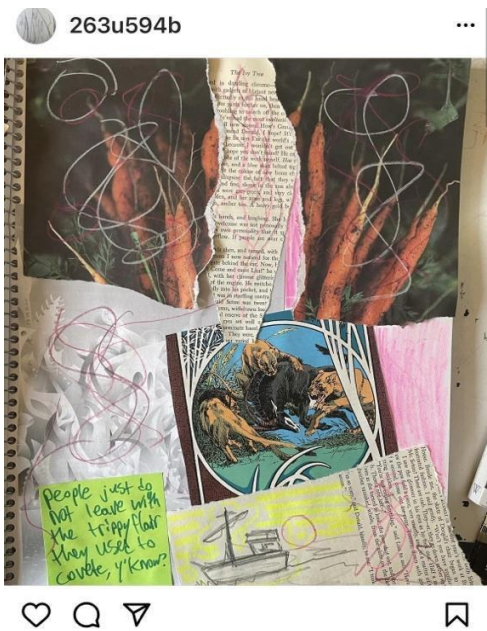


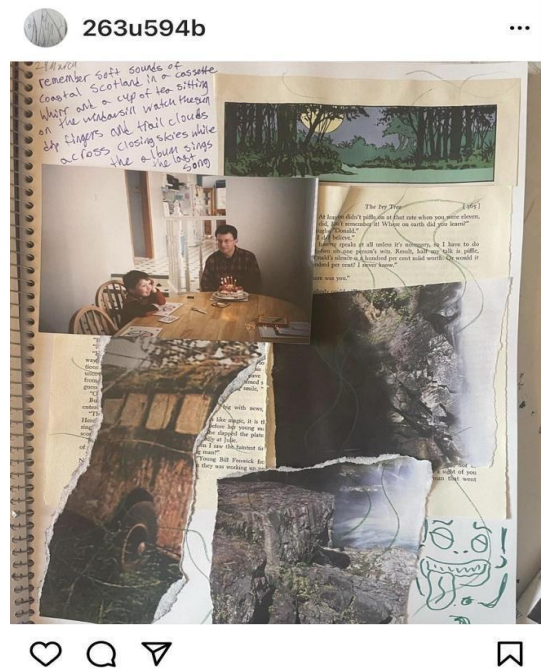
Figure 55

Post 39



Figure 56

Post 40



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