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## **Many Navels (Or Some Collages by Academy Records)**

*A landscape of triangles cut out of blue construction paper.*

*Houses. Mountains. A snowy Scandinavian village. Green clouds hover high in the sky: The Northern Lights. Are we in Norway? Death metal capital of the world?*

*Remember MAYHEM*

*MENFISH is pasted nearby, lettered in bold, the sub-title of a comic or pulp serial. Over there, the absence of a horned figure, a silhouetted hunching*

*MANANIMAL upright but slouching.*

*To the left, upside down, regal: The Sphinx. The reclining MANCAT. There are men at work, bolstering it with something. Iron stakes? Everything must be preserved but the nose, I suppose. And they are high up in the sky.*

*Also: The presence of a woman in a blue dress.*

*And also: The presence of an actor staring at the woman, a still from that movie where the man lost his hearing. The Sound of Metal?*

*The marks of a blue crayon.*

*Little bits of tape hold it, the whole thing balancing on stilts like a bi-pedal knot. It's a leaning ladder with one-rung. You crane your neck to contemplate climbing "up.... to the roof, where [you] can see heaven much better!"*

*Diana Ross. I love that song! She married that Norwegian guy. So sad.*

Suppose we think about the latest collages by Academy Records as if they were dreams. Not, like, The Surrealists. Or "dreamy" dreams. Or lucid states. Or symbolic omens. Dreams as in acts of interpretation. Freud's types of dreams: materializations of psychic work that condenses and displaces available images to express a repressed wish. Those types of dreams.

If dreaming as Freud suggests, is reflexive, a part of the day that necessarily processes our experiences, so too is the gathering and arranging of materials through collage for Academy Records. His studio is a treasure trove of available images that dwell among the means for their alteration, obfuscation, and eventual display. Stacks of newspapers, Life Magazines, and found slides lurk among spray paint, pencils, hand-made and found tables, and shelves. Whatever is at hand is fair game. Pictures and phrases get sliced up, torn out, arranged, pasted, and then carefully presented, perhaps tacked precariously to a wall, or laid out gently on a bespoke table. Just as the chaos of our lived experience yields daily dreams, few of

which we actually return to in waking life, what we see here in the gallery is a small selection of hundreds of artworks woven from curated studio clutter.

These collages are capacious webs, able to expand to hold multiple signs. They compel us to label and list, circling from one element to the next, assigning provisional meaning via the context we ourselves bring. Like semiotic mirrors, they invite a deeply patterned yet freely associative dialogue with oneself. Much like dreams.

To Freud dreams were dense sites of meaning that could be understood via a process of collaborative analysis. The analysand, his patient, was responsible for recalling their dreams to the best of their ability, contextualizing each element with their own personal and cultural associations. The analyst listened for patterns, teasing out significance that the patient was not yet able to discern. In the gallery with Academy Record's collages we are both the analysand and the analyst, alternately associating and pattern-seeking. Assuming both roles, we might make use of Freud's interpretive principles. Take condensation: the dream's propensity to overdetermine images and phrases with multiple meanings. Blue cut out triangles. Are they decorative shapes? Mountains? Houses? Pyramids? All of the above. In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud notes that "'no' seems not to exist as far as dreams are concerned...they show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity, or for representing them as one and the same thing." The triangles are at once empty and solid, ornamental and significant.

Our approach to unraveling these dense knots of signs is inextricable from our own pleasures, interests, and fears. I, a middle school metalhead, recognize the Northern Lights and situate *That One with Diana Ross* in Norway, the heavy metal capital of the world (as opposed to, say, home to the Vikings or world-famous skiing). From there, one association throws others into relief: metal scaffolds, Mayhem, a titular film. Still others inflect upon others, casting affective shadows. I remember that Diana Ross married a Norwegian shipping tycoon who climbed Mount Everest. He was her *second* ex-husband. The love of her life. He left her suddenly (her publicist had to tell her the news), and later died climbing some other mountain. What a beast! I imagine Ross's discovery of his betrayal. I empathize. In turn, small pieces of tape seem vulnerable, tender. Crayon marks, despondent. This is a heartbreaking collage.

Have I wandered too far from the collages by bringing my own cultural experiences to bear on them? If we follow Freud's model, hardly. Experiences with art shape his interpretations frequently. Take for example his analysis of "The Lovely Dream" prompted by his personal association with Alphonse Daudet's *Sappho*. He offers this connection to his patient and is astonished and delighted that it resonates, in turn connecting the dream to yet another play. Heavy metal, Diana Ross, The Sound of Metal... given Academy Record's past artworks that engage in an archive of popular culture, it is no surprise to find my mind thumbing through my life's worth of musical consumption.

And yet, even an introspective feedback loop occasions interpretative impasses. What about this woman in a blue dress? The tonearm raises up. Freud described the element of a dream that is impenetrable, unrelentingly opaque, as its naval—unreachable and unknown as our time in utero. In not pursuing analysis of a dream as far as possible, we risk repressing a wish that, once articulated, might cure a debilitating neurosis. Here, the impenetrable parts of any of these collages, their navals, are opportunities for metacognition: they catch us in the act of desiring to understand. My puzzlement over the woman in blue stops my associative meandering in its tracks, forcing me to acknowledge the limits of my personal context. It's a type of interpretive surrender, and it's what's at stake in a visit to the gallery. One relishes recognition and then defers understanding from one collage to the next... via a slide show projected under a white buttress...or is it a three dimensional glyph? And two images of some Baroque sculpture...or was that the ceiling from *Last Year at Marienbad*?

**Amy Beecher, March, 2022**

