How to Fragment and Unite: An Autoethnography of Collage and Poems

Description

The AutoEthnographer

How to Fragment and Unite: An Autoethnography of Collage and Poems

AUTHORSâ?? MEMO

We address *how to fragment and unite* in this autoethnographic study, which we developed over the Messenger App. It utilises poetry and collage around death, loneliness, postmodern culture, and the latterâ??s related oppressive discourses and language, and alienation. We square up to death in some of our poems and collages and take postmodern culture to task in others. Doing all this helps us combat loneliness and alienation, which is closely related to anxiety and thus with strong emotions. Mass culture produces a kind of emotional frigidity. People often do not connect meaningfully because a lack of emotions does not allow empathy and compassion to emerge. Emotions give us energy to act, but the emotional indifference of political correctness creates distance between people.

â??We address *how to fragment and unite* in this autoethnographic study, which we developed over the Messenger App.

We do not control our lives, which are as fragmented as modern society. Contemplation is one solution to help prevent the distraction that is our curse in this age of late modernity. Our poetry and art are examples of contemplation in action, helping us create and connect with deep feelings. When poems are collage images are highly emotionally charged, they can simultaneously fragment and unite. We critique intellectual blandness and emotional blandness.

Our art allows us to fully express our intersubjective worlds from deeper levels of consciousness. That which is deep and archetypal connects us and is shared with humanity. This does not mean that unity presupposes sameness. As authors of this autoethnography we are different from each other, as is apparent in our autoethnography. Our sensibilities are similar but not identical, even though we have much in common. We fragment and unite, and we invite you to continue this conversation on how to fragment and unite.

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Introduction

We meet for the first time in mid-June 2023 at a Polish conference. For the next three months, we exchanged messages in the form of poems and Krzysztofâ??s collages on the Messenger App. We

give you a selected group of these in this autoethnography

We are both elderly scholars: Krzysztof is 65; and Alec is 71. Our respective backgrounds are different â?? Krzysztof is rural Polish, Alec is a Scottish Highlander â?? but our class habitus overlaps. Krzysztof comes from a small village, born into a poor family with uneducated parents and an alcoholic father. Alec also grew up in a small village, with minimally educated working-class parents and an alcoholic mother.

This connection helps us understand each other and come together around connected concerns. These are death, loneliness, postmodern culture and its related oppressive discourses and language, and alienation. We confront death in some poems and Krzysztofâ??s collages, and take postmodern culture to task in others.

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â??This connection helps us understand each other and come together around connected concerns. These are death, loneliness, postmodern culture and its related oppressive discourses and language, and alienation.

We do not control our lives, which are as fragmented as modern society is. This can result in alienation and anxiety, having strong emotional overtones. Mass culture produces a kind of emotional frigidity. This can result in people failing to meaningfully connect because such frigidity inhibits the emergence of empathy and compassion. Emotions give us the energy to act, but their lack can distance people from one another.

Our poetry and art help us create and connect with deep feelings. When poems are highly emotionally charged, they can simultaneously fragment and unite. Intellectual blandness is associated with emotional blandness and the blandness of vibrant life. Collage and poetic art enables us to fully express what is at the deeper level of our shared consciousness. That which is deep and archetypal connects us because it is a shared part of humanity.

What we look like

fragment
fragment

Alec Grant

fragment
fragment

Krzysztof T. Konecki

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Corner of the tenement

I look out from the corner of the tenement of death.

The Grim Reaper,

is walking,

or actually crawls like a snail.

She looks around â??

for whom to read the epitaph.

Sleepy for now.

I am also sleepy.

I wipe my nose.

My eyes are watering

I see only a shadow

emerging,

from around the corner

And she may experience a metamorphosis.

And leap to the throat like a wolf!

Bite out the will to live!

Bite off the bone of discord to death!

Deprive the will to heal,

of pessimism,

and the will to accept silence.

I penetrate the philosophy of walking changes,

a foot farther, a foot higher,

slower, faster,

inhaling, exhaling,

stopping.

The sound of feet.

Silence.

Silence.

Everything is changeable,

even she,

more and more visible.

KK

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Fathers, sons, and grandsons

I think of my own father

dying alone, scared,

guilt failing him â?? useless,

like his prostate, heart, hanged wife,

estranged son,

and burnt-out life.

My body aches for his,

connected by threads of themes,

unfulfilled promises and dreams,

failing glands,

marriages.

Hand in hand

we walk

down the generations.

Photos gather dust â??

smiling faces all:

the great lie.

Dust gathers dust,

and my grandson

barely knows me.

AG

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Krzystofâ??s Collages

fragment
fragment

Comments by KK

People ask me what Iâ??d like to express in my collages. The problem is that I donâ??t know. I start creating the collage with mixed ideas about what I want to say, but topic emerges during its creation. The images come to my mind, and when I look at the pictures ideas emerge from them.

Something is happening on the liminal level, the subconscious, the body, and the space between myself and others. I donâ??t care about those reasons, motifs, or topics. Creating collages is a freedom I have always celebrated, and I donâ??t want to close it in a word-cage.

When I send a collage to Alec, based on his reaction I create the next collage. And with other people, I do the same. There is something in the space between, but I donâ??t know what it is.

Nobody knows what I want to say in a collage, including me. This is the added value of the creative process.

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Comments by AG

I look forward to receiving your collages, Krzysztof. Iâ??m never sure whether I get your intended cultural references. Inevitably, I wonâ??t always, given our different backgrounds. That doesnâ??t matter much to me. Images or little points in your collages spring out, punctum-like (thinking of the Roland Barthes text, Camera Lucida). These set off a chain of further images, thinking, and perhaps the idea for a poem.

fragment
fragment

Subject chooses

What is your loneliness?

Facing the loneliness of the earth surrounded by all the stars and planets of this world,

look up.

Is a tiny loneliness,

nursing its lonely suffering,

which cannot be soothed anyway,

because the body is fragile?

The older you get,

the more wounds,

the more places not to be healed,

desires to be unfulfilled,

separations beyond repair.

The more digging into loneliness,

In a body burning â??

not out of desire,

not out of love,

not from hatred,

but from the passage of time,

the immensity of which can terrify,

but also calm.

I choose the second option.

KK

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Choices

The choices that you choose

are the choices that choose you

â??Free willâ?? is will of the wisp,

a chimera

Some escape

by force of inhabit,

but emotional and narrative entrapment

generally hold sway,

rule the day

What is the confidence of privilege?

The false â??confidence of classâ??;

donkeys leading lions

Hats off to George Orwell

for pointing this out

Long ago voices continue to haunt.

Everyday wake up in dread,

guilt and unworthiness taunting me

with things no longer said â??

internalized scripts past sellby date

reference to referent longdead,

played out in my tortuous head

AG

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fragment
fragment

Zombies

How do I know Iâ??m not surrounded by zombies?

Not flesh eating, not

half decomposed, not

clumsy, bumping into things zombies.

Not

slow zombies,

running zombies,

exploding zombies,

spitting and frothing zombies,

zombies with weapons,

or zombie limbs without bodies.

There might be, for all I know, vegetarian or even vegan zombies,

body building or botox-loving zombies,

tightrope walking sure-footed zombies.

Whoâ??s to say?

AG

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fragment
fragment

Breathing

Breathing slowly,

looking over our exchanges,

Poland to Scotland and back again.

Keep breathingâ?¦

thatâ??s all there is.

What does a fulfilled life actually mean?

Walk, breathe,

play the game,

as hair, teeth, energy

go AWOL,

and yet, there is always a connection.

I hear seagulls, cars outside.

Chattering wives awake.

Play the game just one more day.

Keep breathing.

â??You have one more citation.â??

Living Tribute, me.

Will they keep coming in when Iâ??m dead?

Long dissipated cremated dust.

â??You have one more citation, Living Legend.â??ð???

AG

fragment
fragment

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The silence on the other side of social

Weâ??re all supposed to be having fun, having a ball,

but some of us remember that itâ??s not like that at all.

We make the best of what weâ??ve got,

contingencies and all.

But some of us see through the shit

that others hold in thrall

The silence on the other side of social.

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My first wife

Often

when I wake up

I think of my first wife.

My breathing speeds.

I think of her dying,

her telling me she loves me.

Too late for that, I look at her

and say nothing.

Where was the love?

Ever?

Between us?

Inside one of us?

Or both of us?

Essence denied,

my breathing slows

as I meet the

new day.

AG

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Comment by AG

No angels, only dragons ð?•? ð?•?ð?•? (

Stability

Stability is a fiction of the mind.

Stability is a friction in the mind:

the mindless mind brought back into mindline

by the centripetal pull of normativity.

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Itâ??s always much worse than youâ??re told.

Germany, 1971, NAAFI,

often drunk we donâ??t know much.

Too many donâ??ts.

Socialized into donâ??ts.

Donâ??t tell donâ??t ask donâ??t see donâ??t know donâ??t

care.

WRAFS and WRACS discharged en masse.

Fucking lesbians.

We laugh and hardly notice.

Bit of a showâ?¦

Life rolling on, like deodorant,

Covers nasties and shocks.

Straight me, but tactile, I hug a corporal.

He pushes me off.

Threatens to deck me.

Easy to get othered then.

Easy to get ordered then.

Suspicion grows like mould.

Confirms itself, covers its tracks.

An airman hangs himself from a telephone mast.

Official obit, RAF News;

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â??died suddenlyâ??.

Quite right! He did! We donâ??t choke up.

A bit of a giggle.

We donâ??t know, see, hear, ask too much.

Too much donâ??t care.

Sexuality and death.

not in Queenâ??s Regulations.

The occasional trip to a brothel.

not in Queenâ??s Regulations.

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Who gives a fuck.

â??Rools and regoolayshunsâ??,

says the Welsh sergeant who calls me a cuntâ??

â??There must be rools and regoolayshuns!

Things get out of hand.

Not natural.

The trouble with you boy:

you think too much.

Canâ??t take a joke.

you shouldnâ??t have joinedâ??.

â??Howâ??s it going?â??, I ask my mate.

â??Not three badâ??.

â??A fair dayâ??s work for a fair dayâ??s pay!â??

â??This is it!â??

Spawny bastards, jammy sods.

Skiving poofs.

In crap order.

Deserve everything they get.

Scintillating conversation rolls on,

like deodorant,

covering compassion,

covering everything.

Everything a cover up.

Under the covers.

Another corporal refuses to name

the lover who outranks him.

â??Rools and regoolayshuns, see!

Senior rank responsible, boyâ??.

Under close arrest.

Still manages to slit his wrists.

They get him before he bleeds out.

Order him.

The MO stitches his wrists.

Calls him a â??cowardly sodomiteâ??.

Other him.

50 years on my mates and me

talk about those old days,

the acceptable times,

the times less othered.

Our monthly ritual

parallels Facebook nostalgia.

Reifies Facebook nostalgia.

I often want to scream

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â??What about these other times these other fuckers!?â??

Voices silenced, lives erased.

Itâ??s always much worse than youâ??re told

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Comment by AG

This does all sorts of things to me: Europe united against the Russian bear. The UKâ??s gratitude, which, because they left Europe, seems weak and pathetic.

Sign out, sign in

Youâ??re now safely signed out.

Sign in

again,

to places of low expectations.

Familiar faces

coming together

through chance encounters,

with random ancestors

and contingencies.

Fulfill your biological function,

give convenient satisfaction

until such time as youâ??re surplus to

requirements.

Become too complicated.

Disaffected.

Rejected.

Sign out until

Itâ??s time to

sign in

again.

AG

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Comment by AG

The narcissistâ??s double message: look at me, donâ??t look at me.

Who are you?

Are you a woman?

Is the dress just camouflage?

Why donâ??t you protest when your husband beats women?

You turn a blind eye and smile at the mirror.

Donâ??t you see a monster there,

who stands behind you and tries to touch you?

His touch is like kindling steel,

that will burn an unforgettable stigma of betrayal on your back.

Laser Tattoo removal wonâ??t help.

The mirror sees a grimace of humility,

a serfâ??s face,

which is slowly turning into cow dung.

No spells on social networks will help to regain the face anymore.

KK

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The Stupidocene

Stream Netflix down toilets.

Steam clean your privacies.

Follow your follicles,

ladies, genitalmen,

inbetweenies,

tinies and teenies.

Welcome to Barbieland:

discourses botoxed

ovary the rainbow,

on the next meme train.

How did we do?

Your custom is important to us!

Stay on the line.

We will be with youâ?¦

We will always be with you,

evicerating hopes,

vaporizing dreams,

bleaching differences,

depilating values.

AG

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Death

Rigor mortis kicked in

when I was four or five:

a social death,

stiffening against the world,

giving up on life early,

or life giving up on me.

Iâ??ve used up space

In every place,

my headstone widening with each degree,

playing the zombie game

of undead trickster

pretending to be fully alive,

and better at the game

than many I suppose.

Death comes by degrees â??

at least for me.

Regular obituaries

as academic texts.

No nailing down of coffin lid,

no fitting of the shroud.

Not yetâ?¦

always one more obit to write.

Got to get it right,

my affairs in order.

AG

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Conspiracies of confusion

donâ??t touch donâ??t hug donâ??t kiss

donâ??t say the wrong things

donâ??t donâ??t donâ??t

mustnâ??t upset

just donâ??t

be yourself donâ??t be yourself

everythingâ??s forbidden

but be authentic

be authentically, mindfully

restrained

conspiracies of confusion

â?¦of contradiction and incoherence

letâ??s have a relationship where

we donâ??t talk

we donâ??t meet

we donâ??t greet

no bodies no problem

AG

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My world

Present and detached

More than audience.

Less than

participant.

My world.

Solitude in the

crowd enables thinking, said

Kierkegaard rightly.

Look death squarely in

the eye socket.

Skull as ultimate selfie.

Make sure you whiten your

teeth.

Stay well hydrated too.

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A prose poem

Join in. Donâ??t not join. I donâ??t have the words. Words elude. There are no words for it. I sometimes think I grasp it. Then it recedes. Back in time. In history. Before I was born. Or my parents. Back to my ancestors. And before them. Ancient memories. How to do life. Never been that good at it.

The ordinary bits I mean. I can write, paint and play. Never enough. Man up they said. Join in. Do it properly.

AG

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The language of the world

The language of the creative is freedom.

The language of the world is conformity.

Centrifugal vies with centripetal.

Centripetal sometimes concedes with centrifrugality.

Centrifugal sometimes concedes with centripoutality.

But there is no middle point.

No Venn overlap.

AG

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Against Philosophy

Is clarity brought to language,

because he believes so?

My theses

are like unanswered questions.

I donâ??t want equations,

or sentences that follow from previous rulings.

I donâ??t want a simplistic logical relationship.

I enjoy multiplying questions

and stopping to give solutions

at the last minute.

This is the most reasonable answer

to all the questions: I DONâ??T KNOW.

Keep quiet, dog!

Because I will tear out your tongue!

My battered tongue

will not express straight what I feel.

I want to sing and dance!

I want to talk to moose and pigeons.

They dream knowledge

that to philosophers has never been revealed,

and my cat will soon

will be presented for the Nobel Prize.

See it!

Hear it!

This is me!

I donâ??t need to know simple sentences

to express beauty and suffering.

I can bombard you with poetry

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until you get so tired,

That you forget logic and facts

and sentences.

And you will finally say:

Enough of this, my poet!!!

Be silent, you rabid dog!

And please give me then a cat to pet.

KK

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The final sign out

This is the way I go now:

Now signed out, sign in.

Encrypted, entrapped,

my text predictive, until I finally sign out,

and get saved in a Cloud.

(Press F1 for â??Hail Maryâ??, or F2 for â??Hairy Malesâ??, when sage, no safe search is off)

Rationalism puts things out of focus.

Socratic dialogue mist-ifies as much

as it clarifies.

Myopia:

the place to be

for see, sex,

and darkness.

AG

They and he

When he found himself in the crowd,

he felt disgusted,

repulsive mugs,

all almost identical,

with a triangle of sadness,

intellectuals by the devilâ??s grace,

pretending to do

dis-course,

follow each other,

step by step,

looking for deviants,

to condemn them to the pile of damnation,

and oblivion.

What a pleasant sight the fire is,

that smothers the feet of deviants,

unwashed by everyday notions

and stereotypes.

It smokes a lot,

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when his heart burns,

the masks of Breughelâ??s

monsters

have to run away and leave this anxiety,

different state of mind,

behind

their pure

and cruel world.

Regulars of the salons,

bludgers

of one discourse,

keep playing

in the republic

of intellectual fools.

KK

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Comment by AG

Great: Marx meets Foucault and Bruegel, Krzysztof?

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Comment by AG

Choices which can turn you to stone.

The art of being liked

You wait for the likes

to stroke your feet and crotch.

You donâ??t feel them in your heart,

there the genitals have moved,

and a void,

which cannot be filled.

There appears only a single like,

a hint of happiness,

but immediately there is a pain,

why does the universe not accept me!?

Exciting morning,

hundreds of likes.

Happiness!

Wow.

Erection.

Orgasm.

You raise prayers

to the Sweet Mountain.

He is great!

Empty art,

in a barren heart,

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for show,

always the same,

like and ð??•

KK

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Comment by AG

Turner meets Darwin meets zombies

Mercy

When animals rule us,

I flee to the zoo to take refuge from them,

They,

In ecclesiastical protection,

they bully

Prosthetically over us.

We let them do it,

We enjoy it,

It is not narcissism

that is the mark of the age,

But masochism,

Forgive us, Lady,

We are weak,

And we only want your good,

Give us the strength to forgive their sins.

And though they know what they do,

I forgive them,

With the help of a sword,

Which cuts off their

All thoughts of betrayal.

KK

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Coda

Some questions emerge for us from all the above. These, and of course, other questions, might also arise for readers. Our questions are on two levels â?? empirical and philosophical.

Empirically and somewhat rhetorically, we question what we have achieved in this exchange of poetry and collages. Has it been worth it? Has it been therapeutic for us? Has it helped us deal better with our existential anxiety? To what extent have we â??tamedâ?? the prospect of our inevitable biological deaths? Have we succeeded in fighting alienation? For me (Alec), the answer must be a qualified â??yesâ?? to all these questions. Qualified, because itâ??s difficult to voice more than an inarticulable feeling that the exchange has been helpful. Whether this will have residual, lasting value is another empirical question?

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For me (Krzysztof) I often experienced relief when Alec answered my collages. I could understand more about them. Not everything that comes from a collage (or a poem) is rational, planned, and has structure and content. Some complementary interpretation of the Other is often necessary. Our exchanges are of tremendous importance in becoming accustomed to death and the emptiness we each feel. Alienation from self and others has become less painful. Emotions may have returned to their empty source. This emptiness can have a positive value in that everything we have done in life, and in death, is empty. Even the self that we celebrate almost every day is void. By our exchange, we try to â??become nobodyâ?• as we were before birth.

â??Empirically and somewhat rhetorically, we question what we have achieved in this exchange of poetry and collages. Has it been worth it? Has it been therapeutic for us? Has it helped us deal better with our existential anxiety? To what extent have we â??tamedâ?? the prospect of our inevitable biological deaths? Have we succeeded in fighting alienation?

What youâ??ve just said, Krzysztof, reminds me of the Zen koan, â??What was my face before I was born?â?• My answer to that is â??a handful of earthâ?•. But, while weâ??re both still biologically alive, itâ??s reasonable to ask two, related philosophical questions. What kinds of identities have we represented in our article? What onto-epistemological premises underpin these identities? Some brief answers are possible here. We are conditioned by the times we live and have lived in, which have shaped us. Our represented identities shine through as simultaneously inevitably fragmented and

unified in the stark reality of such fragmentation. We present our individual selves and each other through disconnected modes of poetry, prose, and images. As bundles of serious, playful, prophetic, anxious, fearful, and critical stories, these traverse a range of shifting periods and places.

Although all this is obvious at face value, it is important to state, to highlight a central irony. We have launched a sustained critique of postmodern fragmentation. Yet, we are singly and together unified in this fragmentation, in the ongoing task of transcending it in text and image.

We leave it to you, dear reader, to extend, to carry on the conversation about how to unite fragmentation.

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Credits

All images provided by the authors

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