Collage Techniques

Keywords
Visualisation
Mood board
Image board
Form characteristics
Context analysis

What Is a Collage?

A collage is a visual representation made from an assembly of different forms, materials and sources creating a new whole. A collage may include newspaper clippings, ribbons, bits of coloured or hand-made papers, portions of other artwork, photographs, and such, glued (photoshopped) to a solid support or canvas. Making collages is an important visualisation technique in the design process, next to design drawing and three-dimensional modelling (see 'Design Drawing' and 'Three-dimensional Models' in section 2.2). By means of collages, you make visual representations of the context, user group or product category with the objective of deriving (visual) criteria.

When Can You Use a Collage?

The use of collages serves different purposes in the design process. A collage can aid in determining the colour palette of the product ideas and concepts. Collages are very suitable to present a particular atmosphere or context that you want to capture in the form of the new product ideas and concepts. In addition, collages help to determine and analyse the context in which the product will be used. As a designer you must take into account the context of which the product will be a part, i.e. the users, usage and usage environment. Making a collage helps to identify an existing or a new context.

Visual thinking and visualisation of ideas is inherent in thinking up ideas and solutions in design. Some issues cannot simply be captured in words, and this is where collages come into play. Collages help in structuring, developing, analysing and presenting visual issues that are difficult to express in words. You could think of shape characteristics, colour palette, compositional issues and so on. The overall purpose of using collages in the design process is to bring together visual elements to explore their commonalities.

Deriving Criteria from Collages?

Analysing collages helps determine criteria (design requirements) to which the solution must apply. Criteria of this kind also set a general direction for idea generation. With a collage we can find criteria for such matters as the lifestyle of a target group, the visual appearance of a product, the context of use and the interaction with a product (actions and handling). Other criteria may be how the product functions in its environment, and criteria that concern the category of products with which the new product is comparable. Collages in that way help to generate criteria by which the aesthetic qualities of ideas and solution can be assessed. Therefore, the creation of a collage is a process that is both creative (designing the collage) and analytical (deriving criteria).

fig. 2.7   Example of a collage used in the design process (from student report)

fig. 2.8   Examples of abstact collages for establishing a colour palette (note the technique used in the botom collage - tearing up paper) (from student report)

Choosing Colour, Texture and Materials
After making collages for the context, target group, usage and environment, you can use these images to define a number of characteristic types of colour/ texture and materials. By means of analyses of collages you can determine the colours that will play a role. You can determine environment colours, preferred colours, target group and the colours used for existing products. Produce a palette for this by using for example cuttings from magazines/ colour guides and/or the computer. The advantage of cuttings from magazines is that you can also obtain an impression of a gloss, material and possible transparency and texture. After gathering these provisional palettes, try to determine which colours will be the main colour for each palette and what the accent colours will be. Determine the relationships of these colours to each other.

Types of Collages?
We distinguish between an abstract collage (see figure 2.8) and a figurative collage. An abstract collage is built from pictures and images that are distorted in such a way that their origins are not visible anymore. Simple techniques are tearing up images, pasting images over one another, applying coloured surfaces with either straight edges or organically ripped edges (see figure 2.8). Usually, abstract collages also contain sections where drawing or painting is applied. Abstract collages miss any pictorial meaning, but only contain meaning on an abstract level in their use of colours and composition. Figurative collages are collages that make use of the

pictorial meaning of the original pictures and images used in the collages. Various types of images are used to create a new image, which itself has a new pictorial meaning.

Image Board and Mood Board
Image Boards and Mood Boards are types of collages that originated from disciplines such as marketing and consumer research. An Image Board and a Mood Board are collages that display the intended user and his/her lifestyle. An Image Board or a Mood Board displays typical lifestyle elements (such as brand preferences, leisure activities and product type preferences) of the users, but also their dreams and aspirations.

How to Make a Collage?
Starting Point
The starting point of making a collage is to determine what the collage is used for. What will be displayed in the collage: the user's lifestyle, the context of interaction, or similar products? Second, it is important to determine how the collage will be used: is the collage instrumental in the design project as a means to generate for example criteria, or will the collage be used to communicate a design vision? (see 'Desgin Vision' in this section)
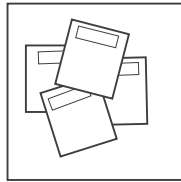
Expected Outcome
The outcome of making a collage is a visualisation of an aspect of the problem context, e.g. the lifestyle of users, the context of interaction or the product category. The collage could also be the visualisation
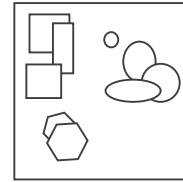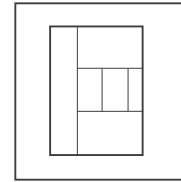
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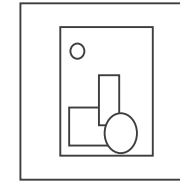Collage Techniques
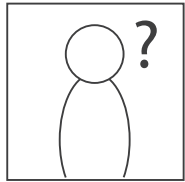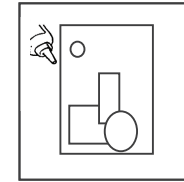
| determine the purpose | select magazines | group imagery | decide orientation of background | structure the composition | paste the collage |

of a design vision (see 'Design Vision' in this section). Also, criteria can be derived from the collage that serve the design process.

Possible Procedure

1 Determine which magazines and/or imagery will produce the most suitable material. Certain magazines are already focused on a certain target group/lifestyle. Take advantage of them. Intuitively gather as much raw imagery as possible (an entire page!).

2 Group together the imagery that concerns the target group, environment, handling, actions, products, colour, material and so on. At the same time, make a selection according to usable and less usable images, but do not throw anything away.

3 For each collage decide the orientation of the background. Ask yourself what influence it will have on the picture that you want to convey (formal and businesslike or informal and fun - vertical versus horizontal).

4 Try by means of small sketches to set down the structure of the composition, paying attention to the creation of lines and axes. Describe the consequences and state whether they are desirable in relation to your vision/picture.

5 Think which consequences the treatment of the imagery (clipping, cutting, tearing) will have for the overall picture. Does the background have its own colour or will the collage be filled entirely with imagery? A decision to create a framework/background will be of significance to the overall picture.

6 Examine which imagery will be placed in the foreground or in the background. Consider the size of the imagery (copy) and the relationship with the underground.

7 Identify which consequences play a role in merging (integrating) or separating the available pictures.

8 Make a provisional composition of the collage with the means at your disposal.

9 Assess the overall picture - are most of the characteristics represented?

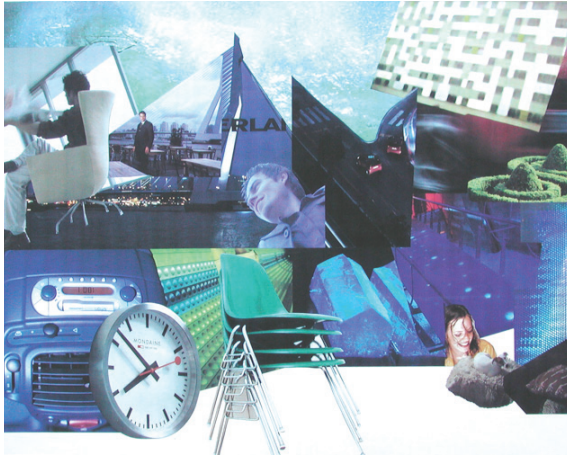*fig.2.9   Examples of collages 'existing product' and 'usage environment' (from student report)*
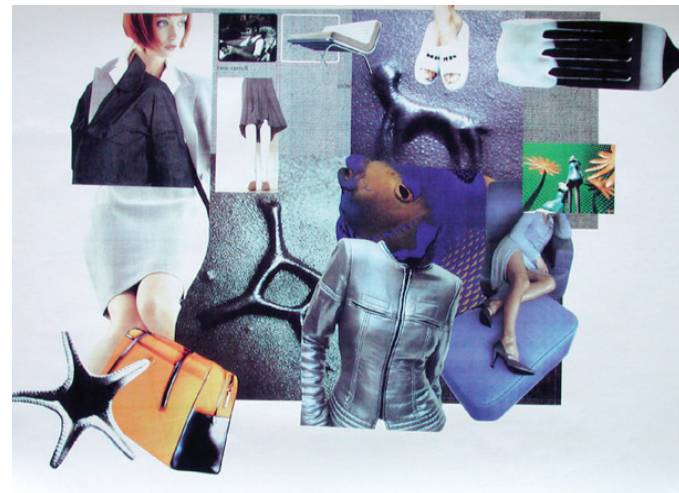
*fig. 2.10
Examples of
collages
used in the
design process
(from student
report)*

10 Paste the collages once the picture meets your expectations and contains most of the characteristics and they are identifiable.

11 If this is not the case, try to identify which part or parts evoke the conflicting picture: imagery (target group, products, etc.), quantity of material, orientation, relationship, structure of the composition, foreground/background, treatment of material, separation/integration of material or types of colours/ shapes.

Colour

1 For each colour palette, determine the main colour and accent colour: hue (sometimes referred to as the type tone of colour, yellows, reds, greens, etc.), value (or grey tone or light or dark colours), saturation (also referred to as the degree of colour), pastel colours.

2. Address the following questions when looking at your collages: must the product be conspicuous or inconspicuous in its environment? Must the product correspond or contrast with the existing products? Must the product fit in with the colours preferred by the target group?

3. Decide the definitive palette on the basis of the answers to these questions.

References and Further Reading

Muller, W. (2001) *Order and Meaning in Design*, Utrecht: Lemma

Bruens, G. (2007) *Form/Color Anatomy*, Utrecht: Lemma.