

# The Exquisite Corpse

## Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game

Edited by Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Davis Schneiderman, and Tom Denlinger

# THE EXQUISITE CORPSE

## **Texts and Contexts**

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To Kelly Haramis, Athena Schneiderman  
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To those that those who visit us from other  
places, the earth, and the voices  
that call us toward new arts practices

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## FOREWORD

# Totems without Taboos: The Exquisite Corpse

PAUL D. MILLER AKA DJ SPOOKY

### 1. Fold, crease, filter

Database aesthetics, collaborative filtering, musical riddles, and beat sequence philosophies don't exactly spring to mind when you think of the concept of the Exquisite Corpse. But if there's *one* thing that I want to you to think about when you read this anthology, it's that collage-based art—whether sound, film, multimedia, or computer code—has become the basic reference frame for most of generation info. We live in a world of relentlessly expanding networks—cellular, wireless, fiber optic routed . . . you name it. This world is becoming more interconnected than ever before, *and* it's going to get deeper, weirder, and a lot more interesting than even the data-stream-driven moment of this writing (NYC, at the beginning of the twenty-first century).

In an increasingly fractured and borderless world, we have fewer and fewer fixed systems to actually measure our experiences. This begs the question: how did we compare experiences before the Internet? How did people simply say “this is the way I see it”? They didn't. There was no one way of *seeing* anything, and if there's one thing the twentieth century taught us, it is that we have to give up the idea of mono-focused media, and enjoy the mesmerizing flow of fragments. And for the info obsessed, games are the best shock absorber for the “new”—they render it in terms that everyone can get.

Play a video game. Stroll through a corridor. Blast your opponents. Move to the next level. Repeat.

Or put away the carnage and imagine a westernized version of a game that *another* culture uses to teach about morals, demonstrating that respect for life begins with an ability to grasp the flow of information between people and places. I wonder how many westerners would know the term “daspada”—but wait. Evolving different behavioral models to respond to changing environments becomes a site where complexity meets empathy, a locus where we learn that giving information and receiving it is just part of what it means to live on this or probably any planet in the universe. And so what makes the Exquisite Corpse cool is simple: it was an artists’ parlor game that exposed its participants to a dynamic process—making the creative act a symbolic exchange between players.

## II. All that is solid

Some economists call this style of exchange and engagement “the gift economy.” I like to think that this fragmentary exchange is the basic way we can think and create in an era of platitudes, banality, and info overload. Even musicians and artists—traditionally the ciphers who translate intangible experience into something visible for the rest of us—have (for the most part) been happy for their work to be appropriated by the same contemporary models of material power that create problems for their audiences. Power and art happily legitimize each other in a merry dance of death, a jig where some people know the rules of the dance, but most got no rhythm. But this “death,” this “dematerialization”—echoes what Marx and Engels wrote about way back in the nineteenth century with their infamous phrase, “all that is solid melts into air.” Think of the Exquisite Corpse concept as a transference process melted over a global grid, where the sheer volume of information moving through the advanced info networks of the industrialized world offers a tactile relationship with something that can only be sensed as an exponential effect—or an order of effect that the human frame of reference is simply unable to process on its own. Enter the Exquisite Corpse, which, at the end of the day, is as much about renewal as it is about

memory. It all depends on how you play the game. The key word here is synthesis.

The way I see it: whenever humanity tries to really grapple with the deep issues—life, death, taxes, you name it—it becomes a game, and like most human endeavors, the Exquisite Corpse is all about chance processes. For example, the game of “daspada,” or “Snakes and Ladders” as it is commonly called, has its origin in India around the second century BC. The game was used for teaching morals—the relative level of reincarnation, the multiple perspectives represented regardless of whether life’s lessons had been learned. The British took it to England in 1890s and from there daspada spread to the rest of Europe and the world. Still the basic idea is of living multiple lives—the ultimate game theory—with the moral relationship between individuals and society linked to rules, and so this seems like a good place to reflect on how games get “sampled” and remixed across cultures.

Cut and paste the results, and it could easily be Pac Man, Quake, or Halo2. This thread easily connects artists as diverse as Luis Buñuel, John Cage, Virgil Thomson, and Grandmaster Flash. Yes, Grandmaster Flash! The whole idea is to look at links—at connections unacknowledged but also undeniably present in the spread of the game. Chance processes and randomness do that—scrambling subjectivity to let the unconscious methods we’ve used to sort information become a filter for the way we engage the external world. This scenario turns the mind inside out, and that, like pop culture always says, is a good thing.

### III. Infotainment Overload

People, according to most studies of “information theory,” create about eight to ten exabytes of information a year in the twenty-first century. An exabyte (derived from the SI prefix exa-) is a unit of information or computer storage equal to one quintillion bytes. This number is so large as to be beyond human comprehension. For example, the total amount of printed material in the world is estimated to be around five exabytes. It’s been estimated that by the end of 1999, the sum of human knowledge (including audio, video and text) was 12 exabytes. The University of California-Berkeley School

of Information suggests that five exabytes of storage space was created in 2002 *alone*, with 92 percent of it on magnetic media, mostly on hard disks. (The vast majority of this space is used to store redundant intellectual works such as music and commercial video.)

This same five exabytes of data has been said to approximately equal “all words ever spoken by human beings.” This statement is just the tip of the iceberg, but you get the idea—our culture produces a tremendous amount of information, and the real way that humanity experiences most of it is through multimedia. That’s where the Exquisite Corpse concept comes home to roost.

Think of one exabyte as a zillion gigabytes, and you get the idea—the scale, density, and sheer volume—it’s all getting smaller, more fragmented, and more nuanced. That’s more information than most of humanity has made throughout its existence on this planet over millions of years. The Exquisite Corpse is a game, also known as “exquisite cadaver” or “rotating corpse,” but it’s also a filtering process where a collection of words or images is assembled collectively. Each collaborator adds to the collage composition in sequence. It’s the sequence of the game that makes the tension between each player a connected and ultimately enriching experience. Each person is only allowed to see the end of what the previous person contributed. At the end of the day I guess you could call this a dialectical process—unfolding well beyond the paper.

A more technologically oriented description: the Exquisite Corpse is an adaptation to human-engineered technologies, testing formal and ecological theorems for high-density lifestyles, sustainable resource shared among urban organisms, and the play of public/private division in cross-species interaction. Got it?

Info density isn’t about the information just sitting happily on your hard drive, on your canvas, or in the artist’s studio: the whole theme of this group of essays is a reflection on the different paths information takes as it moves from one culture to the next, one individual at a time. Think of Moore’s Law—expressed as the doubling of computer processing power every eighteen months—suggesting the phenomenal progress of technology in recent years. Expressed on a shorter timescale, however, Moore’s law equates to an average performance improvement in the information industry of over one per-

cent a week. What games does this open us to in the era of absurdly large numbers? For example, at [pandora.com](http://pandora.com) visitors are invited to enter the name of their favorite artist or song and to get in return a stream of music with similar “DNA.” It’s essentially a private Internet radio station micro-tailored to each user’s tastes. There’s more. For example, customizable Internet radio services like Pandora, Last.fm, Yahoo’s LAUNCHcast and RealNetworks’ Rhapsody are pointing users to music far beyond the playlists that confine most FM radio broadcasts. The most familiar forms use so-called collaborative filtering: software that makes recommendations based on the buying patterns of like-minded consumers. Think of the “customers who bought items like this also bought” function on Amazon.com. Your tastes, and the way they travel through the system, leave trails for the algorithms running the software to model—and this data is then passed on to someone else, and so on.

Think of it as the cultural update of “daspada” transcribed to the realm of the digital—the Surrealist Exquisite Corpse anticipated this, and made it enjoyable.

In the realm of video and online media, the craze is “Machinima”—when kids remix video game characters to make their own films. In the realm of dj culture, it’s the mix tape. The common denominator is selection. The whole schemata runs on density, and the tools we use to navigate information become barometers of the deep cultural structure translated into pure information. As the twenty-first century advances, this pattern will become more and more linked to the way we live . . . and the way we play.

Moore’s original statement can be found in his publication “Cramming More Components onto Integrated Circuits” (*Electronics Magazine*, April 19, 1965), but for this essay let’s think of the basic framework as a mirror for Mies van der Rohe’s infamous quip about design: less is more. Whisper that in someone’s bionic ear and listen to what happens. That’s what this foreword is about: the rebranding of a game. Of course modern architecture’s mantra of “form follows function” pops out of Mies’s observation as well, most noticeably in the Exquisite Corpse’s relentless connectivity. As the material moves from one person to the next, you’re drawn to the idea of social architecture: design could and should reflect the purpose and ethos

of what goes on in a structure. With the Exquisite Corpse, the rules of the game provide the form, and the way people put together the fragments, the function. This is a radical way of thinking about the collaborative process: the way a game unfolds links to the way its material evolves. If architecture is any guide, the *cadaver exquis* will soon house a different set of rules. But that's kind of the point; it's those rules that connect the game to the real world of networks, relays, and info culture. Basically the rules are now almost ubiquitous. That's why kids like mash-ups and remixes, and that's why online culture mirrors so much of what went on with the original game.

#### IV. The Postmodern Prometheus

The remix, as always, is what you make of it. Juxtapose, fragment, flip the script—anything else, simply put, would be boring. This anthology, like the original game of the Surrealists, points to a place in culture where the process of art remains an explicitly collaborative scenario. It's a situation that requires, like the name, a kind of collective action. The drawn version of the Corpse predates the written version—but this anthology is also a map of the un-drawn terrain of bodies and minds that surround the Exquisite Corpse.

Think of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—the mismatched body parts, the fragmented speech, the neo-Romantic sense of loss and renewal. What would that creature feel if it *knew* that it was merely a figment of Shelley's imagination, a conversation piece made up in 1816, on a cold night in Switzerland? No thunderstorm, no lightning bolts channeled through giant Tesla coils, and definitely no hunchbacks called Igor. But *Frankenstein's* monster is as real as any exabyte, and it lies similarly on the fault line between animate and inanimate matter. In the folds of the Exquisite Corpse, we see the grinning specter of Mary Shelley's monster stalking the unintended consequences of physical life created from the realm of the imagination.

Such creation haunts the way we think about the compositional strategies of artists and composers who break down the linear flow of ideas between people. The "text" is never inanimate—it's the human imagination that gives shape and meaning, the elixir that breathes life into the golem. Isn't that what sampling is about, too? Take a fragment of a record, mix it. Sequence it. Repeat. Flip the script, cut

and paste the result, and the literary equivalent of an artificial creature flows off the page and *becomes* sound, becomes another story, another composition, a frame of reference at the edge of what we call human.

We all produce it, and we all know it—even though it has become a mass-culture cliché: collective memory and the way it unfolds in the expression of culture. That's the Exquisite Corpse, too. This anthology explores the places on the cultural map that haven't been marked, places that on any other, more careful map, might be marked "here be dragons." Yes, we're covering those blank places. The active mind wants to doodle and fill in the emptiness. I can only say that this collection of writings is a lexicon, a guide for interpreting phenomena that we all know wait at the edge of our imagination, if we only had the tools to navigate its unknown space.

Wait, we do. If the puzzle pieces fit, draw a line connecting the dots. But most of all—have fun!





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When one of the editors posted a call for a panel on the Revival of the Exquisite Corpse for the “Rethinking the Avant-garde” Conference held at Notre Dame University in April 2000, the first conversations among us began about the resurgence in the practice of the Exquisite Corpse and the need for more scholarship to chronicle the changing visage of the Corpse. A special thanks to Megan McShane and Kimberley Jannarone for joining me at the panel and for the subsequent conversations. Along the way many people have joined us in this conversation, and we are particularly grateful to Ladette Randolph, Kristen Elias Rowley, and the University of Nebraska Press for all their support and interest in this project. The insightful feedback from the anonymous readers of the original manuscript has led to many revisions and an immensely better book.

We owe thanks as well to many other people and institutions for the production of this book, and we wish to thank the University of Washington-Bothell and Lake Forest College. We particularly wish to recognize the contribution of Lake Forest College students Shannon Green, Daniel Kolen, Jennifer Murphy, and Benjamin Lundquist, as well as Elizabeth Weaver at the University of Washington-Bothell. Without their help in many aspects of the publication process, this collection would still be just a piece of folded paper.



## INTRODUCTION

# The Algorithms of the Exquisite Corpse

KANTA KOCHHAR-LINDGREN,  
DAVIS SCHNEIDERMAN,  
AND TOM DENLINGER

At a 1935 meeting of their Surrealist group, Victor Brauner, André Breton, Jacques Hérold, and Yves Tanguy engaged in one of their many parlor games. They folded a sheet of paper in fours, across a horizontal axis, and, taking turns, made their marks in the respective quadrants. In the resulting construction, Brauner's many-eyed "head" gives way to Breton's distorted upper torso, hands fondling two swollen breasts, which in turn gives way to Hérold's egg-shaped mid-section nestled in the upper cone of Tanguy's snarling, reptilian dog feet. The composite figure, as one of some two hundred similar drawings and collages produced between 1924–1949, is both a marker of the historical avant-garde and an epistemological apparatus that lives beyond its initial historical moment. The Exquisite Corpse, following a simple but continuously elaborated algorithm, endlessly reinvents itself and reappears in a number of different contexts.

This collection addresses the need to chart these manifestations of the Exquisite Corpse that are produced by a folding together of technical rules with random, asynchronous, and contingent operations, in ever-widening networks of cross-media creation. More particularly, it develops a fuller consideration of the Exquisite Corpse as it impacts three registers of cultural production: artistic, pedagogical, and theoretical.

Contemporary artistic practice draws from the genealogies of the Exquisite Corpses, as we will see from both work in this volume, and additional examples beyond the binding of this book, such as the 1993 exhibit Totems without Taboos at the Heartland Café in Chicago, organized by the Chicago Surrealist Group; the San Francisco Cacophony Society's Exquisite Corpse event generated in a theater full of people with typewriters; *The Exquisite Corpse: A Surrealist Film in Eleven Parts*, by Dean Naday and Pierre Naday; Donald Lipski's sculptures; *Mysterious Object at Noon*, an experimental Thai film directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul; *Cadavre Exquis première édition*, spawned by ten film directors, scriptwriters, and musicians and conceived of by Adrien Lorion, David-Etienne and Michel Laroche for the Montreal World Film Festival of 2006; and a proliferating engine of a web-based Exquisite Corpse, including *Iamanagram* and the MySpace character of "Madelyn," an amalgam of University of Utah graduate students Kirsten Jorgenson, Harmony Button, and Pepper Luboff.<sup>1</sup> In response to this rich and evolving arts terrain, this volume takes a first step in building new conversations about the Exquisite Corpse as a contemporary arts practice.

There have been, as well, many historical and theoretical treatments of the Exquisite Corpse in larger accounts of Surrealism, but there continues to be a lack of sufficient attention to the Exquisite Corpse as a primary object of interpretation. The exceptions are two exhibition catalogs from the field of art history: Arturo Schwartz's 1940/1970 catalog from Italy and The Drawing Center's *The Return of the Exquisite Corpse* (1994), a catalog of a 1992 New York City art exhibit. The first work addresses the Exquisite Corpse during the Surrealist period while the second portrays a revival of the form, however neither provides adequate theoretical treatments of the practice. Furthermore both texts are limited to drawings, and do not contain poems, performance, or musical adaptations of the technique.

Recent philosophically rigorous approaches to the Corpse that have made rich contributions to the discussion of the Corpse, include Catherine Vesseur's "L'image Sans Mémoire: À Propos du Cadavre Exquis," which considers how the game works in a way that is homologous to Breton's 1921 comments on the cinematic image, in which Breton links the blink of the eye to perception, conscious-

ness, and the micro-passage from birth to death. Hence, each moment of perception, and by implication, each making of a new Exquisite Corpse, recreates the world, envisions it “anew.” Elsewhere, Megan McShane writes of the failure to account for the significant numbers of women who participated in the game.<sup>2</sup> In *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), Elza Adamowicz provides the only currently broadly staged and encompassing theoretical treatment of Surrealist collage methodology that addresses examples in both the visual and literary arts. It focuses on a reconsideration of the Surrealists and their partners’ production in order to expand how these collage techniques open to uncharted epistemological terrain within the Surrealist historical context.

All three of these studies reframe an analysis of the game’s genesis and production in order to reveal the complexity of its practice. Scholarship on the Exquisite Corpse, however, needs to be updated further in relationship to postmodern theory, and no current work brings together a consideration of the pedagogy, theory, and practice in one volume. These occlusions lead, in part, to the tendency to downplay the current significance of the game.

This collection, then, addresses the need to revise our understanding of the Exquisite Corpse in both practice and theory. Its contributors frame artistic activities, place works in historical and critical contexts, and examine the relations between technology, production, pedagogy, and theory. In our predominantly user-generated culture, an artist can—finally—be anywhere or anyone, in or out of the academy, or in or out of virtual heterotopias. Engagement with the Exquisite Corpse also acts to further destabilize the traditional subject in its social context. E. San Juan Jr. notes that “[t]he constitution of the Surrealist subject springs from the problematization of the authority of the author and of the academies, the arbiters of Establishment taste.”<sup>3</sup> This Surrealist constitution is epistemological in nature, charting the slippage between the modern triumph of the autonomous artist and the dissolution of her nonexistent “essence.” The early years of the game suggest a look forward to a postmodern era in which the aesthetic of individual genius transforms into a formalized critique of authority. This critique deploys through ex-

perimentation within traditional forms and the advent of “new” art in a virtual media and performative context.

Consequently, the continued proliferation of the Corpse opens into a new media era and also affects how we think about the body. While the historical terrain has tended to emphasize the manifestation of visual and literary Exquisite Corpses, the constant (un)fold-ing of these hybrid bodies creates a surreally transforming *corporeal* landscape as well. The Exquisite Corpse—in its mediative and performative versions—acts as a method of research and collaboration that accounts for the folding together of multiple realities and bodies. As active participants in the game, we can consider how the heterogeneous flux of perception and the mobile body become the source for encounters with a variety of “aesthetic mutations” (San Juan: 35), as well as the political implications for change produced through the construction of these bodies. While the initial body of the Corpse might be called a “paper body,” its legacy, like the progeny of Dr. Frankenstein, comes startlingly to life as it crosses multiple social, theoretical, and material boundaries.

This trajectory enables us to understand what it is about the Exquisite Corpse *as a method* that has led to it serving as a kind of framing example for manifold media interactions. From William S. Burroughs’s and Brion Gysin’s use of the cut-up method in the 1960s onward, the montage styles of contemporary cinema, along with the formal innovations of the Exquisite Corpse, have proven to be surprisingly generative of sophisticated new practices. Finally, the collection suggests linkages between the Exquisite Corpse and a broader understanding of the different body and its accompanying aesthetics. The disabled or differently sexed body often invokes the grotesque and so unsettles mainstream notions of normalcy. (Perhaps Frankenstein does, in fact, serve as a figure of the Corpse *avant la lettre*?) With the emergence of the many philosophies of difference within and beyond the walls of the university—including feminisms and ethnic, gender, and disability studies—the Exquisite Corpse exemplifies one manner in which difference is produced as a means of disrupting the normalizing of the hegemonic power of the current cultural regime. The game is political to its core, a “core” which is not an object or a thing, but a technopoetic process, a productive

algorithm that mutates the materialities of artworks, classrooms, and social relations.

Thus the collection addresses both historical and contemporary manifestations of poems, drawings, collages, and media and performance works that employ the ritual of the *cadaver exquis*. As one of the few collaborative exercises of the historical Surrealist group to successfully transcend its original time period, the legacy of the Corpse is marked by the efforts of scholars and artists to express new temporal and spatial crossings, as well as new experiences of the body's mutability through the use of a variety of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic frames.

The “rules” of the Exquisite Corpse never veer toward an ossification of dogma, and yet the contributors to this volume nonetheless hold onto baseline definitions of the Corpse across the decades: edges and new figures are created by a fold, a drawing, or an analogous aesthetic move. This edge allows for the processing of information in endless varieties of undulations. For the Surrealists, to fold was to hide *and* to reveal at once—to hide the body of work that the next participant might automatically wish for, and to reveal, in the few lines pressing over the fold, the possibilities of a ludic experience that becomes simultaneously both singular and collective.

The singularizing collectivity of the Exquisite Corpse is then a genetic evolution not only of Frankenstein, but also of the creatures in Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799). In these essays the Corpse becomes an attempt to contain and express those same monstrosities that have mutated even further by the dominance of (post)industrial capital over the last two centuries. Reason *and* the sleep of reason produce monsters, but it is the essence of reason itself that comes into question with the Corpse, a question that has radically intensified since the nineteenth century of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche.

The original Surrealist group, in part responding to the appearance of psychoanalysis, sought to create an antidote to the dominant idea of the rational, the unified ego, and the commodification of the once-public artistic sphere provoked by the rise of capitalism. Everything depends, though, on *how* the artist, the scholar, or the teacher composes rationality and its oppositions. As the caption on



the Prado version of Goya's etching says: "Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels." And so, almost a century after the construction of the first Corpse, we find ourselves simultaneously answering back to its legacy as well as replying to its futurity.

### The Ludic

The collection's first section tackles the ludic aspects of the Exquisite Corpse—the ways in which the Corpse works to defamiliarize the old, and, in so doing, to clear space in order to format the new. Players are participants in a communal technology that enables them to learn something about the world through presentation rather than re-presentation. The contributors in this section more often interpret the Corpse's significance not in terms of the continued paper-folding practice, but in the assumption of its aleatory, ludic method into the substance of later production. In these practices the Corpse becomes both material and metaphor.

Anne Kern and Susan Laxton articulate the primacy of the Surrealist game in the subversion of modernist cultural structures. In "From One Exquisite Corpse (in)to Another: Influences and Transformations from Early to Late Surrealist Games," Kern reasserts the influence of Freud on the group pursuit of ludic activity during the early practice of the *cadavre exquis*, and, in the practice of the later Corpse-like game, "The One in the Other." In "This is Not a Drawing," Laxton traces the material, formal, and syntactical function of the fold in collectively produced Corpse drawings. This contribution traces the genealogy of the Exquisite Corpse to automatism, placing the *cadavre exquis* in the context of an historical shift in Surrealist practices from attempts at tapping "pure thought" to simulating primary processes under the sign of the ludic. The games are introduced as an extension of automatic drawing's counter-figurative intervention into the visual arts, one that worked against the creation of original art objects for exchange and exhibition.

In "Events and the Exquisite Corpse," Ken Friedman engages the legacy of Fluxus and its intersections with the Corpse. Noting the shared tradition of gaming and parlor games for the Surrealists and

Fluxus artists, Freidman articulates the ways in which Fluxus, structured through the use of event scores, creates an aesthetic practice opening out into an unpredictable field over a number of years, beginning in the 1950s and continuing until the present day.

Finally, Oliver Harris, in “Cutting Up the Corpse,” investigates the Corpse’s legacy in terms of the cut-ups of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. For the cut-ups, the juxtapositions of the Surrealist technique provide both physical and metaphorical links, demonstrating how Burroughs’s innovations were remixes of his predecessors, textual predictions of the future, and interventions into the visual and literary body of the Corpse. These histories, as a group, allow us to more fully understand the rich artistic tradition that has emerged as a result of the practice of the Exquisite Corpse.

### Artistic Collectivity and Literary Creation

The essays in this second division argue for a cross-section of Corpses that are at once more complex than the original Surrealist samples, but also profoundly indebted to the anti-rational collaboration of the first players. We might imagine a sheet of paper called “culture” folded three or four times across a topological plane in a Parisian salon, which then promulgates itself through the twentieth century while becoming an exponential, immanent, and polydimensional figuration of monstrous proportions that mirrors a monstrous age. Ingrid Schaffner’s essay examines the value and legacy of the Exquisite Corpse practice within this contemporary milieu. Schaffner assembled a 1993 exhibition at The Drawing Center in New York City, which included numerous artists working anonymously and in collaboration to produce more than six hundred Corpses over a two-year period. This event led to the reassertion of the Exquisite Corpse in its original form and to the newly articulated significance of its contemporary permutations.

Ray Ellenwood’s “The Exquisite Corpse Is Alive and Well and Living in Montréal” details the activities of Canadian artists who pursued Exquisite Corpse-style collaborations over a number of years, beginning in the 1950s, commencing again during the 1990s, and continuing until the present day. Tracing connections between the Montréal Automatists of 1948 and a contemporary revival of collab-

orative art-making, Ellenwood delineates the activities of Canadian artists dedicated to generating artwork through chance encounters and collective endeavor.

“An Anatomy of Alfred Chester’s *Exquisite Corpse*,” Allen Hibbard’s dissection of Chester’s novel *Exquisite Corpse*, collapses the distance of Chester’s own troubled life into the character-sampling texture of a postmodern novel-space. In Chester’s story of masks, fetish narratives, and invisible babies, we see not only the Corpse game updated into the anomalous space of fiction, but we also discover the possibility, and precipice, at the edge of the contemporary anti-novel.

In “together in their dis-harmony’: Internet Collaboration and *Le Cadavre Exquis*,” Michael Joyce puts the Corpse into action, updating “Senegal oysters” and “friable little girls” into the age of the endless data stream. His disembodied collaborations with, among others, Venezuelan multimedia artist Anita Pantin, Los Angeles visual artist Alexandra Grant, and Serbian philosopher and writer Sanja Milutinović, prove that the Surrealist critique of rationality is still very much part of the networked moment, and that the Corpse’s ability to represent all manner of image and text has been assimilated into all manner of collaborative activity.

## Academia

As the academy reconstitutes itself in response to the multiplicity of current demands, and especially as it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the totemic power of an Enlightenment model of the university, the Exquisite Corpse, often relegated to art history programs, has begun to virally find its way out into the campus at large. This device invokes a collaborative model that destabilizes the frame of the solo learner in tightly framed classrooms and makes, instead, a series of provisional communities. As such, the game reconstitutes the corpus of learners and provides new models of analysis, critique, and pedagogy.

Two essays explore this topic. Craig Saper’s “Academia’s Exquisite Corpse: An Ethnography of the Application Process” enacts a vivisection of Jesse Reklaw’s pamphlet *applicant*, a collection of admis-

sion photos to PhD programs paired with excruciating samples from accompanying letters of recommendations. Saper's work slices into the dream logic of the Surrealist moment, using Roland Barthes's *punctum* to stick pins into the process of illustration and "found" collaboration, so that the Corpse, revived in Reklaw, exposes its multiform layers in a most unexpected place.

Davis Schneiderman and Tom Denlinger, in "Dead Men Don't Wear Pixels: The Online Exquisite Corpse and Process-based Institutional Critique," practice the Corpse in a six-campus online collaboration that asks students to create media to be interpreted in de-realized form by anonymous partners at other campuses. Focusing on issues of artistic autonomy and aesthetic value, Schneiderman and Denlinger raise the specter of Surrealist progress by evoking the pervasive ghost in the culture machine of the academy.

### Recomposing the Body

The final section links the textual and two-dimensional manifestations of the Exquisite Corpse to performance and articulates a theatrically driven history of fragmented and re-membered bodies. These performative renditions of the Exquisite Corpse and its progeny repopulate the cultural imaginary and create space for the body stitched together through the different visceral aspects of experience. In this space we encounter the shadow topography of the maimed, disabled, the evacuated, empty, or the cut-apart, the performative heterology of bodies in space that is set into motion by the twitching of the Corpse (and bringing us into the closest proximity with Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, her own revision of *Frankenstein*).

Kimberley Jannarone's "Exquisite Theater" addresses the problematic case of Surrealism in the theater. The originators of Surrealism denounced the theater as an artistic form, and even excommunicated several members of their group based on, among other things, involvement with dramatic performance. Jannarone, however, explores a way to speak of Surrealist theater that also acknowledges its marginal status, specifically in the theatrical projects of Jean Cocteau and Antonin Artaud.

"Howling," by Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, forges links—through

the recurrence of the figure of the scream—between the Exquisite Corpse and Butoh, a hybrid dance form emerging from the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and drawing on surrealism, German expressionist dance, and classical Japanese theater. First performed in 1959, Butoh executes the fragmented and grotesque body rendered between consciousness, the unconscious, history, and the earth.

“‘You Make Such an Exquisite Corpse’: Surrealist Collaboration and the Transcendence of Gender in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*,” by Don Dingleline, examines the filmic fragmentation of postmodern gender. The brief introduction to “Exquisite Corpse,” “Hedwig’s Lament,” emphasizes that Hedwig is “a collage . . . a montage,” another stitched together character who ultimately evokes the collective promise of the now postmodernist event through the Corpse.

All three articles address “theaters” of the Exquisite Corpse—the performative site where we encounter an “other”—and so challenge our impulse to reify the normal and regulated collective body once the curtain comes down. In the theater of the everyday, we live at *and* across the folds of experience into the world of the Corpse.

## Remix

These collected essays cluster around specific schematic guideposts—the Ludic, Artistic Collectivity and Literary Creation, Academia, and the Body—and, taken together, recast the ever-shifting sense of the Corpse. Call this book, then, a remix of the Exquisite Corpse, which itself is a continual remediation of history, gender, categories of experience, and artistic methods. In his foreword, Paul D. Miller aka Dj Spooky notes the limitless problems of storage in the electronic age. We are assailed by a problem of numbers, a difficulty of language translated to binary code, of streaming data washing over the unconscious mind at a rate guaranteed to make Breton and company seem like residents of a different and more archaic age. But if along one fold they remain relics preserved in the vitrine displays of the museum, along other folds they are also always awake, walking abroad far beyond the walls of the archive, and waiting ahead of us to greet us as we turn the next corner. After all, they gave

us their bodies, their pencils and papers, their drawings, texts, their tears and laughter, and, most importantly, a simple set of instructions—the algorithym of, and for, the Exquisite Corpse.

## Notes

1. For “Madelyn,” see: <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=52387897>.
2. McShane, *Exquisite Corpse*, 19–20.
3. San Juan, “Antonio Gramsci,” 35.



# THE EXQUISITE CORPSE





The Ludic

one



# From One Exquisite Corpse (in)to Another

Influences and Transformations  
from Early to Late Surrealist Games

ANNE M. KERN

1

If there is, in Surrealism, a form of activity whose persistence has had the gift of exciting the resentment of imbeciles, it is certainly [in] the activity of play/game (jeu) which can be traced across most of our publications over these last thirty-six years. **André Breton**

Since the first generation of Surrealists emerged out of Dadaism over eighty years ago, a rather remarkable body of scholarship in Europe and the United States has worked over nearly every aspect of this tangled, amorphous group. At the center of this knot we discover the actual games that those associated with Surrealism played (and continue to play) with an amazing adherence and consistency—nearly every evening during some periods, decade after decade—and yet a critical lacuna regarding the games themselves persists. Paradoxically, what the Surrealists themselves took so seriously has still been only cursorily addressed, despite a somewhat increased awareness of these practices in Surrealist scholarship.<sup>1</sup> It was the first generation of French surrealists who invented the Exquisite Corpse and coined the name around the time of the group's foundation in the 1920s, and it has remained a key part of surrealist ludic practice to the present day. This essay will examine the earliest published examples of the Exquisite Corpse in order to demonstrate how its initial concept must be understood *in context*—that is, as

just one of several different kinds of games played by Surrealists for various purposes, and as art objects or illustrations that are most productively interpreted in dynamic relation with the texts that surround their original publication. Exquisite Corpses, in short, are communicating vessels; the task of this text is to examine their flow and direction.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, the discussion that follows will begin to tease out the consistent and crucial relationship that games such as the Exquisite Corpse have with Sigmund Freud's theories of the mind, dreams, desire, and even humor. Recent scholarship addressing the relationship between Surrealism and psychoanalysis has generally sought to "correct" a perceived overstatement of the Surrealists' reliance on Freudian precepts. Yet in the specific domain of the Surrealists' ludic activities, Freud's imprint is prevalent and consistent, whether Freud recognized the Surrealists or not.

Further, I will demonstrate that even the Exquisite Corpse's initial historical and textual context are not sufficient to explain the game's lasting influence within and beyond Surrealism: to truly elucidate this most famous of Surrealist games, we will examine it in comparison to a much lesser known, later Surrealist chain game played and published in the 1950s called the One in the Other (*L'Un dans l'autre*). There we will find a crucial theoretical explication of the purpose and methods of Surrealist ludic *praxis* in general, as well as a game that pushes the concept of marvelous analogical games to a new level.

### Surrealist Game and Play: A Primer

Since the Exquisite Corpse as a Surrealist practice marks itself from the outset as a game, let us stipulate a few general qualities of play and game (the *Oxford English Dictionary* devotes no less than ten full pages to the various definitions of the word "play" alone, so we should recognize this as evocative rather than exhaustive). Play is conventionally understood in English as free and voluntary activity; it is this quality of freedom that defines it, because play that is forced would appear no longer to be play, but an obligation or task.<sup>3</sup> Play often involves or invites repetition; it can often be distinguished from other human activities, in fact, by the extent to which play behaviors are repeated *ad infinitum*, without any diminishment in

the derived pleasure. Play is typically understood to be superfluous, and its purpose, to bring pleasure; play is not imposed by physical or moral necessity (whence the famous truism that “he who is hungry does not play”). But this is not to say that play is at all without intensity, seriousness, or rules; even in its non-game form, play is usually sharply demarcated both spatially and conceptually as distinct from other areas of culture.

Theorists of play and game such as Johan Huizinga have also argued that play activities are necessarily limited in both space and time, though more recently we might argue that online and virtual gaming have begun to challenge such parameters.<sup>4</sup> Thus we are left with the idea that play must be a kind of *consciousness* above all else: we know when are playing and when we are not. As social scientist Brian Sutton-Smith has argued, play exists on a threshold—it *both is and is not real at once*—it is actual human activity, but one that simulates or mimics “real” activity at the same time (e.g., a dog nipping playfully—it both is and is not a nip).<sup>5</sup> Sutton-Smith’s example of a dog’s playful bite is instructive, because it embodies a common paradox of play: though conscribed by rules and limits, play is quite often transgressive, containing otherwise unacceptable behavior (in this case, aggression). One of the most interesting features of Surrealist games, as we will see, is the dynamic tension between rules and transgression.

In the first *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, André Breton provides a definition for Surrealism and the two primary means to evoke it. Play/game (*jeu*) emerges immediately as a central concept: “Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the *disinterested play/game [jeu] of thought*. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.”<sup>6</sup> Surrealist ludic activity can be distinguished from more conventional “social games” (“jeux de société”) at a number of levels. Unlike the Dadaists, for whom all vestige of structure runs counter to their anarchic spirit, the Surrealists expressly sought in their nightly sessions to engage in a kind of “experimental research” (“recherche expérimentale”)—the title of another early game. The Surrealists believed their games

contained crucial elements for this kind of “research”; they were intended above all to be collective and noncompetitive exercises, unlike our contemporary, agonistic game playing. The nature of a Surrealist game always requires at least two people, though many games were played by a minimum of a dozen people at any given time. Surrealist poet Simone Kahn has described the products of Surrealism as “images unimaginable by one mind alone.”<sup>7</sup> Not only did the games “strengthen the ties that unify us,” according to Breton, but they “allow us to take our common desires into account” (“prise de conscience”).<sup>8</sup>

The playful aspects of gaming are equally important; according to the Surrealists, the apparent “lightness” of the game engenders an atmosphere more conducive to the free play of the imagination. Since “the liberation of man” is the “first condition of the spirit,” according to the manifestoes, a radical openness, unchained from the constraints of formal metaphysics, granted the Surrealists the possibility to discover connections that were at once more surprising and more profound (in both the literal and metaphorical senses). Surrealist activity is above all communicative and expressive in aim, driven by revolutionary possibilities for collective thought and creation.<sup>9</sup>

The explicit theoretical objective of Surrealism is the reconciliation of antinomies. The Surrealists continued the philosophical struggle of the Hegelian dialectic that they had inherited from the nineteenth century, although they approached it from quite a different angle, as Bruce Baugh has explored in his book *French Hegel*, which considers the impact of Hegel on French philosophy from the 1920s to the present. Put briefly, the Surrealists neither completely accepted nor denied Hegelian and Marxist dialectical models; instead they sought to bring the poles of dialectical thought together, to hold them in dynamic tension, until, as Breton asserted, “they cease to be perceived as contradictory.”<sup>10</sup> The only way to find adequate expression for this *sur-réalité* is through an all-encompassing ethical commitment that the Surrealists refer to as “the poetic life” (“la vie poétique”): a commitment, in short, to the *experience* of a spontaneous existence over and against conventions and positivistic rationalizations. This poetic life—or “lyric behavior,” as Breton liked to refer to it—rejects

the oversimplified, binary opposition between an autonomous self and a real world “out there,” as posited by a more traditional metaphysics. As Michel Carrouges explains, “Surrealism can in no way accept to close itself up within the confines of subjectivity. Its very principle enjoins it to seek an active synthesis of the subjective and the objective. . . . Its essential role is, on the contrary, to bring them into effective confrontation, to search out the ways by which the most extreme subjectivity and the most tangible objectivity can communicate.”<sup>11</sup> Informed by their own experiences and inspired by Freud (among others), the Surrealists believed that “borderline” experiences—on the edge between waking and dreaming, products of the imagination (verbal, textual, visual) created collectively—*are* that moment of communication, and they devoted themselves to living within it as often as possible.

Thus, far from a sideline occupation, the collective game practice of the first generation of Surrealists in France is in fact the most distilled example of this “poetic life.” The materials produced from their games were intended—at least in principle—to be entirely spontaneous, in direct provenance from the imagination (and the unconscious, through and across the imagination). In a later theoretical statement, Breton goes so far as to claim that to close oneself off from the ludic is to “attack [*saper*] the foundation of the best of mankind in oneself.”<sup>12</sup> The associations or analogies that are made in the games do not reveal an arbitrary assemblage of attachments between signifier and signified or from one signifier to another; on the contrary, the Surrealists considered their chains of associations to be the result of “objective chance” (“le hasard objectif”).<sup>13</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the notion of “objective chance” has its roots in magic and esotericism, positioning us as witnesses to the phenomena of the marvelous in the everyday, which Breton insists is all around us, all the time.<sup>14</sup> A playful attitude loosens up the gears, as it were, and the collective intensity and sense of presence within the group allows for the marvelous to be conjured up, not unlike certain practices of divination. Breton sought to evoke the occult in his games of chance, through which he hoped to liberate the surreality that streams from the unconscious—instead of conjuring from above, the Surrealists were conjuring from below—or, more precisely, from within.



## Freud and the Corpse

One of the most successful and well-known games of “objective chance” initiated and publicly disseminated during the 1920s was, of course, the *cadavre exquis*, or the Exquisite Corpse, to which this volume of essays is dedicated. The object of this genre of games, often referred to as chain games (because they operate according to chains of association), is the re-creation of new attachments between word-images in order to elicit the marvelous through a fortuitous revelation.

The game Exquisite Corpse was given its public introduction in the October 1, 1927, issue—nos. 9 and 10—of *La Révolution Sur-réaliste* [*The Surrealist Revolution*] [referred to hereafter as *RS*], the journal that succeeded *Littérature* as the primary public print venue for the Parisian group of Surrealists. According to surrealism scholar Gaetan Picon, *RS* is the crucial chart of the group during this period: “The fact remains that the history of Surrealism between 1925 and 1929 is the history of this magazine.”<sup>15</sup>

In all, there are five graphic Exquisite Corpse drawings and ten Corpse sentence-collages in the issue; this essay will focus on two of the drawings in particular, as they appear in situ before and amidst an excerpt from an essay by Sigmund Freud.

The Exquisite Corpse drawings in *RS* closely follow the conventional children’s game from which the Corpse derives, Heads, Bodies, and Legs (“Petit Papiers” in French).<sup>16</sup> In general, “illustrations” such as inset photographs, drawings, and paintings in the Surrealist journals tend to have a strange, often inscrutable or uncanny relationship to the text in which they are situated. The point is the connection itself, the spark of crossed wires. In his statement on *Surrealism and Painting* (in an earlier issue of *RS*), Breton explains the nature of vision as an event comprising all that we have ever seen; what we have seen often (and what we have rarely seen); what we love, what we hate, what others have seen or not seen and by suggestion cause us to see (or not see). “There is also that which I see differently than others,” he writes, “and even that which I begin to see *that is not visible*. And that’s not all.”<sup>17</sup> Breton’s depiction of vision as a complex amalgamation of perceptual and mental factors

# LA RÉVOLUTION SURREALISTE



L'ECRITURE AUTOMATIQUE

## SOMMAIRE

### HANDS OFF LOVE

Visions de demi-sommeil : Max Ernst.

### REVES :

Aragon, Pierre Naville.

Journal d'une apparition : Robert Desnos.

Et la lune donnait, et la rosée tombait :

Xavier Forneret.

J. Vaché : Paul Nougé.

### POEMES :

Paul Eluard, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Baron,

Fanny Beznos, Pierre Unik.

La question de l'analyse par les non-médecins :

Sigmund Freud.

Corps à corps : Benjamin Péret.

Le surréalisme et la peinture : André Breton.

Vie d'Héraclite : Fénélon.

Philosophie des paratonnerres : Aragon.

Mieux et moins bien : Pierre Naville.

### CHRONIQUES :

Mouvements perpétuels : Aragon.

La Monade hiéroglyphique : Michel Leiris.

Revue de la Presse : P. Eluard et B. Péret.

### ILLUSTRATIONS :

Arp, le Cadavre exquis, Giorgio de Chirico,  
Max Ernst, André Masson, Picasso, Man Ray,  
Yves Tanguy, Jacques Vaché, etc.

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1. Artist unknown. Cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Nos 9-10, October 1927, photo montage.

provides insight into the idiosyncratic reactions and psychological depth the Surrealists sought to evoke with their disjointed images. Underlying Breton's description in *Surrealism and Painting* is the assumption that vision operates according to a chain of mental associations or analogies, many of which are loaded with affect (such as "love" and "hate"). Thus, as I look at the table before me, I see not only the table qua table, but I associate with it every table I have ever seen, remembered (and in the process reshaped), or imagined. The ultimate aim of Surrealist practice, then, is to become open to fresh chains of associations, new amalgamations of images. For the Surrealists, to recognize is to create the world anew. As we will see, this view of vision and cognition is quite close to Freud's.

Two Corpse drawings in the *RS* issue are situated directly within an excerpt of Sigmund Freud's essay "The Question of Lay Analysis," translated by the analyst Marie Bonaparte, soon to appear that year in its entirety under the *Nouvelle Revue Française* imprint in French.<sup>18</sup> Like Freud's own shift from theorizing the individual to the collective during the 1920s and '30s, the first wave of French Surrealists revised the psychoanalytic process as a group activity, whereas the object of Freud's dream interpretation at the turn of the century (1900) was the individual producer of the dream, the analysand. Thus, from a Freudian standpoint, the Surrealists realize at least two objectives with their ludic activities: the pleasure that comes from "diversion above all" ["avant tout le divertissement"] as Breton put it, that is, the pleasure principle; and a path or "royal road" back to the unconscious, to use Freud's terminology, whence the more-than-reality issues, according to the Surrealists.

In his interpretation of dreams, Freud observed that the metamorphosis of the dream from the moment of its conception, full of latent content and affect, all the way to its verbal or written expression (the "manifest dream"), consists in a complex process which he calls "dream work," that is, "the whole sum of transforming processes which have converted the dream-thoughts into the manifest dream" and the "manifest dream" is "often entirely absurd and confused . . . it confronts our mental life as something alien, for whose origin one cannot in any way account."<sup>19</sup> The task of the psychoanalyst (and,

by extension, the player), thus, is the reconstitution of the original dream.

*The Question of Lay Analysis* was written by Freud in 1926 in response to criminal proceedings brought against a non-medical member of the Vienna psychoanalytic circle for conducting analyses without a medical degree. Freud's object in the essay is to vigorously defend the method of psychoanalysis in general, but more specifically, to defend its practice by non-physicians who have been trained in one of several burgeoning European psychoanalytic institutes. The piece is striking in the context of Freud's oeuvre for its unusual use of a playful, dialogic structure, in which Freud lays out his argument in favor of lay analysts through supposed "conversations with an 'impartial person.'"<sup>20</sup>

The importance of the inclusion of this particular essay in *RS* is its open, exploratory tone. From the very first paragraph, Freud warns off static, apodictic efforts at theory and interpretation:

I shall expound it [psychoanalytic theory] to you dogmatically, as though it were a complete theoretical structure. But do not suppose that it came into being as such a structure, like a philosophical system . . . Nor, of course, can I guarantee to you that the form in which it is expressed today will remain the final one. Science, as you know, is not a revelation; long after its beginnings it still lacks the attributes of definiteness, immutability and infallibility for which human thought so deeply longs.<sup>21</sup>

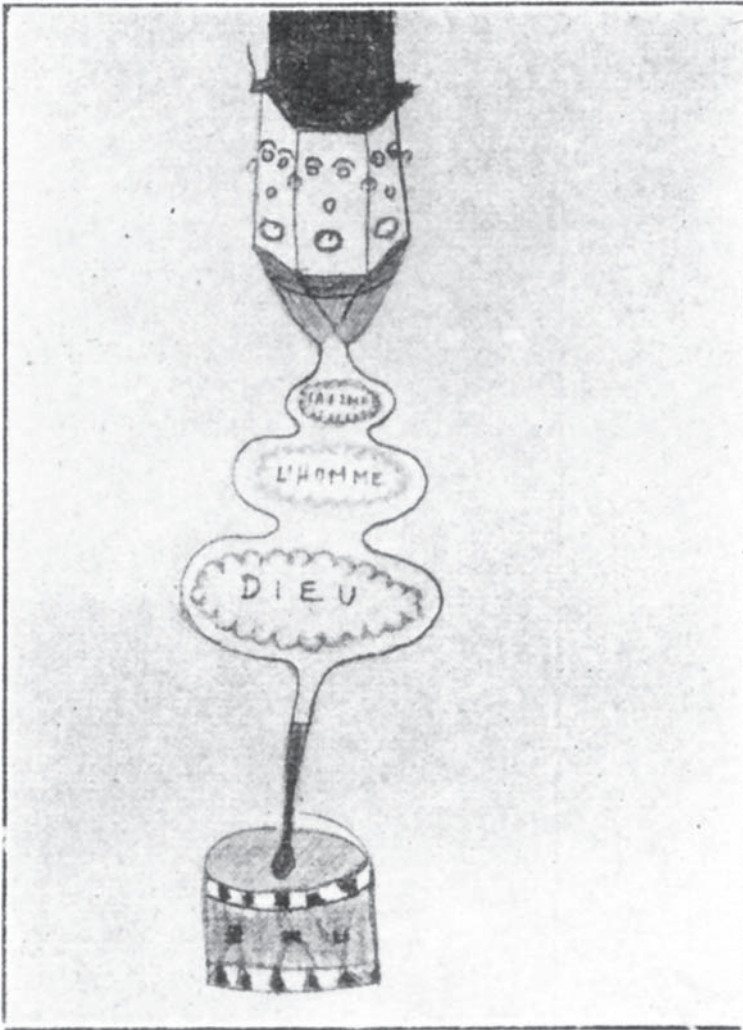
The publication of an excerpt from *Lay Analysis* in *RS* reflects an ongoing interest and integration of Freudian thinking into Surrealist practice, which would become complicated by the Surrealists' increasing politicization during the 1920s and subsequent fragmentation.<sup>22</sup> By the 1927 issue of *RS* in which the excerpt appears, Breton's fascination with Freud was more than a decade old. Even as he moved away from medicine in 1919, Breton remained intrigued with Freud's writings. Breton met Freud in Vienna in 1921, in fact, but the encounter was reportedly somewhat stilted and insubstantial.<sup>23</sup>

The excerpt of *Lay Analysis* translated by Bonaparte in the Octo-

ber 1927 *RS* begins with the essay's second chapter, in which Freud addresses the problem of fixing or freezing a dynamic, active theory into printed matter. The problem of reification was (and is) a central preoccupation for the Surrealists as well; Freud and the Surrealists shared a similar vocabulary to describe their respective projects in terms of energy flow, dynamism, and presence. *Lay Analysis* sets out to convince the "impartial" interlocutor that one need not have medical training in order to practice psychoanalysis: on the contrary, Freud asserts, an education in the history of civilization and mythology would be most preferable. More than simply an apologia, though, the two chapters included in *RS* serve as a cogent summary of the general theory of psychoanalysis. Freud's essay lays out a description of the "mental apparatus" that is at once supple and rigorous, repeating the basic ludic model of freedom within sharply delimited boundaries.

Freud's imaginary conversation in *Lay Analysis* allows him to highlight his interest in the *spatial* (as opposed to material) aspect of the mental apparatus. That is, Freud here is less concerned with what the mind is composed of than he is in the succession of mental functions that result in thoughts, feelings, consciousness. He resorts to a number of analogies to describe the relation between the id and ego. "In psychology we can only describe things by the help of analogies. There is nothing particular in this; it is the case elsewhere as well. But we have constantly to keep changing these analogies, for none of them lasts long enough."<sup>24</sup> Freud's statement echoes—and provides crucial theoretical backing—to the Surrealists' reliance on analogy for their word and image games. In describing later Surrealist games, such as the One in the Other (discussed later in this essay), Breton provides a lengthy theoretical gloss before he presents the game's results. In the case of the Exquisite Corpses in the 1927 edition of *RS*, however—again, the first published, the games are not introduced at all beyond a generic title ("le cadavre exquis")—and the excerpt of the "Lay Analysis" essay that appears with them. Still, the closer we scan that particular portion of *Lay Analysis*, the more illuminating the Corpses embedded in its text become.

The first Exquisite Corpse image in "Lay Analysis" contains a



2. Artists unknown. Exquisite Corpse illustration from "Lay Analysis" article. *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Nos 9–10, October 1927, p. 28, drawing on paper.

trinity of faces set at angles to one another, connected at the “neck” with three bubbles in increasing size, reading “woman,” “man,” and “God” [*femme, homme, Dieu*].

The lowest bubble, containing the word “God,” melds into a drumstick balancing vertically on a drum, which serves as the bottom-most portion (or “legs”) of the drawing. The most important feature of the drawing is the way that its wit depends on wordplay (as opposed to visual play): the three faces are arranged in facets, thus playing on the similarity between “face” (most familiar to the French ear as “face à” meaning “facing someone or something”) and “facets” (“*facettes*”). We might draw any number of correspondences between the content of the words and image on the page, but it is clear that these early drawn ECs operate primarily on a referential, discursive level, rather than operating purely in a visual or visual-sensual register.<sup>25</sup> The “play” of the early ECs turns on the polyvalence of words, on colloquial phrases and double meanings (e.g., “face à” and “*facettes*”). The “marvelous” aspect of this Exquisite Corpse is located in the association we strain to make between the three “*facettes*” of the head and the woman/man/God trinity of the body. If the original players drew according to the “rules” of the Exquisite Corpse, the head and body authors wouldn’t have seen the other’s drawing before composing his or her own, and thus the appearance of a trinity in both provides a fortuitous relation, urging the viewer of the Exquisite Corpse to try to establish a correspondence between the two, just as we do now.

Yet the “feet” of the Exquisite Corpse drawing, the drum, defies our attempts at synthesis. In the section of “Lay Analysis” that surrounds the image, Freud attributes the attempt at synthesis to an ego function: “The ego is an organization characterized by a very remarkable trend toward unification, towards synthesis.”<sup>26</sup> The id, on the other hand, “is, as we might say ‘all to pieces’; its different urges pursue their own purposes independently and regardless of one another” (196).<sup>27</sup> In many ways, Freud’s words here capture the very spirit of the Exquisite Corpse, a game predicated on the constant *va et vient* of marvelous associations and perplexing disjunctions.

The next Corpse drawing to appear in the text of “Lay Analysis” is once again vertically oriented, once again a human-like figure, and

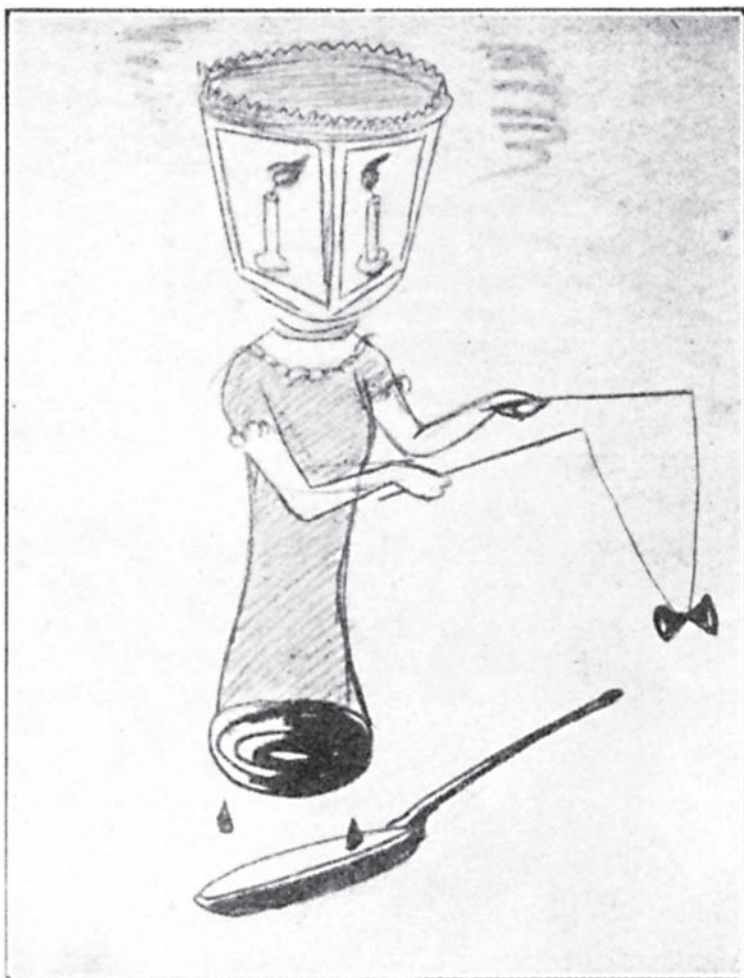


echoes the general outline of the Corpse drawing two pages before. The “head” is a lantern with a kind of jagged top or crown, attached to a woman’s body in a conventional dress (complete with ruffle at the collar and sleeves) and a torso that ends abruptly, with rings like a crosscut log or the bottom of a tin can. The dark, ringed area drips two drops into a frying pan suspended in mid-air below the figure, and the figure’s arms hold out a marionette with a child’s spinning toy attached to the strings. Placed within the third chapter of Freud’s essay, the drawing provokes a marvelous effect in the way it mirrors the accompanying text.

Here Freud reviews the instincts and basic components of human mental life using a rhetorical structure that echoes the starting lines of an Exquisite Corpse drawing. This section of the essay is built from the starting point of a brief aphorism by Friedrich von Schiller—“Hunger and love [are what moves the world],” just as each Corpse player begins with two lines extended from the previous section of the drawing at the fold.<sup>28</sup> The instincts (Schiller’s “hunger and love”) drive all human activity, Freud writes, and they seek satisfaction. “Satisfaction—that is, the establishment of situations in which bodily needs can be extinguished. A lowering of the tension of need is felt by our organ of consciousness as pleasurable; an increase of it is soon felt as unpleasurable.”<sup>29</sup> As if actually illustrating Freud’s point, the Exquisite Corpse drawing portrays synecdochal representations of female (dress) and the spinning toy (that “she” controls and presumably takes pleasure in). The bottom third could represent hunger (the frying pan and the drops). In other words: love and hunger, desire and instinct.<sup>30</sup>

The accent in games such as the Exquisite Corpse is on their status as marvelous *events*, on the “moment of creation” and the “thinking in common”—thus we might assume that their publication is residual in comparison to their parturition. But there is a further complication: the Surrealists necessarily published only a selection of their game results compared with the number of games they played over forty years.<sup>31</sup> This raises the question of the limitations of an accurate historical overview of Surrealist ludic practice, since the textual effects of the published and archived games are all that remain for us to examine now. Like Freud and the Surrealists, we too are faced with





3. Artists unknown. Second Exquisite Corpse illustration from "Lay Analysis" article (frying pan). *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Nos 9–10, October 1927, p. 29, drawing on paper.

the inevitable problem of reification. Does the “marvelous” occur at the moment of the Exquisite Corpse’s creation, or in our reaction as we view it in the context of Freud’s essay? For our purposes, the continued relevance of the Exquisite Corpse must surely be located in the latter.

The Surrealists themselves would go on after World War II to address the problem of fixing a transformational, collective, and supposedly spontaneous activity in printed image and text in a somewhat paradoxical way—that is, by couching their games in even more words as they began to theorize about them more explicitly. At the same time, the Surrealists continued to experiment with the chain (analogical) game form, thus shedding even greater light on the nature and aims of the Surrealist Exquisite Corpse.

### Postwar Surrealism and the Evolution of the “Chain” Game

The Surrealists returned with intense vigor to the idea of games in the wake of their postwar Paris reformulation. As previously mentioned, Breton and the post–World War II Surrealist generation were inspired in their renewed attention to ludic practice by the French publication in the early 1950s of Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* (1951, Gallimard).<sup>32</sup> Unlike the drawn Corpses just discussed, the 1950s Surrealist games tend to be even more complex and extensively glossed from the outset. When the game called the One in the Other first appeared in *Médium* (no. 2, February 1954), for example, it was preceded by several pages of explication; an entire section of the following issue (no. 3, May 1954) was dedicated to further instances of—and responses to—the game. In these discussions, Freud is still a major touchstone. In the 1950s the Parisian Surrealist group surrounding Breton drew especially from Freud’s *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (first published 1905, French trans. 1930) to develop new game methodologies. Consistent with their view in the 1920s, it is the process of Freudian interpretation (this “reading backward” to the unconscious) by which the Surrealists were perhaps most influenced, as Emmanuel Garrigues has cogently argued.<sup>33</sup>

In many ways, *Jokes* is a curious piece in Freud’s oeuvre. Reportedly written in response to Wilhelm Fleiss’s complaint about the number of jokes that appeared in the recounted dreams of *Die*

*Traumdeutung* [*Interpretation of Dreams*] (1899), the essay proceeds from the premise that humor should take its place alongside dreams and slips of the tongue as revelatory of the unconscious. Freud also explains at the opening of the essay that the German philosopher Theodor Lipps was instrumental in piquing his interest in the subject of humor, specifically by way of Lipps's *Komik und Humor* (1898). *Jokes* first appeared in 1905, the same year that the Dora case and *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* [*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*] were published. Freud worked on the *Jokes* book and *Three Essays* simultaneously.<sup>34</sup> There is some indication that Freud felt less than satisfied with the ideas in *Jokes*, but he returned to the topic in 1927, when he published a much shorter essay entitled *Humor*.<sup>35</sup>

From the very outset, Freud characterizes the operations of wit as “playful” (7). Freud’s use of the term “play” and “playful” here refer specifically to an attitude of lightness or distance that the speaker takes from her utterance. This basic association between play and jokes is one that Freud takes from a number of late-nineteenth-century German thinkers, several of whom he specifically cites at the beginning of the essay (7). But Freud quickly moves away from an interest in wit as a conscious process of “playful judgment,” as his predecessors termed it, to his main preoccupation: close, sustained linguistic analysis of jokes, in which he reveals the unconscious underpinnings of such joking “play.”

Freud makes a considerable effort to narrow his field of vision, to let the reader know what he is *not* attempting to discuss. Freud is not interested in the comic, or even in a global definition of humor as such. In justification of a book-length work exclusively devoted to the mechanics of jokes, Freud asserts, “I can appeal to the fact that there is an intimate connection between all mental happenings,” and he also points specifically to the social nature of jokes: “we may also bear in mind the peculiar and even fascinating charm exercised by jokes in our society. A new joke acts almost like an event of universal interest; it is passed from one person to another like the news of the latest victory” (13). As we will see, it is the socially dynamic nature of Freud’s theorization of jokes that will prove particularly important to the Surrealists.

In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud links dream interpretation to the pleasure that one derives from jokes (and, by association, word games). The pleasure of the joke or *mot d'esprit*, Freud claims, results from the release of psychic energy or pressure normally exerted to inhibit unconscious impulses: "we shall not be relying too much on speculation if we assert that both for erecting and maintaining a psychical inhibition some 'psychical' expenditure is required . . . it is therefore plausible to suppose that *this yield of pleasure* [from jokes] *corresponds to the psychical pleasure that is saved*."<sup>36</sup> Thus, circumventing repressive mechanisms accesses the unconscious and saves the psychic effort involved in repression.

A crucial passage in Freud's exposition of the psychoanalytic process in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* provides the foundation for a method of Surrealist reading to be presented in this later example of Surrealist game praxis. Freud writes of "the path that leads from thoughts to perceptual images, or, to use the terminology of the still unknown topography of the mental apparatus (which is not to be taken anatomically), from the region of thought-structures to that of sensory perceptions." "On this path," he continues, "which is in the reverse direction to that taken by the course of development of mental complications, the dream-thoughts are given a pictorial character; and eventually a plastic situation is arrived at which is the core of the manifest 'dream-picture.'"<sup>37</sup>

I wish to underscore here the transformative process Freud describes in the movement from "thought structures" to the "dream picture" and in its reconstruction in the analysis. When the actual "dream-work" takes place, the thought is either condensed or displaced, or is eventually transformed into active expression. Condensation has "a starting point . . . provided by any common elements that may be presented in the dream-thoughts, whether by chance or from the nature of their content."<sup>38</sup> These common elements, these nodes of compression, Freud notes, show "a preference for the use of words the sound of which expresses different meanings."<sup>39</sup> In general, these "points" of condensation enter the conscious mind as "representatives" of the latent dream content and, as Freud points out, "must quite generally be described as *overdetermined*."<sup>40</sup>

The notion that these points of condensation exist, these “key” words, plays a capital role in Surrealist poetics. We should keep in mind that during their evening sessions, these activities included games along with other collective activities, including séances, somnambulistic dream narration, and so on.<sup>41</sup> Surrealist game players *invoked* the marvelous; the marvelous cannot be fabricated or constructed. It is not made, but rather *uncovered*, just like Freud’s unconscious.

In Surrealist activity, then, the primary means for accessing the marvelous is through complete chance within the parameters set by an established system, be it automatic writing, the séance, the game, language, or the edges of a canvas. The purposefully regular, methodical nature of the playing (called “systematic” by the Surrealists) enables the richness of material to emerge in the later games. In a description of the marvelous in *La Clé des champs* [*Free Rein*] (1950), Breton insists that “lucidity is the great enemy of revelation.”<sup>42</sup> Breton considers the marvelous to be a sudden discovery or appearance of the surreality normally locked in the unconscious; it is not religious, but connected rather to the magic of discovery in childhood, the fortuitous revelation. The marvelous is a phenomenon of the here and now, a privileged and ephemeral human experience of the absolute present.

In this spirit, the players abandoned themselves to their imaginations, in which “the only source of eternal communication” resided.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it is important to remember that Breton does not deny the mechanisms of symbolism, nor even does he attempt to assert that we only engender artificial or erroneous liaisons through signification. The force of Surrealism, rather, is to retrieve more profound attachments, because, as Breton asserts, “symbolism won’t survive except in the measure whereby, breaking with the mediocrity of such calculations, it reaches the law of abandon.”<sup>44</sup> Once again we see that Surrealist game playing closely resembles the process of free association in psychoanalysis.

The Surrealists’ use of Freud is ultimately an effort to access and represent this “plastic situation” of the dream through its literary, artistic, and ludic activities. In lieu of creating entirely new images or new symbolic links, the Surrealists sought images that captured

both the reconstitution of an originary relation between image and affect, as well as its transformation to the level of symbolization.<sup>45</sup> In order to better ascertain the nature of this process, we must examine the One in the Other, which I argue can be understood as a poetic transformation of the Exquisite Corpse. The One in the Other distinguishes itself on a number of levels, only some of which square with the original declarations of Surrealist game practice: a player is charged with leaving the room and with identifying oneself with an object (an umbrella, for example). The rest of the players stay in the room, equally charged with linking the player who left with an object (a butterfly, let us say). Upon the return of the player who left, she must transform herself over the course of a monologue (between two and five minutes in length) from the object given by the group into the object she had chosen for herself *without ever naming it*, so that the group can name it (in our example, then, the player would begin with the phrase, “I am a butterfly,” and would finish with an allusion to an umbrella so that the group would know to what object she had returned. It demands a high level of skill on the part of the player from which its “decalcomania” (Breton’s own description of the process) then moves from one object to another. In this sense, the game is concentrated directly on the moment of poetic creation. Remarkable, too, is the fact that in Breton’s view, the game was a complete success: “during some 300 games . . . we never encountered a single failure.”<sup>46</sup> Breton seems to imply that the perfect success rate is due to a kind of divination, or as he puts it, “a return to the source of ritual” (57). Yet for Breton, the Surrealist version of the marvelous or sacred (to use his 1950s terminology) comes from *within* a collective human group, never from without—and certainly not from above.

Among the instances published in *Médium* is the following: “I am a **chestnut** born at the end of a branch, which, by its nature, is generally related to fire but, this time, is related to water. In good weather I displace myself rapidly into the air where I have an ephemeral existence (Wolfgang Paalen)/(**soap bubble**)”<sup>47</sup> Here there is a distinct figural transformation from one object to another. We can trace the allusive associations from the chestnut to the soap bubble: chestnuts are often roasted, which gives us the association of

fire, which is one of the four elements and is connected in this case with its opposite, water. The water serves to evaporate the object in air, which is transformed into another evaporating material, a soap bubble. The transformation of the image, thus, is produced through and across the association between fire and water, the juxtaposition of two opposites.

One can see very clearly here the evolved function of the Surrealist game: the One in the Other is at once a field for cultivating poetic images, a place to refine literary metaphors, and a rich coffer of examples of free association. The theorization surrounding the game focuses on the free analogy between poetic images (the “spontaneous image transfer” [“*décalcomanie spontanée*”]) and the texture of plasticity, the elaboration of the poetic *forms* of Surrealism. With the One in the Other and games like it, the Surrealists developed a system—that is to say, a frame—and inside these frames resides the space of plasticity. But it is necessary to recall the objective of the Surrealist “finds” (“*trouvailles*”): as Breton specifies, “it’s from object to object that a relationship establishes itself in all its primitivity by taking all of its demonstrative value.”<sup>48</sup> Once again we discern one of the great (if paradoxical) tropes of modernism: the authentic involves a return to the primitive, the origin of things, to the foundation of the spirit. Exactly as we saw in *Exquisite Corpse*, the One in the Other operates as a *transformational medium*, and the visual/poetic object is literally created in the interstice between minds. Both are chain games in which coherence is suggested by verbal or visual syntax, but undermined by the strange dissonance of the analogy (a lantern stands in for a person’s head in the *Exquisite Corpse*, a chestnut becomes a soap bubble in the One in the Other). The whole picture or word chain does make a strange kind of sense, but only as it unfolds.

The exercise in poetic creation seen in the One in the Other—that is, the metonymic encapsulated in the metaphoric (and in the previous instance, with a truly astounding metaphoric knot transforming “fire” to its exact opposite, “water”, in the middle)—can be found throughout Surrealist poetry and prose. But it likewise offers us a provocative model for reading: by retracing the associative path developed in playing the One in the Other, the Surrealists provide themselves (and us) with a framework for literary invention, a

privileged view into the moment of Surrealist poetic creation, and, at the same time, a method for the process of reading itself.

As evidenced by the development of psychoanalytic ideas from the early instances of Exquisite Corpse to the complex, extensively theorized word-knots of the One in the Other, the Surrealists clearly became better players and theorists of their games by refining their practice of generating and interpreting plastic images. The reintegration of plastic images from the unconscious and their evocation of the marvelous offer us a (re)vision of Surrealism as lived practice, as a unity of strangeness, and as a long, backward road.

In closing, a final example of the One in the Other from *Medium* (no. 3, 1954), which renders the connection between the Exquisite Corpse and the One in the Other quite explicit: “*I am an **egg holder** with sockets separated by folds and all different from one another. I require, for my fabrication, a collective labor, each artist digging his own socket in total ignorance of the exact nature of the work made by the person before. My quality proves the violence of collisions which produce themselves between my sockets. I announce that I will swallow new eggs.* (Jean Schuster)/(‘**Exquisite Corpse**’).”<sup>49</sup> The passage from egg carton to “new eggs” (Corpse drawings and sentences) succinctly describes the object both of the Exquisite Corpse and of the present essay: I would exhort us to read these tiny pencil drawings, these strange chain games, as *trouvailles*, or fortuitously found objects. Breton wrote in 1937 that the “*trouvaille*, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it . . . It alone can enlarge the universe, causing it to relinquish some of its opacity.”<sup>50</sup> By reconnecting early examples of the Exquisite Corpse to their original print context as well as to another Surrealist game, we can more clearly discern the importance of ludic practice to Surrealism—and the consistent importance of Freud to that practice.

## Notes

“S’il est, dans le surréalisme, une forme d’activité dont la persistance a eu le don d’exciter la hargne des imbéciles, c’est bien l’activité de jeu dont on retrouve trace à travers la plupart de nos publications de ces trente-six dernières années.” Breton, *L’Un dans l’autre*, 17.



1. See Sebbag, *En Jeux surréalistes*; Adamowicz, *Surrealists Collage in Text and Image*; Garrigues, *Archives du surréalisme*.
2. *Vases communicants* [*Communicating Vessels*], 1932, is the title of a book by André Breton in which he elaborates his theory of desiring beings as “communicating vessels,” mutually filling and refilling one another, with no one existing independently of the other.
3. The separation between play and game concepts is something quite particular to English among western languages. The French “jeu” and the German “spiel,” for example, have much more fluid vernacular definitions.
4. Huizinga’s influential treatise on human as game player, *Homo Ludens*, first appeared in German in 1938, and remains a key text in discussions of the ludic (game and play) at all levels of culture. Following the publication of Huizinga’s works in French by Gallimard in 1951, Breton argued for a return to Huizinga’s precepts as a basis for understanding the critical importance of game and play to human life (Garrigues, *Archives du surréalisme*, 218).
5. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 1.
6. My emphasis. “Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieure de certaines formes d’associations négligées jusqu’à lui, à la toute-puissance du rêve, au jeu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous les autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie.” Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, 36.
7. Rosemont, *Surrealist Women*, 87.
8. “[D]’emblée elle [la connaissance découverte du jeu] se montrera propre à reserrer les liens qui nous unissaient, favorisant la prise de conscience de nos désirs en ce qu’ils pouvaient avoir de commun.” Breton, *L’Un dans l’autre*, 17.
9. André Breton and Phillipe Soupault’s book of automatic writing, *Champs magnétiques* [*Magnetic Fields*] (1920), is another early example of this collective impulse. The fundamentally close relationship between automatic writing practices and Surrealist games is reflected in the 1927 issue of the Surrealist journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* (RS), but the connection had already been made in the early twenties, according to Elza Adamowicz. Both automatic writing and Surrealist games are made in a “passive-receptive” state, providing the necessary conditions for “psychic automatism” (Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 5). For more on automatic writing, compare also Carrouges, Caws, Balakian, Finkelstein.
10. Michel Carrouges has described the overall synthetic impulse of the Surrealists as a “dialectical humanism.” Carrouges, Baugh, and other Surrealist scholars have enumerated in detail the conceptual shifts that the Surrealist “dialectic” underwent over the years (more or less Marxist, Hegelian, etc.). For the purposes of the present discussion, which focuses primarily on the late 1920s and mid-1950s, I take the Surrealist effort to reconcile antinomies in its broadest sense (see Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, 72).

11. Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, 179.
12. Garrigues, *Archives du surréalisme*, 218.
13. "Objective chance": "Objective chance is the whole of those phenomena which manifest the invasion of the daily life by the marvelous. Through them, in fact, it becomes clear that man walks in broad daylight in the midst of a network of occult forces that he need only search out and tap" (Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, 180).
14. The "marvelous": a moment of illumination, of sublime paradox in everyday life that hints at a set of hidden, deeper meanings; in Louis Aragon's words, "the marvelous is the contradiction that appears in the real" ("le merveilleux, c'est la contradiction qui apparaît dans le réel") (as quoted in Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object*, 15). For more on the relationship between Surrealism and the occult, see Nadia Choucha's *Surrealism and the Occult* and Celia Rabinovitch's *Surrealism and the Sacred*.
15. Picon, *Surrealists and Surrealism: 1919–1939*, 71.
16. In *The Surrealist Look*, Mary Ann Caws describes the importance of the Exquisite Corpse thus: "As a proof of the value of automatism and chance, it had to be taken seriously . . . the final result is usually felt to be, from its surprising aspect, more than the product that those players would have arrived at otherwise, separately, or together in a conscious collaboration" (228).
17. Breton, *Surréalisme et la peinture*, 16.
18. Marie Bonaparte was a great-grandniece of Napoleon I of France. Bonaparte first went to Sigmund Freud for treatment, and later became an accomplished analyst in her own right and an important interlocutor of Freud. She founded the Société Psychanalytique de Paris (French Institute of Psychoanalysis) in 1915, and it was she who paid Nazi authorities, enabling Freud to flee the Reich. It was also to Marie Bonaparte that Sigmund Freud famously wrote, "The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'" Bonaparte practiced as a psychoanalyst until her death in 1962.
19. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 198–199.
20. The subtitle of the essay in English.
21. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 191. "Je vais vous l'exposer dogmatiquement, comme si elle était déjà un système achevé. Mais n'allez pas croire qu'elle soit née ainsi tout équipée, comme il advient aux systèmes philosophiques ( . . . ) Je ne puis, bien entendu, vous affirmer que l'expression formelle de la doctrine a l'heure qu'il est en demeurera définitive. Vous le savez, la science n'est pas une révélation, il lui manque, longtemps encore après ses débuts, la certitude, l'immuabilité, l'infailibilité, dont la pensée humaine est si avide." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 25.
22. As has been widely noted, one of Freud's important precursors, Pierre Ja-

net, had as much or more influence as Freud on Surrealist theories of the mind, whereas the writings of C. G. Jung seem to have had virtually no impact at all; see S. Dresden, *Psychoanalysis and Surrealism*.

23. In Marie Bonaparte's journals, she records Freud's comments on the Surrealists: "They send me all of their productions. They think I approve what they write. But it isn't art" (Goleman, *Freud's Mind: New Details Revealed in Documents*, 3).

24. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 195. "En psychologie, nous ne pouvons décrire qu'à l'aide de comparaisons. Ce n'est pas spécial à la psychologie, il en est ainsi ailleurs. Mais nous devons sans cesse changer de comparaisons: aucune ne nous suffit longtemps." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 27.

25. The *Lay Analysis* essay is immediately preceded by five word E.C.s, which also rely heavily on colloquialisms and double meanings (24).

26. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 196. "Le 'moi' est une organisation qui se distingue par une remarquable tendance à l'unité, à la synthèse." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 28).

27. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*. "Ce caractère manqué au 'soi', celui-ci est, pour ainsi dire, incohérent, décousu, chacune de ses aspirations y poursuit son but propre sans égard aux autres." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 28.

28. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 200. "Vous vous souvenez des paroles de notre philosophe: la faim et l'amour." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 29.

29. Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 200. "La satisfaction, c'est-à-dire que se produisent des situations dans lesquelles les besoins corporelles puissent s'éteindre." Freud, *La Question de l'analyse*, 30.

30. The distinction must be noted between the moment of the Exquisite Corpse's (ostensibly spontaneous) creation, and the subsequent placement of the drawing in a "performative" mode (displayed in a Surrealist journal).

31. To date (and to my knowledge), no exhaustive compilation of archived and/or published Surrealist games has been made. Emmanuel Garrigues edited and annotated an indispensable volume of Surrealist games in French for the *Archives du surréalisme* series (published by the NRF imprint of Gallimard) in 1995, but it does not contain any drawn Corpses. In 2004, Editions Jean-Michel Place published a new account of Surrealist games by Georges Sebbag. The most widely known E.C.s are those published in the various Surrealist journals, including *RS*, *Variétés* (a Belgian journal), and *Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. The most insightful book-length study on Surrealist E.C.s in English is certainly Elza Adamowicz's *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, 1998.

32. The translation of Huizinga into French was followed shortly thereafter by former Surrealist Roger Caillois's influential critique of Huizinga, *Les jeux et les hommes* [*Man, Play and Games*], 1958). For an account of the relationship between Caillois and the Surrealists (including its breakdown), see *The Edge of*

*Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (2003), especially 84–86.

33. Garrigues, *Archives du surréalisme*, 15.

34. “Ernst Jones tells us that Freud kept the two manuscripts on adjoining tables and added to one or another according to his mood” (Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, xxviii).

35. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, xxix.

36. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 145.

37. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 201.

38. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 202.

39. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 202.

40. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 202.

41. Recording of dreams was done by virtually every “member” (fifty or so) of the movement. They even developed a system of classification for their dreams: the natural dream, the prophetic, the self-induced, etc. The effort was to bring the images of dreams into waking life (see Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, 126–127).

42. “La lucidité est le grand ennemi de la révélation.” Breton, *La Clé des champs*, 10.

43. “La seule source de communication éternelle entre les hommes.” Breton, *La Clé des champs*, 12.

44. “Le symbolisme ne se survit que dans la mesure où, brisant avec la médiocrité de tels calculs, il lui est arrivé à la loi de l’abandon.” Breton, *La Clé des champs*, 12.45. “The pleasure of transgression is associated with the social function of games, the pleasure of adhering to rules (grammatical and syntactical) while breaking the laws (of association and logic)” (Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 57). Adamowicz also references critical work on combining syntactic coherence and semantic incoherence in the poetry of Breton and Péret: “cf. Gerald Mead, ‘A syntactic model in Surrealist Style,’ *Dada/Surrealism* 2 (1972), 33–37, and Richard Stamelman, ‘The Relational Structure of Surrealist Poetry,’ *Dada/Surrealism* 6 (1976), 59–78.” Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 203.

46. “Durant les quelques trois cent tours . . . nous n’avons pas rencontré un seul échec.” Breton, *L’Un dans l’autre*, 19.

47. “Je suis une châtaigne naissant à l’extrémité d’une branche qui, de par [sic] sa nature, est généralement en rapport avec le feu mais qui, cette fois, est en rapport avec l’eau. Par beau temps je me déplace avec rapidité dans l’air où j’ai une existence éphémère—Wolfgang Paalen (bulle de savon).” Breton, *L’Un dans l’autre*, 20.

48. “C’est d’objet à objet que la relation s’établissent en toute primitivité en prenant toute sa valeur démonstrative.” Breton, *L’Un dans l’autre*, 19.

49. “Je suis un oeufrier aux alvéoles séparés par des plis et tous différents les

uns des autres. J'exige, pour ma fabrication, une main-d'oeuvre collective, chaque artisan creusant un seul alvéole en toute ignorance de la nature exacte du travail effectué par son devancier. Ma qualité s'éprouve à la violence des collisions qui se produisent entre mes alvéoles. J'annonce que je gèberai les oeufs nouveaux ('le cadavre exquis')." Breton, *Nouveaux elements du dictionnaire unitaire* "L'un dans l'autre," 61.

50. Breton, *Amour fou*, 14-15.

## “This is Not a Drawing”

SUSAN LAXTON

# 2

In Enlightenment philosophy, play is any pursuit undertaken for its own sake. Thus when Immanuel Kant claimed play for aesthetics, attributing its pleasures to the “free play of the cognitive powers,” it was on the basis of play’s disinterest. Play would be neither conceptual nor sensuous; it would have no stake in intellectual or material worlds; it wouldn’t matter.<sup>1</sup>

How then to understand play as a mode of avant-garde engagement? Specifically, how could disinterested, ineffectual activities, forms that are bracketed from normal life, possibly meet the challenge to change life according to the avant-garde project that movements like Surrealism claimed as a goal? The answer lies at least partly in that phrase—“normal life”—and in the Surrealist aim to overthrow the rational norms that ruled perceptions of reality. In practices that ranged from aleatory wandering to modified parlor games to automatist rituals designed to elicit irrational manifestations, the Surrealists found in play an unrestricted medium for their critique of reality. The game of *cadavre exquis* stands as the most durable of all these ludic strategies, with a longevity that stretches well beyond the temporal borders of the Surrealist movement—a testament to the game’s accessibility and flexibility, certainly, but also to the game’s ultimate efficacy as a form of avant-garde intervention in the visual arts. Regardless of the specific historical moment of its practice, the

game produces a paradoxical result, structurally consistent yet historically, almost photographically, specific. Every *cadavre exquis* is not so much a drawing as a trace of a process, an index of the game.

This essay explores the specific terms by which this emphasis on process in the visual *cadavre exquis* operated as a contravention, the formal and material work done by the game, and its effectiveness as a vanguard strategy under the aegis of Surrealism. The structure and process of the game—its intersubjectivity, regulation, and guarantee of chance results—transgressed the fundamentals of modernist art practices as they were conceived in the first decades of the twentieth century: those notions of genius, originality, intention, development, and the romance of individual expression that had, up until this point, secured perceptions of autonomy for the visual arts.

For Peter Bürger, whose *Theory of the Avant Garde* remains the model for evaluations of the historical avant-garde, collage and montage were the paradigmatic methods through which Surrealism had attempted to restore art's critical engagement with social praxis.<sup>2</sup> As a gathering of parts emancipated from the whole, a montage never attains the closure in meaning of a conventional, syntactically bound utterance; indeed, its institutional resistance is located specifically in the frank disclosure of its own internal contradictions. According to this model, the *cadavre exquis*, whose beginning, middle and end—head/torso/feet—correspond to the subject/verb/object structure of the written version of the game, would fall into the category that Bürger opposes to montage: that of “the organic work of art,” which is “constructed according to the syntagmatic pattern; individual parts and the whole form a dialectical *unity*.”<sup>3</sup>

Montage is valued as an avant-garde practice specifically because its objects entail a mode of reception radically different from that of this unified object. In the organic work of art “anticipating the comprehension of the whole guides . . . the comprehension of the parts,” as, say, the *cadavre exquis*, in its verticality and its anthropomorphic iconography, raises the expectation that the image will represent a figure. Yet repeatedly the *cadavre exquis* frustrates that expectation, as it substitutes “monsters” “abstracted from the natural conditions of existence of all other objects” for that which was previously assumed as given: the unity of the human form.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, this resistance is

made through the content of the fragments, which technically obey syntax but resist it through iconography that becomes inappropriate in syntactic combination. The ludicrous appearance of the *cadavre* is received as such because its specific parts are set in perceptual and cognitive tension with the whole of the object and its meaning. The reception by the viewer forces a critique of conventional expectations; the *cadavre exquis* performs functionally as montage, even if it does not share its structure as linguistically conceived.

In the *cadavre exquis* image, the Surrealists have outlined an extremely qualified notion of the whole—one that simultaneously embraces and reveals difference—that asserts itself as an intervention at the same level of commitment as montage. Its unity, insofar as its heterogeneous fragments are pronounced against the armature of the human figure, runs counter to the concept of unity implied by the “organic” work of art—there is no essence, no center to the image, there are only parts set in a chain of part production. Nevertheless its structure does not negate the figure, but preserves it within the limits of the sheet and the game—the images advance their renovation of drawing from within the material support of the medium. And while the syntactic structure of the *cadavre exquis* is never destroyed in the game, syntax itself is revealed as dramatically ambiguous, as the break between fragments is inscribed at precisely the point of their cohesion: the kissing hinge of the fold.

### The Fold: Materiality and Index in the Pictorial Field

Already by 1923, as Jacques Baron has recollected, the recombinative operations of folding had been deployed by the Surrealists in the café game of pleating newspapers into amusing revisions of the headlines: “*L’Usine de liquéfaction prend le contrôle de tous les services fédéraux*,” for example.<sup>5</sup> The game revealed hidden meanings latent in the printed page, subversive variations of ready-made facts coaxed from the headlines through the successive couplings and suppressions of the refolded newsprint. Perhaps it forced a revelation about the structuring paradox of syntax, or disclosed the fragile threads by which meaning attaches to language, or manifested the potential links of anything with everything. At the very least the newspaper game brought the fold into the repertoire of formally subversive Sur-



realist strategies. As an operation commensurate with the “cut” of collage and montage as well as the formal occlusions of Max Ernst’s overpaintings of the early 1920s, its embrace served as the ultimate condition of possibility for the *cadavre exquis*. The fold *points*—not only to the dialectic structure of the game and to the juxtaposition effect it creates, but to the process of the game and its formal consequences: chance and its paradoxical repetition, sameness and difference, the mechanical, the manual, the material. The formal operations of the fold are key to the critical capacity of the visual version of the *cadavre exquis*.

Most obviously, the fold lines in *cadavre exquis* function as the break points of juxtaposition in the completed drawings, marking the difference between successive contributions much in the same way that spacing identifies collage as a construction. Yet the incongruities inscribed by cutting in other strategies of fragmentation are significantly altered in the mechanisms of folding. In collage and montage, where solid fields of image join edge to edge, the transition from one to the other is consistently abrupt along both sides of the divide—the distance between the adjacent elements is fully pronounced, and formally the fragments signify as unambivalent “difference.” The Surrealist enigma here lies in the “impossibility” of a context outside of the imagination that could bring together such disparate fragments. The effect of the opposition is that the elements could at any moment repel violently like polarized magnets. But in the *cadavre exquis*, the tension of juxtaposition is ameliorated by the way that drawing is regulated in the game, specifically by requiring each player to take up the contours of the image exactly where another player left off, effectively extending the previous contribution long enough to smooth the transition.

A particularly reduced example from 1927 [Fig. 4] illustrates the limits of drawing as a medium for complementary juxtaposition in the game. A single, monochromatic, closed line cleanly demarcates the body of an animal-like figure (the image is horizontal) from its ground; the simplicity of line depersonalizes the graphic marks to the point that it is entirely conceivable that one hand, rather than four, might have made the drawing.<sup>6</sup> What holds it together as a unified image is the smooth transition of line from one segment to another,

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

4. André Breton, Camille Goemans, Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguy, © ARS NY.  
*Exquisite Corpse*, 1927. Graphite pencil on folded paper, 15.7 x 20 centimeters.  
Photo: Jacques Faujour. CNAC/MNAN/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource NY; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. © 2006 Estate of Yves Tanguy/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

marked only by minor gaps and overdrawing as different players take up the line. Yet the drawing's peculiarity is still pronounced. It has what could be the head of a turtle, the torso of a jigsaw puzzle piece, a human foot and a party-hat tail. Separately the sections refer to an amphibian and a mammal, flanked by passages of utterly non-referential forms. The juxtaposition effect is achieved not through sheer formal difference, but through a more elusive incompatibility of form with meaning, like a syntactically correct sentence made nonsensical because of a conflict between its signifieds: "the disguised shrimp hardly enlightens double kisses"—where an internal inconsistency unravels the meaning of the statement.<sup>7</sup>

In this lean *cadavre exquis* the sense that the image should be regarded as something other than a drawing made in a traditional manner is marked only by the presence of the three transparent—yet pronounced and indelible—lines that rigidly cut across the freehand

sweep of the outlined figure. These fold-lines break the image down into sections and, signaling the nearly indiscernible formal differences between the elements, identify the drawing as a composite. Formally speaking, the fold functions as an edge, that distinctive category of line that belongs to neither and yet to both of the spaces it separates. The fold lines are independent from the image and yet essential to its Surrealism, its juxtaposition effect. At the fold, form meets content in the drawing and they cancel each other out.

At the same time, the fold remains the site of a yoking of disparity that is necessary to the Surrealist aesthetic. It is precisely at the fold line that the joining of independent elements is forced—the turtle becomes a jigsaw becomes the loin of a beast—and the graphic marks link to deliver the qualified gestalt that set the *cadavre exquis* apart from other operations deployed to produce sheer unlimited sprawl.<sup>8</sup> Yet the labile double function of the fold assures that the elements of the *cadavre exquis* don't exactly synthesize, either: they join and separate, couple and divide.<sup>9</sup> All of the tension and paradox necessary to the dynamics of juxtaposition are put in play by the fold, which strikes against the unity of the gestalt that it itself generates. Thus ambivalence works from *within the frame of the organic artwork*—in fact precedes, underlies and produces the work. This is because, like a guarantee of intervention, the paper is folded before the drawing begins.

If the traditional conception of drawing proceeds from the assumption that the graphic line is privileged over the blank field that it marks, then the notion of drawing-as-origin depends on suppressing the materiality of the blank page, the paper support that precedes the image.<sup>10</sup> In this hierarchical matter, the fold is indispensable to the *cadavre exquis* in its capacity to rupture the field of representation. For the folds “insist” on the presence of the paper; by pushing it forward in their wrinkled breaks they index its materiality, measure its thickness and its flexibility, break its invisible surface, and invade the projective field of pure idea, pure thought.<sup>11</sup> The creases are of the paper yet physically set apart from the paper, slight imperfect ridges that spoil the illusion of impartial ground. But this assertion of ground against figure is not simply a reversal of hierarchy—a

shift from the privileging of graphic signs to the establishment of material-as-foundation and origin. Rather it is an affirmation of support as violable, buckled onto itself: the fold simultaneously vaunts and reduces the ground. The ghosted grid it imposes is the “under-figure” of the *cadavre exquis*, pointing away from the figure that it structures toward a process—with all of the traits of action and tactility that that process implies—that preempts the illusion of unmediated conceptual expression that has traditionally linked drawing with originality. And because the process is traced to the same register break that actually produces the figure it works against—that is, it is an ambivalent process that internally fights the coherent image it is making—the hierarchy of figure over ground that is implied in conventional drawing is not so much reversed as made redundant: the course of the game as well as its temporal trace are recorded as prior to and indispensable for the object. The fold introduces an alternative line, one that reveals the dissembling nature of the graphic line—that makes a humbug out of the ideal drawing.<sup>12</sup>

The folds that crease the figure and the field of the *cadavre exquis* indicate a play of productive and destructive processes, and the ludic term can be used literally here because the fold is exactly the manipulation through which chance enters this particular instance of drawing—the element of chance being that which designates a game as such. The fold administers the unforeseen in the *cadavre exquis* by assuring the secrecy of each contribution. Attribution of meaning to the whole unfolded drawing will proceed purely on the basis of happenstance, as Breton insists when he introduces the chance-based exchange of the *cadavre exquis* as the paradigm for a revision of the cause-effect relay of communication in “Dialogue in 1928”: “Question? Answer. A simple labor of adequation that implies all the optimism of conversation. The thoughts of two interlocutors pursue themselves separately. The momentary rapport of these thoughts is imposed between them by coincidence as well as contradiction. Very comforting, all in all, because we like nothing more than to question or to respond, the ‘cadavre exquis’ is intended to execute some questions and responses whose dependence, carefully unforeseen, is also guaranteed.”<sup>13</sup>

The format of question and response, whether applied ornamen-

tally to independent strains of thought as in the “dialogue game” (where answers are coupled arbitrarily to questions, rather than responding to them dialectically), or activated through the folded links of the *cadavre exquis*, seems to identify an agenda for the Surrealist game as reaching beyond sheer shock and contention. This is not the Dada model for chance—drawing words at random from a bag to make poetry. Rather it seems to be a perturbed dialectic of the arbitrary, an exploration of the causal paths of chance as the defining parameters of surreality. So while the fold marks the point in the game where the drawings separate, keeping the other compositions hidden beyond the edge of the field, it in turn forces the players to acknowledge the presence of these others—to place their pencils on the tail-ends of the unknown. Only a few small marks indicate the existence of a hidden image: the minimum “cause” allowable to generate the “effect” of the next image fragment. Thus at the same time that the fold separates, it links—any shift in any one section of the structure results in a change in the ensuing parts. Like a graphic game of dominoes, the *cadavre exquis* is assembled from a chain of insignificant consonances that nevertheless construct a system of associations, causes and effects parallel to—but outside of—the parameters that are conceived to control meaning in corporeal space.

Through its exposure of the material grounds of art practice (it is the crease that trashes the drawing, renders it unsuitable for framing), its insertion of chance into the field of intention and mechanical repetition into the expressive process, along with its continuous performance as the sign of paradox (the join that breaks), the fold at the levels of both action and sign (its formal result) demonstrates that it is the key to the critical potential of the *cadavre exquis*. This becomes clear at once when we look at a series of *cadavre exquis* images produced in 1930–1931, when folding was eliminated from the game, and we see the drawings make a transition from by-product to end product. The shift seems to have happened gradually and inconsistently, and was subject to repeal later in the 1930s.

First, as if signaled by the consecration of Surrealist painting, a series of gouache examples on black ground emerge. In a *cadavre exquis* of January 16, 1929, the specificity of the dating alone seems to signal a transition—from the game valued as sheer process to its

outcome, an object which is in turn undergoing a shift from ephemera to art. Nevertheless, this drawing is folded—it traces the progress of the game—and its authorship remains largely anonymous, in the original spirit of the game.<sup>14</sup> While the overall painted style is consistently rough and clumsy, the registers show a distinct separation, with the celestial sky of the uppermost field ceding abruptly to an approximation of a corseted waist, which joins green and red cherries flanked by the word “*ventre*” to end in a particularly detached set of abstract legs, planted against a horizon punctuated by an erupting volcano.

The image is distinctive in its use of paint against the assertive black ground: the bright color of certain earlier examples is here raised to almost spectacular levels. In these images, the black ground competes for space with the figure, pitching the prismatic absence of all color against the vivid and opaque gouache. A degree of agency toward creating spatial tension within the frame is given to color, an independent distraction from the dynamism of sheer anomaly that dominated the earlier drawings, in which the choice of paper ground seemed arbitrary—part of the general surrender to chance.

By 1930 even this tension between figure and ground would be eliminated, replaced by a more insidious challenge to the visual shock of disparity. Early in the decade an extended revision of the rules of the game, instigated by Valentine Hugo, resulted in a large number of colorful and highly finished *cadavres exquis*, again on black ground, but this time drawn in colored pencils.<sup>15</sup> Unlike gouache, the soft transparency of lead soaks up the black field on which it is posed, producing a mark that is fused and reconciled with its ground. While the images are never monochromatic, the range and intensity of color is diluted by their common black base. Color, rather than performing as a sign for the abrupt transition from one contribution to another, here becomes a factor in reconciling differences, naturalizing the juxtapositions that have been drawn into the images and assisting the appearance of the *cadavre* as an organic whole. This unifying effect occurs in spite of the resistance posed by the iconographic content of the figures, which remains preposterous in combination—as, for example, in a faceless drawing of 1930

that incorporates a brick wall with booted legs and a vulva-like medallion that reads alternately as an opening and a flame.

But the decisive difference between the majority of the black-ground drawings and their predecessors, the shift that delivers the *cadavre exquis* to the sublimating imperatives of the work of art, is the elimination of the folds. The variation that Hugo worked up for the game stipulated not only a calculated selection of materials but the guarantee that that dramatic black field remained pristine. As a substitute for pleating the papers before the game, a series of faint marks were made at equal intervals in the margin of the sheet to indicate the stopping points of every contribution, and a blank sheet of paper was slid over the finished portions of the drawing to mask them from the other players. The secrecy of the successive drawings remained, the character of the image as intertextual and intersubjective was preserved, but the fold as the overt sign of that structure and process and the revelation of chance and materiality is gone.

The resulting images hold together as organic works of art in a manner so antithetical to the founding tenets of the *cadavre exquis*—to expose through play the sublimating conventions at work in art—that to actually call them *cadavre exquis* amounts to a betrayal of Surrealism itself. Rather, in these drawings it seems as though it is the *cadavre exquis* that has been revised “upward” according to the standards of autonomous art. A typical composite from 1931 [Fig. 6], by Valentine Hugo, André Breton, and Paul Éluard, demonstrates the extent of this return to the rationale of figure drawing. The image unambiguously signifies a female nude: a wheel-like head tops two high breasts that taper to a slim waist; the arms, remarkably human for a game-figure, are clasped behind the back. A fringed table-like skirt is centered over thighs that turn briefly equine before they disappear into mismatched but compatible high-topped shoes. Careful attention has been given to the modeling of the skin, to the consistency of the tabletop perspective of the woman’s fringed skirt, as well as to the proportions, volumes, and perspective of the figure as a whole, betraying a desire on the part of all of the players to make marks that fall well within the demands of “good drawing”: mimesis improved by moderation and harmony.

Most tellingly, though, those points at which the players handed

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5. Valentine Hugo, © ARS NY, Tristan Tzara, Greta Knutsen. *Exquisite Corpse*, 1929. Colored pencil on black paper. Photo: Philippe Migeat. CNAC/MNAN/  
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6. André Breton, Paul Éluard, Nusch Éluard, Valentine Hugo. *Exquisite Corpse*, 1931. Colored pencil on black paper, 32.5 x 25 centimeters. CNAC/MNAN/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource NY; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

off the drawing to their companions, so apparent in the earlier images, are not at all obvious in these examples. Shouldn't there be an indication within the figure—just below the breasts, somewhere around mid-thigh—of a break between the sections? All signs of the figure as a composite have been completely effaced: there is no jog in the flow of the line, no blunt shift in color or style to signal the rotation of draftsmen. In fact, all the points of juncture have been smoothed over, gently traced over in white pencil—the same white that was used to pick out highlights across the figure, falsifying a consistency in light between the separate registers. The turn to conventionality is iterated at the level of form: in the return of skill, in a naturalization of the invented image, in *pentimento*; every possible step has been taken to ameliorate the exaggerated spacing of the juxtaposition effect.

It is only through incongruous iconography that this demure nude approaches Surrealism, most notably in her wheel-like head and the two nails that tip her breasts: even the most polite iconography can render an improbable result in mis-combination, and this one does. But the incongruity of the fragments is not due to shifts between subjects and texts, that is, breaks that would foreground the differences between the players and their drawings, but to the creative imaginations of the individual players. The irrational yoking of human to horse is accomplished by Éluard's will alone; the wheel is mounted strangely on two breasts by Hugo, and it is Breton who places a table around the waist he has just finished shading. Absurdity is generated within the sections of the drawing, not between them. It is the result of an "automatism-effect" applied by the Surrealists playing the game—of certain assumptions on their part of what should constitute a Surrealist image—and not structural juxtaposition generated by the game itself. The point of register shift, once a paradoxical cleaving, is in these drawings all juncture, a sublimated reconciliation of parts.

But perhaps most importantly for what was to become of the Surrealist movement in the 1930s is the elimination of certain psychic coordinates for drawing that had been established through the associative illogic of the fragmented *cadavre exquis*. Along with the recuperation of the organic work of art at the levels of materiality,

chance, and process, removing the fold entailed another loss: that of the shock of unfolding. While the secrecy of the successive contributions to any one *cadavre exquis* is essential to preserve the startling effect of the players' differences, it is the fold that makes them pronounced—against each other and against the unified figure. The ghostly familiarity of each fragment, made unrecognizable through the condensations and displacements enacted by the folds, designates the scene of unfolding the *cadavre exquis* as an uncanny encounter with an estranged self. Furthermore, the event of unfolding triggers not only a psychic-based refutation of the subject-as-agent, but a traumatic encounter at the level of representation. The fold asserts the temporal against the synchronicity or gestalt of the traditional work of art, indelibly marking the drawing not as the projection of an idea sprung whole from its creator but as a process developing over time. If in the *cadavre exquis* the fold sets the dynamic axis of psychic association against the rationalized field of referential mimesis, then the unfolding of the recursive page is the event that effectively delivers the jarring figuration of these two incompatibles. For the last act of the *cadavre exquis* game is to return the paper to its first orientation—to the spatial parameters of the blank sheet. As the page is reopened the *cadavre exquis* reassumes the soma of the pristine field, yet fails to fulfill its promise of completion and significance. Posed against the restored frame of the page qua page there is now a broken and inane surface: the sheet has returned degraded, rather than as the vehicle for an ideal image. Like a joke whose punch line depends on a surprise deviation from an expected outcome, the *cadavre exquis* crushes the anticipation of unity promised by its own bounded edges. It is only in this shock of unfolding that we see the ghost of drawing.

The folds will return to the game, very beautifully—and I use this term critically—in a series of collage versions from 1938,<sup>16</sup> and more prosaically in crude pencil drawings from the late 1930s that seem to be an attempt to recover the initial impact of the *cadavre exquis*. But the reactionary changes to the rules of the game early in the decade, made under the pretense of experimentation, signal an irrevocable shift in the ambitions of the Surrealist group under André

Breton's direction. It is no coincidence that the elimination of the marring fold from the *cadavre exquis* occurs at the very moment of Georges Bataille's break with Breton over Breton's embrace of traditional forms and institutions of art. Bataille never played the *cadavre exquis* game, although ironically the very "inventors" of the game, Jacques Prévert and the rest of the rue du Château group, would align with Bataille when he split with Breton. For Bataille, the naming of any phenomenon as "marvelous," even (perhaps especially) one so quotidian as a parlor game, amounted to sublimation. Bataillean play would only be articulated in the form of an Aristotelian concept of chance, where, as Rosalind Krauss has put it, "a structure rules absolutely over any apparent play of happenstance, a structure of recurrence and compulsion that 'automates' and programs that field in relation to death."<sup>17</sup> Yet oddly, the *cadavre exquis* meets that description. The polarization of these two Surrealists along the differences between the Freudian drives—Breton's Eros opposed to Bataille's Thanatos—misses the link between the development of Bataille's Surrealism and the early play practices deployed by Breton. There is the historical link, parlayed through the shared polemic that resulted in the defection to the Bataillean camp of the "inventors" of the *cadavre exquis*, but there is also a common desire for the exorciation of existing conventions and hierarchies. If Bataillean play would eventually be recast in terms of its "transgressive relationship to non-meaning," there is ample evidence of this same deconstructive impulse operating in the repetitions and unveilings of the early *cadavre exquis*.<sup>18</sup> At its best, the game repealed the hierarchy between figure and ground, ideal and material, and did so through the application of the lowering devices of the fold. It is the buckled page that transgresses drawing, releasing monolithic denotation into the proliferations of meaningless play.

What does an evacuation of meaning imply for the avant-garde capacity of play? Does the definition of play as an activity performed as an end in itself doom its processes to the inefficacy of autonomous art?

In considering these questions it is good to remember that before it is anything else, the game is a production that emanates from its

players, a process drawn from and traced to the *mundane action* of play. While the syntax explicitly called for in the rules of the game and apparent in the final images is a structuring device that implies an independently functioning and signifying representation, the generation of the image through the discrete contributions of a number of players undercuts the single-minded motivations identified with creative agency. These are figure drawings that openly bear the traces of the process of the game—indices of action, experience, and intersubjective relations that had played out in corporeal space. Regardless of whether the graphic marks that yield the *cadavre exquis* refer to unconscious utterances or to fragments of empirical reality, their folds refer to the sequence, duration, and participants of the play. This indexical quality of the drawings is the images' "ace in the hole" against mastery, as each drawing reveals its means of production as mechanical and arbitrary, the very opposite of the organic and naturally motivated. The flicker of subject and object delivered by the *cadavre exquis* images, doubled by the dynamism of an appearance that shifts between whole and part, is reiterated at the level of signification, as the drawings declare themselves as both the iconic representation of a figure and the index of the process of the game, a game that subverts figuration and undermines reference.

Traced back from the *cadavre exquis* drawings, the course of the game is established as the site of social engagement, and through play Surrealist art is advanced as having been constructed from active social relations. And because this reinscription of art production in social praxis is made from within the rubric of play—that is, under the aegis of a chance-driven practice that stands definitively against means/ends rationality, it extends the possibility of a critical art production taking place outside of a system of commercially driven exchange-value.<sup>19</sup> The *cadavre exquis* asserted the "useless" value of play against a modern context dominated by utilitarian rationality. Deployed as an immediate experience rather than as a philosophical term made to serve as a metaphor for aesthetic practice, play as it is pursued in the *cadavre exquis* presented a positive intervention in the avant-garde attempt to reintegrate art with life. Most significantly this intervention was not an opposition but an internal displacement: the game performed from within the very machine-like

parameters that were perceived as automating every aspect of life. Surrealist games ultimately derive their power from their production of non sequiturs from within the very structures from which one expects the logical unfolding of meaning. Accordingly, the *cadavre exquis* made its critique of the status quo without validating those historical pressures that had forced art away from social relations by superimposing mechanization and artistic practices in a manner designed to disclose a potential for the aleatory within even the most regulated processes. As in automatism, where a phenomenal world produced on the spot by the unconscious discloses the Surrealist in a “state of grace” with chance, the *cadavre exquis* gives the Surrealist at play privileged access to a ludic, Nietzschean reality comprising illusion and illusion’s unraveling. The folds themselves are evidence of an incessant and successive production and subversion of the recognizable image: “L’enigme,” as Breton wrote, “est de ne pas savoir si l’on abat si l’on bâtit.”<sup>20</sup>

## Notes

1. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 62.
2. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*.
3. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, 79. Bürger uses the example of Breton’s book *Nadja*, whose events tumble out without beginning, middle, and most importantly end, as a counterexample to the unified literary work.
4. This classes the *cadavre exquis* with representations that Breton designates as dream figures: “poetic and artistic constructions which, at least on the outside, seem to be abstracted from the natural conditions of existence of all other objects.” Breton goes on to give examples: “Limiting myself to the plastic domain, I have only to give as examples of these ‘monsters’—apart from Dali’s *Le Grand Masturbateur*, of which I have already spoken—Picasso’s *Le Joueur de Clarinette*, di Chirico’s *Le Vaticinateur*, Duchamp’s *La Mariée*, Ernst’s *La Femme 100 Têtes*, and one of Giacometti’s strange moving figures.” Finally, in the same passage, he directly relates the emergence of the monsters to modernity: “The highly disturbing nature of these objects, together with the remarkable way in which they have multiplied for twenty years or so in every country of the world . . . makes us reflect on the very particular necessity to which they must be responding in the twentieth century.” Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, 49–50.
5. Baron, *L’an un du Surrealisme: suivi de l’an dernie*, 80.

6. The players, as indicated on the reverse of the sheet, were Camille Goemans, Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguy, and André Breton.

7. Breton, *Le Cadavre Exquis, Son Exaltation*, 8; translation modified for English syntax.

8. I am referring to the Bataille *informe*. While *informe* is an operation set against the figure, as Yve-Alain Bois has pointed out: a “fragmentation of the body (itself temporally folded and unfolded) disturbs the Surrealists’ ‘Exquisite Corpses’”; Bois himself also warns against treating the *informe* as sheer deformation, which would imply that even “the slightest alteration to the human anatomy, in a painting, for example, would be said to participate in the formless—which comes down to saying that modern figurative art, in its quasi-totality, would be swept up into such a definition.” Bois and Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide*, 34, 15.

9. The double function of the fold in the *cadavre exquis* invites comparison with Gilles Deleuze’s operation of Baroque intelligibility as it is theorized in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Play is repeatedly invoked in Deleuze’s essay to describe the “operative function” of the fold (66, 3); like the Surrealist paradigm, the Baroque fold is linked to postmodern forms and systems. The Surrealist fold shares Deleuze’s Baroque critique of Cartesian space, a contestation that is enacted through dynamic seriality and the production of a unique variable; both systems foreground process and propose a new link between the “spontaneity of the inside” and the “determinism of the outside” (29). Deleuze even compares the Leibnizian, labyrinthine thought to “a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements” (6). The difference that prevents the folds of the *cadavre exquis* from inclusion in the Baroque model lies with this term “infinite.” Deleuze’s fold is a crease that multiplies into endless curves and twisting surfaces, a “double operation” of simultaneous folding and unfolding in opposite directions, a fold that is not opposed to unfolding, that is neither “tension-release” nor “contraction-dilation” (7). Yet the *cadavre exquis* finds its significance as much in its pleated field of reception as in the culminating delivery of misrecognition accomplished at its *unfolding*—two operations that are linked, interactive, dependent, but discrete. While there is repetition and the possibility of inexhaustible seriality *across* its production, the *cadavre exquis* makes its specific critique of form in its individual instances—and each of these instances produces a framed and discrete image. While the Baroque fold is theorized by Deleuze as an anti-Hegelian infinite—“A process without spatial development . . . *plier, déplier, replier*” (xvi)—the model for the *cadavre exquis* is a dialectic that *culminates* in a single irresolvable image. Call it an arrested vector or a failed potential for the articulation of pure open-endedness, but once open, the *cadavre exquis* is never refolded.

10. Wigley, “Paper, Scissors, Blur,” 29. Because the paper ground is ignored

in the reception of drawing, Wigley argues that there is a kind of immateriality to drawing, “as if it occupies a liminal space between material and immaterial. This allows it to act as a bridge across the classical divide between material and idea.”

11. The fold makes the paper material, establishes it as ready-made, and violates what Rosalind Krauss has called “the draftsman’s white sheet”; Krauss writes that the “smooth white surface of each is nonetheless an index of a kind of emptiness, a fundamental blankness which is that of the visual field itself understood as a field of projection. It stands, that is, for what is assumed to be nature’s opening onto the external world as a limitless beyond, an ever retreating horizon, a reserve assumed from the onset but never filled in advance.” Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 54.

12. The blurring of the line between drawing and sculpture, here, is inevitable with the introduction of the tactile into the visual field. The *cadavre exquis* rejects the immateriality of flat representation and insists on being experienced as an object. This is consistent with Breton’s conception of the ease with which the images on the page could be “constructed”—they are already understood as objects in the object world. Breton insures against an utterly optic apprehension of the *cadavre exquis* by offering, as an example of a commensurate “sur-real” found object, a Hopi doll, published alongside the *cadavre exquis* in *La Révolution Surréaliste* no. 9–10, 34.

13. Anonymous, “Le Dialogue en 1928,” 7, translation mine. What follows in the article are not examples of the poetic *cadavre exquis* but of the “dialogue” game, in which questions and answers are formulated separately: “*Qu’est-ce que la peur?*” “*Jouer son va- tout sur une place déserte.*”

14. Lebel, *Juegos Surrealistas*, 110. The image, originally in Breton’s possession and now in a private collection, is inscribed on the back in Breton’s own hand: “X, A. Breton, X, Louis Aragon?”

15. Jean-Jacques Lebel reports, “In the years Hugo was in Breton’s life, she kept for everyone a portfolio full of black [C]anson paper and colored pencils. Thus the great quantity of *cadavre exquis* on black ground.” Lebel, “La erupción de la vida,” 30. Twenty-eight of these images have been published in *Juegos Surrealistas*, 112–39.

16. These *cadavre exquis* collages are folded, but they hold together unambiguously, with none of the tension attributed to the game as a process. Whereas the deployment of the folded line against the graphic line in the *cadavre exquis* has the effect of an intervention in drawing practices, when it is set against the already transgressive spacing of collage the syntax of the folded page becomes all structure. It operates like a double negative to undercut the juxtapositions that the collage has already activated; in turn collage as a medium has the effect of disarming the operations of the fold.

17. Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 64. Hal Foster as well argues that Breton fo-



cuses on Eros, striving always for unity and reconciliation in his representational practices, yet all the while is subject to the death drive. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 15–17.

18. Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 113. The proliferation to annihilation of meaning, the vitiation of mastery, and the expansion of the possibilities of drawing from within drawing itself are leitmotifs that point to “the play outside meaning” of the *cadavre exquis*. It was perhaps this destructive aspect of play that first attracted Bataille to Breton’s Surrealism.

19. The *cadavre exquis* drawings would ultimately be absorbed into the very institutions they meant to critique; they went off with William Rubin to join the first Dada and Surrealism show in New York’s Museum of Modern Art—indeed, the *cadavre exquis* would be literally placed at their service in the early 1990s, when New York’s Drawing Center used the game as a fundraising ploy. The show, *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, featured “historical” works, but was generated when curator Ingrid Schaffner engaged more than one thousand artists to produce spectacular composite drawings which were then auctioned at a gala event for the benefit of the Drawing Center.

20. Breton, cited in Baron, *L’an un du Surrealisme*, 12.

## Events and the Exquisite Corpse

KEN FRIEDMAN

# 3

The twentieth century gave birth to two artistic traditions that remain visible as ways for groups of artists, composers, and writers to generate and realize collaborative works.

The first tradition was that of the *cadavre exquis*, a Surrealist game tracing its origins to the French parlor game known as *petits papiers*. Developed around 1925, the title “Exquisite Corpse” comes from one of the earliest historical examples of the game. The Exquisite Corpse allows three or more players to create works of visual art and writing by joining together individual sections through a collage-like meeting of words, lines, or images at the edges of each individual contribution.<sup>1</sup> Artists and writers used the Exquisite Corpse to generate collaborative artworks by exploiting the possibilities of communal process and chance operations.

The second was the tradition of the *event*, an idea that emerged from the musical philosophy of composer Henry Cowell as an approach to composing based on sound-creation activities broken into minimal, basic elements. John Cage introduced this term to the composers and artists who took his courses in new musical composition at the New School for Social Research in the late 1950s. In the early 1960s, this circle of artists and composers adapted the idea of the event to describe the terse, minimal instructions that typified pioneering ap-



7. Ken Friedman. *The History of Fluxus*. 1993. Sugar, salt and shoes used by Ken Friedman in performance at the Seoul-NYMAX Mediale Festival organized by Nam June Paik and Jonas Mekas at Anthology Film Archives in New York, 1994. Photo © Lisa Kahane, NYC.

### Two Elimination Events

empty vessel

empty vessel

| George Brecht, 1961

### Open and Shut Case

Make a box. On the outside, print the word "Open." On the inside, print the words "Shut quick."

| Ken Friedman, 1965

proaches to intermedia in the international laboratory of art, music, and design known as Fluxus.<sup>2</sup>

Events began as a way to explore music composition and performative works. The musical origin of events gave rise to the custom of using the term "score" for the concise, verbal instructions used to notate events. Scores transmit instructions that allow a performer to realize an event work in the same way that a music score transmits instructions allowing performers to realize a musical work. While the concept of events began in music, it soon migrated to visual art and intermedia, developing as a significant intermedia form in its own right.

Two major distinctions separate the Exquisite Corpse from event scores. First, the Corpse is a simple yet powerful algorithm for creating individual works of art or literature. An event score is a way to transmit, generate, and realize works of many kinds. The scoring process is a method similar in

purpose to music notation while each individual score is an algorithm for generating works. Second, while the Exquisite Corpse survives in selected and often well-known examples, the method itself remains a parlor game or a teaching tool. In contrast, the events tradition survived and grew beyond its originators to enliven a rich spectrum of intermedia art forms. While historical examples remain visible, much as famous music works do, artists and composers continue to work with event scores, both as a way to realize earlier scored work and as a way to generate new work.<sup>3</sup>

## Events

While the term “events” entered the world of music with Henry Cowell,<sup>4</sup> it blossomed through the activities of John Cage, a Cowell student who probably heard it from him, as did intermedia artist Dick Higgins, when he studied with Cowell many years later. Both Cage and Theodore Adorno frequently use the term “events,”<sup>5</sup> speaking of musical events ontologically as a form of work—labor—performed in time and realized through time’s unfolding.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the event in art, music, and intermedia has many meanings and nuances. An event can exist in at least four forms: as idea, as score, as process, and as artifact. The realized event is typically visible in five kinds of artifact: behavioral artifacts of enactment or performance, physical artifacts as environment or installation, physical artifacts as intermedia, physical artifacts as object, or aural artifacts as sound.<sup>7</sup> In many cases, an event may exist in more than one form, leaving a wake with several kinds of artifacts.

The musical origin of events means that realizing or performing the score brings the event into final, embodied existence. As with music, anyone may perform the score. One need not be an artist, composer, or musician to do so, and not even a professional practitioner of the arts.<sup>8</sup>

This quality of events is “musicality,” the fact that anyone may realize work from a score. This distinguishes events from performance art, some forms of improvisational mu-

## How Nemo Got Honored in His Patria

a metadrama in three parts

### I - SOLO

A bows to the audience stiffly and repeatedly for a minute.

### II - DUO

A and B bow to each other stiffly and repeatedly for a minute.

### III - SOLO

B bows to the audience stiffly and repeatedly for a minute.

| Dick Higgins, 1985

## Choice 1

The performer enters the stage with a tied parcel, places it on a table, and opens it to take out a whipped cream cake with ten candles. He lights the candles, then blows them out. He picks up the cake, shows it to the audience, then flings it into his own face.

| Robert Bozzi, 1966

## Zyklus

Water pails or bottles are placed around the perimeter of a circle. Only one is filled with water. Performer inside the circle picks the filled vessel and pours it into the one on the right, then picks the one on the right and pours it into the next one on the right, etc., till all the water is spilled or evaporated.

| Tomas Schmit, 1962

## Shuffle

The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo, but quietly.

| Alison Knowles, 1961

## Lessons

List the difference, in cubic inches, between your bed and your tub.

List the difference, in square inches, between your porch and bathroom floors.

| Davi det Hompson, 1969

sic, most painting, or other art forms that are only seen as authentic when an author-creator realizes them.<sup>9</sup> Nam June Paik defined this aspect of events in a 1962 score titled "Read Music: Do It Yourself."<sup>10</sup> This came to define the nature of events and many aspects of artistic and musical practice in the Fluxus community.

In visual art, collage is a common ancestor to events and to the Exquisite Corpse. Higgins described an evolution of art forms that moved from collage through environments and happenings toward the event structure, describing events as happenings broken into their smallest possible elements.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that many events take physical rather than behavioral or aural form, however, music is the key evolutionary influence on events. The musical origin of the term anchors the concept in action rather than in artifacts. In this sense, Higgins once described music in the most general and abstract way as something that "takes place in time," adding that "anything that just breaks up time by happening in it, is musical."<sup>12</sup>

From a musical origin, events moved into performance, intermedia, and other domains. Some of us who worked with events developed a form of artistic practice in which events constituted instructions for the realization of social situations and even physical artifacts.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever form of realization events may take, event scores tend to be compressed and minimal, engaging such key Fluxus ideas as intermedia, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, and presence in time, as well as musicality.<sup>14</sup> Many event scores emerge from life situations. They can be realized in everyday situations as well as in performance, emphasizing the unity of art and life. Higgins discussed these ideas in his nine criteria of Fluxus. Among the key ideas that relate to events were minimalism (as a synonym for concentration), resolution of the dichotomy between art and life, implicativeness, play or gags, ephemeral-ity (or presence in time), specificity, and musicality.<sup>15</sup>

The first well-known event scores emerged among art-

ists and composers in John Cage's course in experimental music composition at the New School for Social Research. The event offered a way to score the new musical compositions of such students as George Brecht, Dick Higgins, and Al Hansen.<sup>16</sup>

The artists and composers who created the Fluxus network provided the crucial community that developed the medium. Higgins describes the developing Fluxus network in waves.<sup>17</sup> The first wave of Fluxus artists and composers included George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Ben Patterson, Mieko Shiomi, Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, and La Monte Young. These artists and composers first described and practiced events. Soon after the founding festival at Wiesbaden, a second wave of Fluxus artists adopted the form, including Milan Knizak, Willem de Ridder, Tomas Schmit, and Ben Vautier. These were followed by a third wave including Geoffrey Hendricks and myself, and later waves including Jean Dupuy, Larry Miller, Yoshimasa Wada, and others.<sup>18</sup>

Several factors accounted for the rich early development of event scores as a common medium among Fluxus artists. One was the implicit nature of event scores as a common vocabulary. A second involved the concise quality of the event score. A third significant factor was the fact that event scores were physically easy to transmit. Ease of shared communication made scores a logical way to transmit works of art, music, performance, and intermedia in the first artist network to include artists from Asia, Europe, and North America. Fluxus was a community of artists and composers spread around the world in an era of high telephone costs that made ordinary mail and printed documents central media for communication at a distance, while participation in a widespread network emphasized distant communication.<sup>19</sup>

The event score forms a continuous thread through Fluxus practice from the earliest days to the present. Events together with multiple editions constitute a common twin focus in the work of nearly all artists associated with Fluxus.<sup>20</sup>

**Canto 1**  
**(If You Catch Sight of a**  
**Friend in the Distance)**

If you catch sight of a friend in the distance: go toward him, calling out loudly. Let the calls ring out. Answer his calls. Develop the structures of his calls. Desirable development: from very simple to very complex calls.

(Can be performed in public libraries, lecture halls, churches, central stations, civil service departments, and in outdoor places under an immense blue sky.)

| Bengt af Klintberg, 1965

**Remote Music**

For single or multiple keyboard instruments in concert.

A mechanical hand with pointing index finger (or a boxing glove) is arranged out of view on a string-and-pulley system above the keyboard prior to the performance. Out of view, the performer lowers the hand onto the keyboard to produce a single note.

| Larry Miller, 1976

### Fluxus Champion Contest

Performers gather around a large tub or bucket on stage. All piss into the bucket. As each pisses, he sings his national anthem. When any contestant stops pissing, he stops singing. The last performer left singing is the champion.

| Nam June Paik, 1962

### Ice Trick

Pass a one-pound piece of ice among members of the audience while playing a recording of fire sounds or while having a real fire on stage. The piece ends when the block of ice has melted.

| Lee Heflin, date unknown

### Street Cleaning Event

Performers are dressed in white coats like laboratory technicians. They go to a selected location in the city. An area of a sidewalk is designated for the event. This area of sidewalk is cleaned very thoroughly with various devices not usually used in street cleaning, such as dental tools, toothbrushes, steel wool, cotton balls with alcohol, cotton swabs, surgeon's sponges, tooth picks, linen napkins, etc.

| Hi Red Center, date unknown

## Event as Social Process: Invisible College, Community of Practice, and Folk Tradition

The fluid nature of events transmitted through concise verbal instructions made them easy to describe and develop. This gave rise to a form of artistic and musical practice in which artists shared concepts in an emerging laboratory.

The practices that typify events resemble the social processes that develop and transmit ideas in other kinds of productive communities. One is the "invisible college" that constitutes a scientific community. One is the "community of practice" that typifies a guild or profession. One is the cultural community that generates a folk tradition with the memory practices and transmission practices of folklore.

The notion of the invisible college began among the early members of the Royal Society in the 1600s. They did not belong to a formal institution other than the society itself. Common interests and regular meetings led them to refer to themselves as an "invisible college."

Members of the Fluxus community created and shared a rich series of newsletters, multiples, and publications, along with personal correspondence. This enabled continual communication among for colleagues who might not meet in person for years at a time. While only one or two large-scale events have gathered the entire community at one place or time,<sup>21</sup> different subsets and constellations of Fluxus participants have met together frequently in a rich cycle of concerts and festivals that has continued for nearly half a century since 1962. This has created a community that fits the description of an invisible college in many key dimensions.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of a community of practice took shape in information science, design studies, and knowledge management. The term "communities of practice" is new, but the concept is ancient, rooted in the way that ancient and medieval craft guilds generate and transmit knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Communities of practice generate rich cycles of interaction within groups that shape cultures through behavior, enactment, and shared social patterns. Despite many projects and

systems that mirrored the functions and structures of formal organizations, Fluxus never functioned as a formal organization with a prescribed structure, rules, or explicitly enrolled members. Nevertheless Fluxus developed an ongoing community of artists, composers, and designers. Some of these have now worked together for nearly half a century in different but overlapping networks. A culture emerged that has many of the same attributes that organization theorists recognize in organizational culture and organizational learning. Many of the cultural practices of this community coalesce around the shared work of the event.<sup>24</sup>

Folklorist and Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg emphasizes the similarities between the events tradition and folk traditions, speaking of “simple pieces filled with energy and humor, pieces without any personal stylistic features, pieces that could be transmitted orally just like folklore and performed by everyone who wanted to.”<sup>25</sup>

## How Events Work

Events have several surprising properties that emerge from the meeting of two streams of events practice. One is the historical development of events as they emerged in art, music, and intermedia. The other is the experimental structure that emerges as we analyze the possibilities inherent in the idea of the event.

In the experimental intermedia context,<sup>26</sup> events naturally encourage a rich variety of interpretations and approaches that incorporate diverging tendencies. The development of events in a community of practice meant that event scores by different artists often converge in common patterns to generate similarities that Klintberg describes in terms of folklore and tradition. These common properties are sometimes so strong that the work becomes impersonal, making it easy to confuse the work of one artist with another. At the same time, the event scores of any one artist may diverge, one from the next, in contradictory dialectical progressions. The variety of converging and diverging patterns makes it

### **Monochrome for Yves Klein, Fluxversion II**

An orchestra, quartet, or soloist, dressed in white, plays a favorite classic. A fine mist of washable black paint rains down during the performance. Performers continue to play as their scores and music stands, instruments, and clothes slowly turn from white to black. The performance ends when no performer can read the notes.

| Ben Vautier, 1963

### **Zen Vaudeville**

The sound of one shoe tapping.

| Ken Friedman, 1966

### **Disappearing Music for Face**

Change gradually from a smile to no smile.

In concert, performers begin the piece with a smile, and during the duration of the piece, change the smile very slowly and gradually to no smile. Conductor indicates the beginning with a smile and determines the duration by his example which should be followed by the orchestra.

| Mieko Shiomi, 1964



**Event: 10**

A performer stands on a dark stage with his back to the audience. He strikes ten matches at uniform intervals. Another performer rings a bell ten times at the same (or different) intervals.

| Robert Watts, 1962

**Solo for Conductor**

Conductor enters and takes a deep bow toward the audience. He remains bowed while he performs various acts with his hands at floor level, such as tying shoe laces, straightening out socks, wiping shoes with cloth, picking up little specks from floor, etc. Performance ends when conductor straightens up and exits.

| George Maciunas, 1965

**Food Piece for Dick Higgins**

A rich variety of food has been placed on a table. The performer starts to take food and put it in his mouth, but he drops the food to the floor the same moment it touches his lips. He takes as much food as in a regular meal, but when he has finished, all food is on the floor in front of him.

| Bengt af Klintberg, 1963

possible to consider groups of events as collations distinct from the composers who created them.

Higgins emphasized the fissile nature of events in terms of their simplicity and the fluid way that groups of events can be linked or separated. "Any art work can be looked at as a collation of events," he wrote, "but for works that tend to fissure and split into atomized elements, this approach by event seems particularly appropriate."<sup>27</sup>

Events may be realized in several ways. As ideas, we think them. As scores or instructions, we transmit them in some form, printed, broadcast, exhibited, or even spoken. As process, we perform, enact, or realize them—that is, we make them real. As artifact, events take a form that may represent or replicate the idea, the score, the process, some trace or relic of these, or possibly a completed work that remains when the score is realized.

In performance, events are often presented as single instances. They may also be collected into a series for presentation in concert form. In the 1960s and since, groups of events were generally presented in concerts, a series of events gathered together into a program. On occasion, several concerts in sequence over a period of days or even weeks were organized in festival form.

For most concerts, artists and composers chose events for a program from an expanding repertoire of scores. In most cases, artists realize a concert after a few rehearsals.<sup>28</sup>

**Ways to Select, Realize, and Present Events**

Here follows a taxonomy of ways to select, realize, and present events. While this is taxonomy and not chronology, there is a historical element to each category. The examples given here are the first occurrences of major forms when they occur well prior to later examples, or major early examples that occur relatively close in time. If the first occurrence of examples took place fairly close to one another, I give all. If several years lapse between the first occurrence and later examples, I give only the first occurrence. I nev-

ertheless add later examples that are different or distinct in nature, including variations.

1. Performers or Presenters Select Events for Concert. 1.1 Performers in concert choose works (John Cage New School course, New York Audiovisual Group, Yoko Ono Loft concerts, early Fluxus concerts, George Maciunas, individual Fluxus artists, and others), 1.2 Conductor of concert chooses works (New York Audiovisual Group, Yoko Ono Loft concerts, early Fluxus concerts, George Maciunas, individual Fluxus artists, and others), 1.3 Organizer of exhibition or director of festival chooses works (George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, and others), 1.4 Full company choose works as a group, including performers, conductor, assistants, and others (Fluxus, Fluxus West), 1.5 Choice negotiated among different groups of participants and others (various).
2. Audience Chooses Events for Concert. 2.1 Members of audience choose works by telephone before concert (Fluxus West), 2.2 Members of audience choose works by mail before concert (Fluxus West), 2.3 Artists propose works by mail before concert (Fluxus West), 2.4 Members of audience choose works through workshop and dialogue before concert (Fluxus West, Event Structures Workshop), 2.5 Members of audience choose works through workshop and dialogue at concert (Event Structures Workshop), 2.6 Members of audience choose works from list of artists and titles at concert (Fluxus West), 2.7 Members of audience choose works from workbook of scores at concert (Event Structures Workshop), 2.8 Members of audience choose works from a menu with each event performed to order (Fluxus a la Carte, Knud Pedersen), 2.9 Members of audience choose and perform events (Ken Friedman).
3. Random Selection of Events for Concert. 3.1 Throwing darts at worksheet (Dick Higgins, Al Hansen), 3.2 Cards with scores scattered and picked up (George Maciunas), 3.3 Cards with scores shuffled and distributed: “dealer’s

#### Anger Song Number 6 (“Smash”)

1. Inviting the people to come for free, if they bring whistles and hammers.
2. Arraying and hanging as many breakable images around the room as possible—fine bottles, decanters, flower pots and vases, busts of Wagner, religious sculptures, etc.
3. When they come, explaining the rules:
  - a) They surround the ringleader. b) He turns, ad lib. c) When he has his back to anyone, this person is as silent as possible. d) When he has his side to anyone, this person blows his whistle repeatedly, not too loud. e) When he faces anyone, this person blows his whistle as loudly and violently as possible. f) When he actually looks into anyone’s face, this person smashes an image with his hammer.
4. Continuing from beginning until all of the images are smashed.

| Dick Higgins, 1966

## Become Invisible

by hiding

by divesting yourself of all distinguishing marks

by going away

by sinking through the floor

by becoming someone else

by concentrating so hard on some object or idea that you cease to be aware of your physical presence

by distracting everybody else from your physical presence

by ceasing to exist

| Bici Forbes, 1966

## Bit Part for Audience

Each word of a poem is written on separate cards passed out to the audience, who perform them in sequence.

| Larry Miller, 1969

## Verbs

Performers enact different verbs from a book of verbs.

| Ben Vautier, 1963

choice” concert (Ken Friedman), 3.4 Cards with scores shuffled and hands played: “poker game” concert (Ken Friedman), 3.5 Scores numbered and selected by random number using *I Ching* (Fluxus West), 3.6 Scores numbered and selected by random number using random number generator (Richard Maxfield).

4. Events Selected by Theme or Topic for Concert (Fluxus West).
5. Events Selected by Structural Similarity for Concert (Fluxus West).
6. Events Presented in Alphabetical Order for Concert. 6.1 Events presented in alphabetical order by artist name (Fluxus West), 6.2 Events presented in alphabetical order by title of piece (Fluxus West), 6.3 Events presented in alphabetical order by concept (Fluxus West), 6.4 Events presented in alphabetical order by theme or topic (Fluxus West).
7. Time and Duration. 7.1 Single event for entire duration of performance (La Monte Young, Jackson Mac Low, Milan Knizak), 7.2 Events presented in increasing duration of performance time (Ken Friedman), 7.3 Events presented by decreasing duration of performance time (Ken Friedman), 7.4 Each event lasts one minute (Jean Dupuy).
8. “Same Event” Concert. 8.1 Different works that can be interpreted in a way that creates the same outcome (Event Structures Workshop), 8.2 Works by different artists that are essentially the same (Event Structures Workshop), 8.3 The same work by one artist realized in different interpretations (Event Structures Workshop), 8.4 Concert of several works with each section consisting of one work given several interpretations (Event Structures Workshop).
9. Eight Theaters (Ken Friedman). 9.1 Theater of the Object (Ken Friedman), 9.2 Theater of Ideas (Ken Friedman), 9.3 Noh Theater (Ken Friedman), 9.4 Shadow Theater (Ken Friedman), 9.5 Ice and Water Theater (Ken Fried-

- man), 9.6 Puppet Theater (Ken Friedman), 9.7 Narrator's Theater (Ken Friedman), 9.8 Bunraku Theater (Ken Friedman).
10. Broadcast Concerts. 10.1 Radio broadcast of performed concert (Fluxus West), 10.2 Radio broadcast instructing audience to perform events on impromptu basis: "Please turn off your radio" (Tomas Schmit), 10.3 Radio broadcast instructing audience to perform concert of events with props gathered according to prior instructions: "Peiskos med Per" (Ken Friedman), 10.4 Radio broadcast of narrated scores (Fluxus West, various), 10.5 Filmed television broadcast of performed concert (Festa Fluxorum Wiesbaden), 10.6 Television broadcast of events performed in news segment (Fluxus West), 10.7 Television broadcast of live concert on the air "Tonight Show"—cancelled segment (Ken Friedman).
  11. Sound tapes and records. 11.1 Taped music included in live concert (John Cage, Richard Maxfield, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, George Maciunas, others), 11.2 Taped music concert (Richard Maxfield, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, George Maciunas, others), 11.3 Tape machines perform music in live concert (Richard Maxfield, Ken Friedman, others), 11.4 LP recordings (Richard Maxfield, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, Maurizio Nannucci, Slowscan Editions, others), 11.5 Tape editions (Telus, Barbara Moore, Slowscan Editions, others).
  12. Photography, film, and video. 12.1 Fluxconcert photographs (Peter Moore, George Maciunas, Friedemann Malsch, Lisa Kahane, many others), 12.2 Photographs and slides to present events in concert (George Maciunas, others), 12.3 Films (Fluxfilms, George Maciunas, Jonas Mekas, Jackson Mac Low, Paul Sharits, others), 12.4 Video (Nam June Paik, Larry Miller, others), 12.5 DVD (Nam June Paik, Larry Miller, others), 12.6 PowerPoint Presentation (Ken Friedman), 12.7 Film based on recycled newscast footage of events (Ken Friedman).
  13. Telephone. 13.1 Telephone call events (Ken Friedman),

### **In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti**

Performers use old adding-machine tape as a score. Each number on the tape represents a metronome beat. Each performer is assigned a number. When his number appears, he performs upon the beat. Performance can consist of actions (raising and replacing hat, shaking fist, making faces, etc.) or sounds (tongue clicks, pops, smacks, lip farts, etc.) Performers may all perform same action or different, or all perform same sound or different. Performers should practice their assigned sound or action so that each can perform clearly—sharp, defined action or sound, loud if sound, in time with beat.

| George Maciunas, 1962

### **Falling Event**

1. Let something fall from a high place.
2. Let yourself fall from a high place using an elevator, parachute, rope, or anything else, or using nothing.

| Mieko Shiomi, 1963

**Magic Event Number 1  
(to make a couple of  
enemies)**

Take an egg and boil it hard and write a couple's names on it. Then cut the egg in two pieces and give one of the halves to a dog and the other half to a cat.

| Bengt af Klintberg, 1965

**Three Lamp Events**

on. off.

lamp

off. on.

| George Brecht, 1961

**Proposition**

Make a salad.

| Alison Knowles, 1962

**The Distance from This  
Sentence to Your Eye is  
My Sculpture**

Produce an object bearing  
the text:

*The distance from this  
sentence to your eye is my  
sculpture.*

| Ken Friedman, 1971

**Three Aqueous Events**

ice

water

steam

| George Brecht, 1961

13.2 Live telephone call-in (Ken Friedman), 13.3 Answering machine call-in (*Phone Events* by Ken Friedman).

14. Internet and World Wide Web. 14.1 Web exhibition of score collection (Nam June Paik, Panix, Anne Drogyness), 14.2 Web publication of scores (Joe De Marco, Allen Bukoff), 14.3 Web download of score collection (*52 Events* by Ken Friedman, *Fluxus Performance Workbook* by Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn), 14.4 Web download of performed events (UbuWeb, Walter Ciansiusi, Crispin Webb), 14.5 Web site with event scores and documents (Allen Bukoff, Alan Bowman, Emily Harvey, Ben Vautier, Ann Drogyness, University of Iowa).

15. Published Presentation. 15.1 Published scores (Various), 15.1.1 Collection of scores. 15.1.1.1 Box edition of scores (*Water Yam* by George Brecht, *Events* by Robert Watts, Fluxboxes published by George Maciunas), 15.1.1.2 Scores sheet (Fluxus, George Maciunas), 15.1.1.3 Published book or pamphlet with single-artist collection (*Grapefruit* by Yoko Ono, *By Alison Knowles* by Alison Knowles, *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* by Robert Filliou, *Stockholm-spellet* by Bengt af Klintberg), 15.1.1.4 Published anthology collection (*Fluxnewsletter* score collections by George Maciunas, *Fluxfest Sale Sheet* by George Maciunas, *Fluxus Performance Workbook* by Ken Friedman), 15.1.1.5 Illustrated collection of scores (*Art Café Review* by Ken Friedman, *Junior Fluxus Happening & Events for Kids* by Robin Page), 15.1.1.6 Description of concert (George Maciunas, Ben Vautier, Tom Johnson), 15.1.1.7 *Blue Cliff Record* (Ken Friedman), 15.1.2 Printed artifacts, 15.1.2.1 Postcards (*Fluxpostcards*, *Fluxus Postal Kit*, various series by George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Robert Filliou, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, others), 15.1.2.2 Rubber stamps of scores (Ken Friedman), 15.1.2.3 Business cards (Ken Friedman), 15.1.2.4 Advertisements (Yoko Ono, Larry Miller), 15.1.2.5 Posters and broadsides (George Maciunas, Ben Vautier, Dick Higgins, Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, Milan Knizak,

- others), 15.1.2.6 Billboards (Yoko Ono, Geoffrey Hendricks), 15.1.2.7 Silkscreen on wall or sidewalk (Alison Knowles), 15.1.2.8 Stencil on wall or sidewalk (Ken Friedman).
16. Objects. 16.1 Carved objects (Terry Reid, Nancy McElroy, Marsh Agobert), 16.2 Engraved objects (Ken Friedman), 16.3 Silkscreen objects (Alison Knowles), 16.4 Sandblasted objects (Ken Friedman), 16.5 Ceramic objects (Dick Higgins, Ken Friedman), 16.6 Buttons (Ken Friedman, Dick Higgins), 16.7 Stickers (Dick Higgins).
  17. Exhibited events. 17.1 Exhibited scores, 17.1.1 Exhibition of event scores to accompany single concert or performance (Yoko Ono), 17.1.2 Exhibition of event scores within larger exhibition (Fluxus, individual Fluxus artists, others), 17.1.3 Solo exhibition of event scores on paper (Ken Friedman), 17.1.4, Solo exhibition of event scores on canvas (Yoko Ono), 17.1.4 Touring solo exhibition of event scores (Ken Friedman), 17.2 Installation, 17.2.1 Environment (various), 17.2.2 Objects constructed to instruction (various), 17.2.3 Entire exhibition constructed to instruction (Daniel Spoerri, Arthur Koepcke), 17.2.4 Entire exhibition of works built to instruction with royalties paid to artist (Hans Ulrich Obrist), 17.3 Exhibited documentation (various), 17.4 Exhibited multiples (Fluxshop), 17.3 Exhibited display formats (various).
  18. Teaching and Learning Contexts. 18.1 Presenting and performing to a group of colleagues (John Cage's courses in new music composition at the New School for Social Research), 18.2 Dialogue (*Games at the Cedille* by George Brecht and Robert Filliou), 18.3 Multilogue (*Teaching and Learning as a Performing Art* by Robert Filliou), 18.4 Sleeve-book (Ken Friedman).
  19. Special Methods. 19.1 Perpetual Fluxfest (George Maciunas), 19.2 Symposium (Dick Higgins, Ken Friedman, others), 19.3 Table Talk (Ken Friedman), 19.4 Communion (Ken Friedman), 19.5 Intimate events (Ken Friedman, Jock Reynolds), 19.6 Hidden events, 19.7 Thick concert, 19.8 Thin concert, 19.9 Dasein concert, 19.10

### **Piece for George Brecht**

Enter the Sistine Chapel by the nether door.

Survey the ceiling on the lintel.

Exit by the other door.

| Albert M Fine, date unknown

### **Danger Music Number Twelve**

Write a thousand symphonies.

| Dick Higgins, 1962

### **Tree\* Movie**

Select a tree\*. Set up and focus a movie camera so that the tree\* fills most of the picture. Turn on the camera and leave it on without moving it for any number of hours. If the camera is about to run out of film, substitute a camera with fresh film. The two cameras may be alternated in this way any number of times. Sound recording equipment may be turned on simultaneously with the movie cameras. Beginning at any point in the film, any length of it may be projected at a showing.

\*For the word "tree," one may substitute "mountain," "sea," "flower," "lake," etc.

| Jackson Mac Low, 1961

### **Distance for Piano (to David Tudor)**

Performer positions himself at some distance from the piano from which he should not move. Performer does not touch piano directly by any part of his body, but may manipulate other objects to produce sound on piano through them. Performer produces sounds at points of piano previously determined by him. Assistants may move piano to change distance and direction to directions of the performer.

| Takehisa Kosugi, 1965

### **F/H Trace**

A French horn is filled with small objects (ping-pong balls, ball bearings, rice, small toys, etc.) or fluid (water, mud, whiskey, etc.). Performer enters the stage, faces the audience, and bows toward the audience so that the objects cascade out of the bell of the horn into the audience.

| Robert Watts, 1963

### **For La Monte Young**

Performer asks if La Monte Young is in the audience.

| Emmett Williams, 1962

Pensées (Blaise Pascal, Aktual USA, Ken Friedman), 19.11 One-minute events (Jean Dupuy), 19.11 Nanofluxconcert (Ben Patterson), 19.12 Fluxus a la Carte (Knud Pedersen), 19.13 Complete Performance Inventory (Secret Fluxus), 19.14 Keep Walking Intently (Lisa Moren).

20. Documentary Collections. 20.1 Scores collected and reproduced in exhibition catalogues (*Fluxus & Happenings* by Hanns Sohm), 20.2 Scores collected and reproduced in anthologies (*Fluxus: The Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties* by Harry Ruhé, *Fluxus & Cie.* by Ben Vautier and Gino DiMaggio), 20.3 Scores collected and reproduced in archival documentation (Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Foundation books and catalogues by Jon Hendricks), 20.4 Scores collected and reproduced in catalogue raisonné (*Fluxus Codex* by Jon Hendricks).

Events, by nature, are broad and open-ended. While each event releases its potential in a specific instance of realization, it is the nature of events to be “minimal . . . with maximum implications.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the Exquisite Corpse emerges from a narrower field of generative artistic activity.

### **Exquisite Corpse and Events**

As all artworks do, the Exquisite Corpse releases its potential in each instantiation. Unlike many art forms, however, the Corpse generates and gathers its potential by invoking the careful rules that give rise to each specific realization. These rules are located in the history of Surrealist games dating back to the 1920s; I first met the Exquisite Corpse in the history and literature of Surrealism.<sup>30</sup>

For a short but intense period in the 1960s, I made a contextually different use of the Exquisite Corpse than others did. In addition to working with such Surrealist games as the Exquisite Corpse, I also worked with event scores and a rich variety of Fluxus activities published in different multiples of jokes, games, and puzzles. Surrealists used the



Corpse within a Surrealist tradition of ideologically uniform activity, and most Surrealist projects took place within the specific circle and the context established by André Breton. While many used Surrealist games in the context of teaching and learning, I also used them in a broad, pluralistic framework of artistic exploration, linking Surrealist games with other activities. (This heterodoxy bothered both latter-day Surrealists and some of my Fluxus colleagues, but that's a story to be told another day.)

Long before the 1960s, the Exquisite Corpse was already seen as an archaeological relic of twentieth-century culture. In 1948, Pierre Schneider wrote, "We remember the *cadavre exquis*, if at all, as a parlor game fashionable two decades or so ago. Perhaps it still tumbles out of the closet from time to time, usually at moments of acute social ennui. Usually it lies buried alongside the charades and musical games dear to our fathers."<sup>31</sup>

Schneider's article goes on to praise the surprising and revolutionary qualities of the long-buried Corpse, noting several important qualities of an art form that exemplifies the "axiom that some wholes are qualitatively different from their component parts." He praises the result as "the closest thing to communal poetic creation today," a device for turning ordinary humans into Homers.<sup>32</sup>

The charm of the Exquisite Corpse and similar games involved the use of chance in creating poetic or artistic results.<sup>33</sup>

The broad, playful quality of Surrealist games led Schneider to comment on their similarity to such parlor games as musical chairs. Most represent a genre of the traditional parlor games that everyone knows well, a tradition with three related dimensions. The first dimension involves the typical polite parlor games of urban life, charades, musical chairs, blind man's bluff, and many more. A second dimension touches on the long tradition of folk games going back centuries, even millennia, from circle games and nursery rhymes to games of chance or rituals. In the third dimen-

### Laughing

Four performers enter and stand in a row facing the audience. They have four laughing masks on their faces and stand ten minutes motionless after which they bow and leave again. Great fun.

| Willem de Ridder, 1963

### Bag Exchange

On a given day, everyone is asked to bring a brown bag with an object of their choice in it. An area is designated to contain the bags. At the end of the day, the bags are distributed at random.

| Larry Miller, 1969

### Wind Music, Fluxversion I

Scores are blown away from stands by wind from a strong fan in the wings as the orchestra tries to hold them.

| Mieko Shiomi, 1963



### **Moving Theater**

Fluxus fleet of cars and trucks drives into crowded city during rush hour. At the appointed time, all drivers stop cars, turn off engines, get out of cars, lock doors, take keys and walk away.

| Nam June Paik, date unknown (ca. 1964?)

### **Duet for Full Bottle and Wine Glass**

shaking  
slow dripping  
fast dripping  
small stream  
pouring  
splashing  
opening corked bottle  
rolling bottle  
dropping bottle  
striking bottle with glass  
breaking glass  
gargling  
drinking  
sipping  
rinsing mouth  
spitting

| George Maciunas, date unknown

### **Mechanical Fluxconcert**

Microphones are placed in the street, outside windows, or hidden among audience, and sounds are amplified to the audience via public address system.

| Richard Maxfield, date unknown

sion, both parlor games and Surrealist games resemble many Fluxus activities: anyone can play them. As Paik, Maciunas, and others often said: “do it yourself.”<sup>34</sup>

The flourishing history of the parlor game tradition was similar enough to Fluxus activities that Something Else Press published a classic nineteenth-century collection of games, reprinting William Brisbane Dick’s 1879 anthology, *Dick’s One Hundred Amusements*.<sup>35</sup>

This is also true of the relation between folk traditions and Fluxus traditions, as Klintberg notes in his 1993 article on Fluxus games and folklore.<sup>36</sup> Many have compared Fluxus event scores with the material in Jerome Rothenberg’s<sup>37</sup> anthologies of ancient and recent poetic speech from many cultures, or the collection of American poetic speech and ritual by Rothenberg and George Quasha.<sup>38</sup>

Games arise from, reflect, and generate community as well as competition. The English word “game” goes back to Old Swedish, Old Norse, and Old High German words meaning “game, sport, merriment, joy, glee.” These, in turn, trace their roots to a Gothic word meaning “participation, communion.”<sup>39</sup> Far beyond the element of competition, games bind communities together; an important aspect of the game is the concept of rule-bound competition among members of a commonality.

The Exquisite Corpse and events share a common property as art forms that developed in a social context, but they diverge in important ways. Both emerged as a common practice in communities of artists, but the nature of these communities saw the practices function at nearly opposite poles of experience.

The Exquisite Corpse receded into history, emerging in well-known examples by famous artists and poets, or turning up as parlor game or classroom exercise. While the Exquisite Corpse is occasionally played today as a parlor game or a medium for generating art works, it no longer exists in its original form. Instead it has influenced new traditions in which the heritage of the Corpse lives on. While

Schneider argued that the Exquisite Corpse was a nearly forgotten relic two decades after it was born, Surrealist games have influenced a rich variety of cut-up and collage forms in the decades since. The method of the Exquisite Corpse and similar games influenced William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, and others who used the cut-up technique. It also influenced artists working in related permutation traditions. This includes artists who created generative permutation systems for individual or group projects, and composers who sampled or drew on slices cut from life—pioneering avant-garde composers such as John Cage and Richard Maxfield, as well as recent generations of artists and composers who use sampling techniques of different kinds. Despite an influential and important legacy, the Exquisite Corpse itself has not experienced a continuous life in its own right beyond the experiments of interested artists and an important and continuous existence in pedagogical situations.<sup>40</sup>

Events continue to function in a variety of situations.<sup>41</sup> While they may be used in the parlor game tradition, they function in an ecological wetlands unifying art and life, and function as scores for concerts and the realization of artwork.<sup>42</sup>

Both events and the Exquisite Corpse encourage and even require Paik's "do-it-yourself" esthetic. While the Exquisite Corpse encourages do-it-yourself practice, however, more people look at examples of famous games than undertake the work of playing. As Schneider noted, the Exquisite Corpse had short life span as an active art medium. In contrast, the event led to a living tradition that has continued without break for more than half a century. From the 1950s through the present day, event scores continue to function in a living tradition of artistic practice and concert performance. This living tradition gives events a far different life than the pedagogical half-life of the Exquisite Corpse.

Events call forth active practice. Adorno argued that music played from scores belongs to those who perform it. Performers realize the music, taking fresh possession of the

## **Removal**

Lower an island one inch by removing one inch of its top surface.

| Milan Knizak, 1965

## **Shoes of Your Choice**

A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone, if one is available, and describe a pair of shoes, the ones he is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell when he got them, the size, the color, why he likes them, etc.

| Alison Knowles, 1963

## **Concerto for Orchestra, Fluxversion 1**

Orchestra members exchange their instruments.

| George Brecht, 1962

## **Danger Music Number One**

Spontaneously catch hold of a hoist hook and be raised up at least three stories.

| Dick Higgins, April 1961

### Party Event

Send invitations to all your friends—except one—with the following: *green party green clothes*

And to one person: *red party red clothes*

| Bengt af Klintberg, 1967

### Fashion

Cut the coat along its entire length.

Wear each half separately.

| Milan Knizak, 1965

### Cheers

Conduct a large crowd of people to the house of a stranger. Knock on the door. When someone opens the door, the crowd applauds and cheers vigorously.

All depart silently.

| Ken Friedman, 1965

### Organic Music

Orchestra breathes in unison and slowly, following the rhythm indicated by conductor. Breathing is done through long tubes or wind instruments without mouthpieces.

| Takehisa Kosugi, no date

music with every performance, and only possessing it by performing it. Adorno wrote of those who “earn the symphony in order to own it: to play it.”<sup>43</sup>

### Conjectures on Events: Personal Reflections

Each of the four forms that an event can take has its own value and uses: score, idea, process, and object.<sup>44</sup>

The idea is pure, simple, and inexpensive. An idea is easy to store. One carries it in the mind. As a memory artifact, however, an idea is difficult to preserve. Ideas are subject to change, memory loss, message failure and interference. Ideas require physical media for transmission: voice or body for direct signal; pen, publication, or digital media for remote transmission.

Scores reduce the possibility of change, memory loss, message failure, and interference, while remaining inexpensive. At the same time, scores require storage, adding a level of cost and management as the price of exact preservation. Even preservation fails to solve the challenge of interpretation and the possibility of multiple interpretations or misinterpretation.

Process is another way to work with scores. We experience work in live or recorded performance through the process of realization, either by performing the work, participating in the performance, or witnessing the performance. The most common way to experience orchestral music, theater, or time-based art forms is through some kind of process.

Process offers the most complete possible realization of any one interpretation, and it opens the existential frame of plural possibilities. But process emerges in time, and location in time is both an advantage and a disadvantage of process. Because process emerges in time, it is impossible to experience the process outside its moment in time without a recording. Before the age of recordings, in fact, it was impossible to experience a process outside the exact moment of its unfolding.

Process is the heart of much performance, and some as-

pects of any performance arise in time and vanish again. This is particularly true of musical forms that change through improvisational development. This was the case of Mozart's performance work, for example, when Mozart shaped a tangible experiential world that played out in frequent live concerts with rich improvisation. This music vanished when Mozart died. Theologian Karl Barth writes that "Mozart's preserved [work] is enormous. But probably even greater is the number of all those works of which we are deprived and destined to remain so. We know that at all periods of his life he loved to improvise, i.e., to freely create and play for himself in public concerts for hours on end to only a small audience. What he did this way was not written down—a whole Mozartean world that sounded once and then faded away forever."<sup>45</sup> What we hear today is Mozart's legacy, his remains, different from the process that Mozart shaped in daily practice. This was not the "practice" of scales or the practice of realizing a written composition. Rather, it was an expert practice brought to life in behavior.<sup>46</sup>

Process has disadvantages in contrast with ideas or scores. While recordings enable us to capture any one performance, sometimes from several perspectives, it is difficult to experience several aspects of a piece at once or in comparison, even with expensive equipment. In contrast, ideas, scores, or objects permit conceptual comparison.

Live performance is time-consuming and often expensive. Creating and storing recordings is also expensive and capital-intensive. Even though it is easy to purchase and use recording, storage, or playback units in the industrial world, making this equipment is only possible in the kind of society that is able to spread the required investment and effort over thousands of financiers and industrialists, millions of producers, distributors, and retailers, and billions of consumers. Logistics, transportation, storage, presentation, and related issues provide their own difficulties for art forms not traditionally seen as time-based. These include the forms of object making and presentation now summed

## **Two Inches**

A two-inch-wide ribbon is stretched across the stage or street and then cut.

| Robert Watts, 1962

## **Chewed Drawing**

Chew a nice piece of notebook or drawing paper.

| Larry Miller, 1968 ('89)

## **Danger Music Number Nine (for Nam June Paik)**

Volunteer to have your spine removed.

| Dick Higgins, February 1962

## **Killing the Books**

by shooting  
by burning  
by drowning  
by cutting  
by gluing  
by painting white, or red, or black  
etc.

| Milan Knizak, 1965–1970

### **Wounded Furniture**

This piece uses an old piece of furniture in bad shape. Destroy it further, if you like. Bandage it up with gauze and adhesive. Spray red paint on the wounded joints. Effective lighting helps. This activity may be performed with one or more performers, and simultaneously with other events.

| Alison Knowles, 1965

### **Christmas Tree Event**

Take a Christmas tree into a restaurant. Place the tree in a seat next to you. Order two cups of coffee, placing one in front of the tree. Sit with the tree, drinking coffee and talking. After a while, depart, leaving the tree in its seat. As you leave, call out loudly to the tree, "So long, Herb. Give my love to the wife and kids!"

| Ken Friedman, 1964

### **Dressing**

Two performers of clearly different length or width enter the stage area. One by one they take off their top clothing, hand the pieces to each other and put them on again. So they exchange clothing and leave the stage again.

| Willem de Ridder, 1963

up under terms such as "process art" and *arte povera*.

The object is another form. But realized objects also give rise to misunderstandings. Many feel that an object represents the artist's chosen or preferred interpretation. While this may sometimes be true, each object obscures the possibilities that are closed off when the object takes final form. An object suggests an aura of permanence that hides the process of its own making. Most objects evade the issue of process that they necessarily pass through to find a final shape. Storage, transportation, and physical change are additional problems. This is also true of the objects left behind by process, such as recordings.

It is important to consider all these issues in examining the nature of events and event scores.

At a time when many artists use scores to generate works, the attribute of musicality in score-based work requires deep reflection. Musicality has implications that pose challenges to many kinds of art, and they challenge the nature of art markets.

Transmitting and performing music demonstrates the potential of score-based work. The composer creates the score, ceding control over how the music is realized or interpreted after the score leaves the composer's hand.

To compose is to give up certain rights, and the composer loses the right of absolute control over the use and interpretation of the work. The performer determines the interpretation. The composer is obliged to acknowledge authorship even if he or she disapproves of the realization.

In score-based work, my view is that the artist also gives up a certain element of control. While some aspects of the work are protected by copyright or by moral rights in art law, score-based work inevitably permits wide interpretation. The one right that does not change is the right of authorship. Even though the creator may wish to disavow badly realized work, the work must be acknowledged. Even a bad realization must be acknowledged as a bad realization.

In this, event scores differ from the Exquisite Corpse.

Any specific enactment of the Exquisite Corpse is a multi-player game in which players invoke the rules of the game to realize a poem, a drawing, or another kind of work. Once realized, each iteration is sealed and complete. Each time a group of players enacts the rules of the Exquisite Corpse, they generate a series of moves or plays leading to a completed game.

In contrast, an event score is not a set of rules, but an instruction for work that players realize.<sup>47</sup> Each realization of a score creates an example. The continual need to interpret the score means that no iteration is ever a final realization of the work embodied in the score. It is instead a realization, an interpretation, or an example.

When artists use scores to create physical artifacts, musicality means that artists other than the creator can realize the works. While this concept was born in the fact that many artists who worked with event scores were composers, it signifies far more. Events that include instructions, games, and puzzles work this way. So do some multiples, sculptures, and paintings. In my view, the fact that Fluxus published instructions for many works in different collections of scores means that anyone who is willing to realize one of those scores can own a work by the artist. This is parallel to the way that we experience and effectively own a work of Mozart by listening to an orchestra play a Mozart score or by playing it ourselves. Another orchestra or Mozart himself might give a better rendition, but it is still Mozart's work. This, too, is the case with a work that George Brecht, Milan Knizak, Bengt af Klintberg, or Dick Higgins created to be realized from a score.

Musicality has fascinating implications. The mind and intention of the creator are the key element in the work rather than the hand. While the artist's hand is important to skillful rendition, this is unimportant in many conceptual works. In this deeper sense, musicality is linked to experimentalism and the scientific method. Scientific experiments operate in the same manner when any scientist is able to

### **Actual Clothes**

Cut a circle into all parts of your clothing.

| Milan Knizak, 1965

### **Portrait Piece**

Do this piece with a portrait of yourself or of your dearest one.

Crumple up the portrait without tearing it.

Smooth it.

Look at the face in the portrait, crumpling and smoothing it.

Look at the face through a magnifying glass.

| Mieko Shiomi, 1963

### **Biblical Fluxus 3: Fluxscore for Zealots**

1. Enter a building of idol worship.

2. Destroy idols.

| Eryk Salvaggio, 1999

### **Hens**

Three hens are released and then caught.

| Ben Vautier, 1963

**Event: 13**

From backstage, at stage left, release thirteen helium-filled balloons through a slit in the curtain. From backstage at stage right, drop thirteen white balls or eggs through a slit in the curtain.

| Robert Watts, 1962

**Film Script #6**

Water boils to nothing.

| Alan Bowman, 2001

**From 271 Ballets**

On a green lawn, twenty-eight dancers, dressed in slightly different shades of green, blend into the natural surroundings as they move about.

| Richard Kostelanetz, date unknown

reproduce the experimental work of another scientist. This also raises interesting questions for collectors who believe that the authenticity of a work is located in the handmade characteristics of the artifacts.

Musicality means that the work may be realized several times in different and sometimes original ways while remaining the same work in each state. This is comparable to conductors who perform or record a great interpretation of a Brahms requiem, returning to the work a decade or two later for a different, yet equally rich interpretation of the same work.

While musicality is a key concept in events, and certainly in Fluxus, scholars and critics have yet to give it adequate attention. Musicality means that anyone can play the music. Deep engagement with music and the spirit of the music is the central focus of musicality. In this sense, musicality may be *the* key concept in events.

In this sense, I take a more radical view of musicality than many of my colleagues. Anyone may realize my work from the score. I will acknowledge it, though there is a difference between acknowledging the work as mine, and approving every realization. While those who realize my work may wish to consult me, others may interpret my work in ways that I might not. It is possible that someone may realize a score better than I have done. Musicality implies all these possibilities. The work requires my intention. It does not require my personal interpretation. My experience is that a fluid constellation of plural interpretations sheds light on the intention of the work. This is the nature of events.

Event-based works also challenge an art market based on objects presuming an authenticity located in physical form. Much work with scores takes place in a context that touches the art market. Museums, galleries, and concert halls form a central venue for event scores, and art critics, art historians, and musicologists focus on and discuss the work. For this reason events have a different contextual meaning than folk games, parlor games, or other social practices. This context



places value, often monetary, on specific realizations by specific artists.

Some artists who work with event scores disagree with me on the meaning of musicality, and some of the strongest objections come from artists trained as composers. Artists who might particularly be expected to apply the criterion of musicality to their work on theoretical grounds reject the concept in practice. There are two main reasons.

The first issue is control. Some artists believe that their work can be realized in only one interpretation, their own. Even though that interpretation may change frequently, these artists stress specific notions of intention that must be brought out in each realization of the work.

The second issue is the market. Many artists feel that if anyone can realize authentic versions of their work, they will have nothing to sell. Even those who accept the possibility of creating objects from scores cannot solve the problem of rights and royalties. Composers and playwrights collect royalties for the performance of their work. So far there is no stable system comparable to music rights or theater fees (for plays) for artists who create scores for event-based artifacts.<sup>48</sup>

Musicality in art raises interesting, profound questions. The issues are even more intriguing now than in the 1960s. Global politics and world economies are undergoing transformation, and with them, global culture. The art world has moved from the rebirth of painting to the birth of a grotesque new materialism at exactly the same moment that a new humanism is blossoming. The boundaries between art and many other fields of endeavor—music, design, and politics, to name just a few—have dissolved. More people have come to understand the useful distinction between the valid concept of experimentalism and the reactionary concept of avant-gardism. In these exciting times, the implications of musicality, the consideration of meaning, intention, realization, and interpretation that musicality raises, are among the liveliest and interesting.

These key issues emerge in the events tradition.

## **Orchestra**

The entire orchestra plays phonographs. The orchestra tries to play a well-known classical masterwork. Instead of an instrument, every member of the orchestra has a phonograph.

This can be performed several ways: 1. All have same recording. All try to start at same time. 2. Each has different recording or version of piece. All try to start at the same time. 3. Different sections of the orchestra are given different passage to play, rotating through entire piece in sequences. 4. Each member of the orchestra starts and stops playing different sections of the recording at will.

| Ken Friedman, 1967

## **Newspaper Event**

Performers who speak at least five different languages use newspapers or books in the different languages as scores. They read the texts in time and volume according to the instructions of a composer. (Can go from very soft to extremely loud and stop, soft-loud-soft again, varied tempos, etc.)

| Alison Knowles, 1965



### Solo for Rich Man

shaking coins  
dropping coins  
striking coins  
wrinkling paper money  
fast ripping of paper money  
slow ripping of paper money  
striking paper money  
throwing coins

| George Maciunas, date  
unknown

### Radio

Performers and audience  
listen to a play over the  
radio.

| Ben Vautier, 1961

### Events Meet the Exquisite Corpse

“Neo-haiku” art forms involve the simple, concentrated forms typical of event scores. George Maciunas labeled events as a “neo-haiku” art form. Yoko Ono, in turn, spoke of this kind of work as possessing an “event bent.” I have described events as a form of “Zen Vaudeville.”<sup>49</sup>

The Exquisite Corpse and much Surrealist work constitute what Maciunas labeled “neo-baroque.” “Neo-baroque” forms involve multiple streams of complex information, often working at crosscurrents to build dense layers of competing and conflating experience. Happenings were a neo-baroque form, along with most collaged, cut-up forms. With the unpredictable psychological density created by multiple players using these approaches, so was the Exquisite Corpse.

With the birth of events, the 1960s gave rise to a new tradition in realizing works of art. Like the Exquisite Corpse, this tradition could yield finished works in the form of artifacts, as well as a performance process. Unlike the Exquisite Corpse, the open quality of events and event scores was separate from ideologies of art or music, psychology, or politics. Events are an intermedia form, an open structure allowing artists and composers to generate work that anyone may realize. The open quality of the event structure permits multiple interpretations and co-creation. Considering these two traditions in relation to one another sheds valuable light on both.

### Notes

1. Brothie and Gooding, *A Book of Surrealist Games*, 25, 73–79, 143–44. See also Breton, *Le Cadavre Exquis, Son Exaltation*.

2. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 163–64; Higgins, “Fluxus,” 222–23.

3. While the tradition of the Exquisite Corpse and the tradition of event scores shed interesting light on each other, there is no direct connection between them. Surrealism as a whole had little influence

on Fluxus. For more on this issue, see Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 168–73.

4. Despite his crucial influence on the visual art of John Cage, Dick Higgins, and others, art historians have never examined Cowell's work with the same consideration that musicologists give it. For more information on Cowell, see Cowell, *New Musical Resources*; Cowell, *Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music*.

5. Robinson, "The Brechtian Event Score," 122.

6. My first engagement with event scores took place in 1966 when Dick Higgins and George Maciunas brought me into Fluxus. When I met Dick Higgins in August 1966, Dick thought my projects were original and interesting, and felt I ought to be part of the Fluxus network. Dick introduced me to George Maciunas. When I met George, he asked me what I had been doing. I described my ideas and projects. George invited me to participate in Fluxus, immediately planning a series of Fluxus editions based on my ideas.

At the time I met Dick and George, I did not call my projects art. I had no name for them. Despite the fact that I had no name for my activities, I enacted them in public, systematic, and organized ways, realizing them in public spaces, parks, and visible arenas as well as in churches and conference centers, radio programs, and once or twice on television. I was planning to become a Unitarian minister at the time, and I saw these activities as a form of philosophical or spiritual practice.

The fact that my activities did not take place in the context of art made me quite different to the other Fluxus people. George Brecht, Nam June Paik, George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Mieko Shiomi, and others worked with event scores before I did. These were important artists and composers while my activities had no name. They worked in New York, Tokyo, London, and other metropolitan art scenes while I was a youngster in New London, Connecticut, and an adolescent in San Diego, California. Their work was known internationally, albeit underground, while I had no contact with the art world, creating my nameless projects and realizing them in any environment that seemed possible. At the same time, this fact meant that these projects were my own. The ideas were original to me and because I was not active in art or music, others did not influence me.

At George Maciunas's suggestion, I began to notate my activities in the form of event scores. These scores recorded activities from the repertoire of projects I had generated since childhood. The first public piece I recall doing, and one of the first that I described to George, involved scrubbing a public monument on the first day of spring in 1956. This became my first event score. The distinction between realizing a public action and notating it in the form of a score is the distinction that governs my work before 1966. An artist once said that if my first scored pieces took place in 1956, I would have been more important than

George Brecht. This is exactly the difference between George Brecht and me, and it is the reason that I make no such claim. Brecht scored his ideas in the 1950s. He was a central figure in pre-Fluxus activities and early Fluxus. I created my first scores when I entered the Fluxus network in 1966 to notate the activities I had been doing before I entered Fluxus.

While I developed a repertoire of activities, repeating them often in the years between 1956 and 1966, these only became formal scores in 1966 when George Maciunas explained the tradition of scores. I communicated “how to do it” instructions to friends in letters and bulletins, and I made comments in my own notes and diaries. I understood and conceived these as scores when George encouraged me to notate my ideas for publication by Fluxus.

Context determines the nature and status of social activity, and I only entered the art context in 1966. While I performed my actions or realized the projects notated in my event scores as early as 1956, these were not artworks. Brecht, Knowles, Higgins, Ono, Watts, and the others made artworks and composed music. What I did had no name. The others worked in an explicit context of art and music. I did not. There does remain an important distinction between my work and the work of later artists active in different kinds of conceptual art and performance. Even though the older participants in the Fluxus network preceded me by several years, this work was still uncommon in 1966. In those years, there were only a dozen or so people doing this kind of work, and I was one of them.

7. The etymology and meanings of the word “event” shed interesting light on these issues. The word “event” derives through Middle French from the Latin “eventus,” meaning “occurrence” or “issue,” from the word “evenire,” meaning “to come out,” “to happen.” This, in turn, grew from the combination of the suffix “e” with the word “venire,” “to come.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* gives these definitions: “something that happens . . . a noteworthy happening . . . a social occasion or activity . . . any of the contests in a program of sports . . . the fundamental entity of observed physical reality represented by a point designated by three coordinates of place and one of time in the space-time continuum postulated by the theory of relativity . . . a subset of the possible outcomes of an experiment.” The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (<http://dictionary.oed.com>; accessed August 18, 2006) defines an event: “The (actual or contemplated) fact of anything happening; the occurrence of . . . anything that happens, or is contemplated as happening; an incident, occurrence. the course of events . . . In the doctrine of chances: (a) Any one of the possible (mutually exclusive) occurrences some one of which will happen under stated conditions, and the relative probability of which may be computed. compound event: one that consists in the combined occurrence of two or more simple events. (b) Occasionally, a trial or hazard, which will result in some one of several different ways (‘events’ in the preceding sense) . . . In sport-

ing language: Something on the issue of which money is staked; also, one of the items in a programme of sports . . . That which follows upon a course of proceedings; the outcome, issue; that which proceeds from the operation of a cause; a consequence, result. in (the) event: in (the) result . . . undesigned or incidental result.”

8. Dick Higgins often marked envelopes with a rubber-stamped epigram reading, “Don’t let the professionals get you down.”

9. Friedman, “Fluxus and Company,” 250–51; Friedman, “Working with Event Scores,” 126–27.

10. Paik, quoted in Smith, *Fluxus*, 63.

11. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 163–64; Higgins, “Fluxus,” 222–23.

12. Higgins, *Postface/Jefferson’s Birthday*, 42.

13. Friedman, “The Belgrade Text,” 52–57; Friedman, “Working with Event Scores,” 124–128; Friedman, “52 Events,” 396–400.

14. Friedman, “Fluxus and Company,” 244–51.

15. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 174–82.

16. Cage’s legendary classes at the New School became a fountain of innovation for twentieth-century art and music. Just as European relic hunters located enough wooden fragments of the True Cross to build a first-rate ship of the line, enough artists and composers apparently studied in the John Cage classes to fill a sports arena. The few who actually studied with Cage—or with Richard Maxfield, who taught the class after Cage—shared what was then an unpopular range of concerns. Working from event scores was one such concern. This was a time when Abstract Expressionism was the most highly publicized tendency in visual art, before the even more materialistic medium of Pop Art replaced it. The market did not govern music in such a dramatic way, but few composers had an interest in the radical forms that Cage and his students developed. Interest in Cage’s class grew as the class receded into a history whose teacher and students became increasingly famous.

17. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 163.

18. For a history of Fluxus, see Smith, *Fluxus*; “Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing,” in Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader*, 3–21. See also Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*; Higgins, “Fluxus.”

19. For a rich discussion of artist networks and their dynamics, Fluxus among them, see Chandler and Neumark, *At A Distance*.

20. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 11. For a concise history of event scores in Fluxus, see Dezeuze, “Origins of the Fluxus Score,” 78–94. For an analysis of event scores as a common structure among Fluxus artists, see Robinson, “The Brechtian Event Score.” A large collection of event scores is available in Friedman, Smith, and Sawchyn, *Fluxus Performance Workbook*. It is available for free download at <http://thing.net/~grist/ld/fluxusworkbook.pdf>.

21. The most notable example of this was the exhibition *Ubi Fluxus, ibi Motus*, organized at the Biennale of Venice in 1990. For more information, see Bonito Oliva, Di Maggio, and Sassi, *Ubi Fluxus, ibi Motus*.

22. For more on the concept of the invisible college, see Crane, *Invisible Colleges*; Price, *Little Science, Big Science*; Price, *Little Science, Big Science . . . and Beyond*; Zuccala, "Modeling the Invisible College," 152–68.

23. For the development and transmission of knowledge within guilds, see Friedman, "Design Science and Design Education," 55, 61–63; for more on guild training, see also Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior*; Lowry, *Autumn Lightning*; Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*.

24. For more on the concept of communities of practice, see Wenger, *Communities of Practice*; Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*. For more on organizational learning and knowledge management, see Friedman and Olaisen, "Knowledge Management," 14–29; Nonaka and Takeuchi, *The Knowledge-creating Company*; Dierkes, Antal, Child, and Nonaka, *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge*.

25. Bengt af Klintberg, quoted in Sellem, "The Fluxus Outpost in Sweden," 69; see also Bengt af Klintberg, "Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore," 115–25; Bengt af Klintberg, *Svensk Fluxus/Swedish Fluxus*. For more on traditional folk games and activities, see Chase, *American Folk Tales and Songs*; Chase, *Singing Games and Playparty Games*.

26. Friedman, "Fluxus and Company," 248; Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 174–76; Higgins, "Fluxus," 224–26.

27. Higgins, "Fluxus," 223.

28. Participants in the Fluxus network performed together often. Shared experience and common knowledge led to a repertory tradition. This tradition made it possible to present a concert of established scores on short notice.

At Fluxus West, for example, we developed a traveling repertory ensemble that often included pick-up participants and workshop participants. From late 1966 through 1971 or 1972, I organized activities and exhibitions at the Fluxus centers in San Diego, San Francisco, and the Los Angeles area. We also traveled in the Fluxmobile, a Volkswagen bus equipped for exhibitions, performances, and concerts. We performed a regular repertoire of events by such artists and composers as Genpei Akasegawa, Ay-O, Robert Bozzi, George Brecht, Albert M. Fine, Ken Friedman, Hi Red Center, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyonagi, Joe Jones, Bengt af Klintberg, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Takehisa Koguchi, Jackson Mac Low, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, and Emmett Williams.

We used scores from the different collections published by Fluxus and Something Else Press. Most of these scores now appear in the *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, together with event scores by such Fluxus artists as Jean Dupuy, Larry Miller, Jed Curtis, or Anne Tardos.

In pre-Fluxus concerts by the New York Audiovisual Group and in concerts at Yoko Ono's loft on Chambers Street in New York City, performers or conductors chose the program. This approach is anchored in classical music tradition, and it became the traditional way to organize early Fluxus concerts. This remains the most common way of creating and performing events at Fluxus concerts.

Seeking ways to explore and widen the event format, some of us developed additional ways to select works, to generate concerts, and to perform or present events. I focused on extending ways to approach events during the years between 1966 and 1972 when I was performing and organizing concerts on an almost-daily basis. While the repertory method remained the standard format, with performers or the conductor selecting the program, I began to explore other ways to present and interpret the work. These included ways to exhibit events outside the concert format, and many ways to present or work with events in broadcast format or live engagement. During these years, I also experimented with formats that involved audience selection. I continued to experiment with different ways to select and structure concerts in later years when I organized programs in what became the Event Structures Workshop format.

The approaches to selecting, realizing, and presenting events can be summarized in a taxonomy that I developed to examine these issues. These methods overlap, including ways to select as well as to present. Since some of these systems incorporate methods from several taxa; this is not a comprehensively systematic taxonomy. Nevertheless it offers an idea of the wide variety of methods that began with the artists in John Cage's courses in the 1950s, especially George Brecht, Al Hansen, and Dick Higgins.

The event became a central medium for the artists who established the Fluxus network in 1962. Several members of this group helped to generate ways to present and realize events. These included Bengt af Klintberg, Alison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Ben Patterson, Mieko Shiomi, and La Monte Young. By the middle of the 1960s, Fluxus artists in other places had begun to explore the medium. These included Milan Knizak and the Aktual artists in Prague, and me and others at Fluxus West. All of these artists helped to develop original methods for selecting, realizing, and presenting events, as well as contributing original works. So did artists who entered the Fluxus context later, notably including Jean Dupuy, Larry Miller, and Jock Reynolds. A much larger group developed works using the event form, but these developed the medium itself, as well as more recent innovators, including Knud Pedersen, Secret Fluxus, and Lisa Moren.

This is a taxonomy rather than a chronology. Items therefore do not appear in historical order. The taxonomy moves from concert presentation through mediated presentation to reflection and documentation. Item 1.1, "Performers in concert choose works," probably emerged as the first method of concert

presentation with the New York Audiovisual Group, the Yoko Ono loft concerts, and early Fluxus concerts arranged by George Maciunas and other individual Fluxus artists. These come first in the taxonomy because concert methods come first in taxonomical order. In historical terms, however, item 18.1, “presenting and performing to a group of colleagues,” probably represents the first method of showing and performing scores. The development of event scores as we know them today began in the context of teaching and learning at John Cage’s course in new music composition at the New School for Social Research, and the participants in that course established the earliest history of regular event performances.

In a similar way, the taxonomy organizes broadcast concerts and broadcast-related presentation methods before published collections. For that reason, the 2002 digital edition of the *Fluxus Performance Workbook* precedes the earlier printed edition of 1989. Even though some documentary collections preceded recent activities, activities of all kinds come before documentation. For that reason, even though Jon Hendricks’s books and catalogues of the 1980s serve as a major source of event scores and information for projects in the 1990s, some of the projects preceded Hendricks’s publications in the taxonomy.

The taxonomy focuses on ways to select, realize and present events. Media listed here are presented in terms of realizing or presenting event scores. While many artists work with ceramics, for example, I only know about event scores in ceramics by Dick Higgins or myself. So, too, the nature of Fluxus as an experimental laboratory meant that artists borrowed from one another extensively, building on each other’s work. Yoko Ono was probably the first artist to exhibit event scores as the entire body of a show when she arranged a one-day exhibition of her scores to accompany a concert of her work in Tokyo. Artists later included events in many exhibition contexts and formats. In 1973 I became the first artist to present a solo exhibition comprised entirely of event scores for a show at the University of California at Davis. This became the first traveling exhibition comprised only of event scores, touring in a printed edition of standard sheets of letter paper. In the late 1980s, Yoko Ono built on her own earlier work and the intervening contributions to circulate an exhibition comprised extensively of event scores in a large, elegant format on canvas.

29. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 163–64.

30. I worked extensively with Surrealist games when I taught a course titled Surrealism in Everyday Life at the San Francisco State College Experimental College in the spring of 1967, offered through the English department as a parallel, credit-bearing course titled Literature of Surrealism and the Avant-Garde. The San Francisco State College Experimental College had several important Fluxus connections. Fluxus artist Jeff Berner was the founding dean of arts and humanities, and the man who gave me my start in college teaching. Richard Maxfield occasionally lectured in Experimental College courses when he taught

at San Francisco State College (SFSC). Before Maxfield moved to California, John Cage had selected him as Cage's successor, teaching the famous class at the New School for Social Research, where La Monte Young worked as Maxfield's assistant. San Francisco State College Experimental College was also the site of the first course in intermedia ever taught in a university. I created it and taught it along with the parallel experimental course in intermedia that I developed and taught at the SFSC Department of Radio, Television, and Film. The story of that class appears in Hans Breder's recent book on intermedia, along with accounts of Breder's pioneering intermedia program at University of Iowa, site of many additional Fluxus projects. See Friedman, "Intermedia: four histories, three directions, two futures."

31. Schneider, "A Note on the Exquisite Corpse," 85.

32. Schneider, "A Note on the Exquisite Corpse," 85.

33. For a useful, concise collection of Surrealist games, see Brothie and Gooding, *Surrealist Games*.

34. Paik, quoted in Smith, *Fluxus*, 63. This was more than a score summarizing an aspect of Fluxus, however. When people outside New York approached George Maciunas to ask him to organize or arrange a Fluxus project for them, his reply was often "do it yourself." By this, he meant using or recycling published materials, scores, and artifacts, bringing them into a new format or context by realizing them on a local basis. The concept was also central to the longest-lived and most durable Fluxus gallery, the Emily Harvey Gallery of New York and Venice, Italy. George Maciunas's last aboveground loft space at 537 Broadway became Jean Dupuy's Grommet Gallery. (Long before, in a prophecy of Fluxus, it had been the site of P. T. Barnum's theater and museum, a project that, unlike his circus, lasted only a few years.) Dupuy's memorable and influential Grommet Gallery lasted only a short time. In contrast, Emily Harvey Gallery has endured for a quarter century, continuing still as a foundation with gallery and residential properties in New York and in Venice. In some ways, Harvey ran a private museum, and many of her exhibitions involved what she labeled, with a New England sense of humor, "self-help." Where most gallery owners handle all details of installation and exhibition, Harvey often expected Fluxus artists to demonstrate do-it-yourself ingenuity by participating in the organization and presentation of their work at her gallery.

35. Dick, *Dick's 100 Amusements*. Many games in this collection bear a striking resemblance to Fluxus activities. It always amused Fluxus artist—and Something Else Press publisher—Dick Higgins to note that many readers mistakenly believed this to be an anthology of his own proposals and event scores. When he discussed the book, however, he was always careful to explain that he was not its author. See Dick Higgins's *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 181, 226.

36. Klintberg, "Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore."



37. Rothenberg, *Technicians of the Sacred*; Rothenberg, *Technicians of the Sacred*, revised ed.; Rothenberg, *Shaking the Pumpkin*.

38. Rothenberg and Quasha, *America, a Prophecy*.

39. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

40. Several factors may account for this. Analyzing them is beyond the scope of this article, but I suspect that it has something to do with the difference between the Exquisite Corpse as a game and the Exquisite Corpse as a set of rules for generating art works, and any specific artwork generated by those rules. If people wish to play a game, as they do in chess or ball games, they use the rules to generate the play. If they wish to focus on a specific result, they focus on an outcome. Some people delight in specific examples of the Exquisite Corpse just as chess enthusiasts may relish a specific sequence of moves or a classic game. I address a slightly different aspect of this issue later in this article, where I contrast the Exquisite Corpse as a set of game rules with event scores (or music scores) as artifacts that enable players to realize a specific game or series of moves.

41. In a comment on this chapter, one reviewer noted: "Friedman's historiography and genealogy of events . . . might do well to make reference to the philosophical concept (currently popularized by the likes of Alain Badiou), which seems, especially in its contemporary form to owe much to the Fluxus concept." While I agree entirely with this suggestion, the space permitted to a single chapter in this book makes this impossible. I can sketch the short outline of such an article, however. If I were to write an article on the philosophical genealogy of events, I would start with Heraclitus and other pre-Socratic philosophers, especially Parmenides and the Eleatics, moving to Socrates' contemporary, Diogenes. Another tradition descends from the author of Job and the writings of Koheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes, and I would consider the book of Sirach from the Apocrypha. After the Bible, the discussion would jump to the east to discuss Han-Shan, the hermit of Cold Mountain, and the early Zen masters. (This exploration is at least partly written in David Doris's excellent chapter on Fluxus and Zen in *The Fluxus Reader*.) From there, it would move through Albertus Magnus and Pierre Abelard up to the nineteenth century to discuss Kierkegaard. In the 1960s, Kierkegaard was a central figure for me, and I often discussed his thinking in workshops on events. Nietzsche's aphorisms would play a role in the discourse, along with the theologian Paul Tillich. On several occasions in the 1960s and 1970s, I lectured or taught seminars at Starr King School at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, framing events in the context of Tillich's ideas on art. It would probably be useful to develop some ideas from two pragmatist philosophers, George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, with special reference to the subsequent work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann on the concept of the symbolic universe and world building. Then it would be possible to move forward in time to Alain Badiou's work

on the event, as well as some of relevant concepts from Jacques Derrida.

As you can see, this is a difficult piece of writing, and it is impossible to do justice to these ideas in a limited space. I proposed some notions on a theology of Fluxus at the Fluxus seminar Bertrand Clavez organized at the La Tourette Monastery. This is where that discussion would lead.

42. The 1960s and 1970s saw the development of an “art for the household” tradition, with artists and publishers generating works, projects, and artifacts for the intimate context of daily use.

43. Adorno, “Vierhändig, noch einmal,” 142–43; Adorno, “Four Hands, Once Again,” 3.

44. Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, two artists who collaborate as The Art Guys, propose a fifth form, “as joke.” This proposal nicely captures the quality of events as works realized in play. The term “joke” can range from broad slapstick to gentle subversion, from subtle paradox to dialectical engagement, suggesting not so much a structural form as an existential quality that can apply to any of the four structural forms an event may take. For more on The Art Guys, see The Art Guys, *Suits*; The Art Guys, *The Art Guys Think Twice*.

45. Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 40.

46. For more on process in music and other activities, see Friedman, “Behavioral Artifacts,” 35–39.

47. One may reasonably ask whether the Exquisite Corpse itself is the score for a work that players realize. As I see it, the difference between the Corpse and a score in this sense is that the Corpse is a system for generating works, while any given score is a mechanism for generating a specific work. Even though any score may generate multiple interpretations, it is the concept of the event score as a system that corresponds to the concept of the Corpse as a system.

48. Hans Ulrich Obrist has come the closest to devising a system that allows an artist to sell scores rather than objects. His exhibition *Do It* allowed galleries and museums to realize scores in exchange for a fee paid to the artists. For more information on this project, see Obrist, *Do It*.

49. For more on the relation between Fluxus and Zen, see Doris, “Zen Vaudeville,” in Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader*, 91–135.

## Cutting Up the Corpse

OLIVER HARRIS

# 4

### An American in Paris

In the summer of 1961, thirty-six years after its original discovery, three examples of the verbal Exquisite Corpse appeared in the second issue of *LOCUS SOLUS*, edited by John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and Harry Matthews. Published in Geneva, this “Special Collaborations” issue of the magazine put out by the New York School of poets should be regarded, according to David Shapiro, as “one of the basic texts in considering a theory of collaboration.”<sup>1</sup> With over forty names on the front cover, the contents of this de facto manifesto for a “pluralist aesthetic” ranged widely—from a song by Shakespeare and Fletcher and a poem by Coleridge and Southey to translations of Japanese linked verse—although the historical grounding and theoretical framework of the collection is evident from its epigraph: “La poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un.”<sup>2</sup> Lautréamont’s famous critique of individual authorship, a dictum so enthusiastically taken up by André Breton, confirms the centrality here of Surrealist collaborative work in translation, including a section from *The Immaculate Conception* by Breton and Éluard. Tucked away, in between the “Question and Answer Game” by Breton and Tanguy and “Two Poems” by Char and Éluard, were the three Exquisite Corpses, including the original line that gave the game its name.

*LOCUS SOLUS II* appeared in the context of a general postwar revival of interest in European avant-garde movements, collaborative work, chance procedures, and collage-based methods that crossed or combined media. This included such events as the “Art of Assemblage” exhibition at MOMA, also in 1961, and such publications as *PIN* by Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann, which in 1962 hailed the rediscovery of “new tendencies in poeting and paintry.”<sup>3</sup> Although, of the four poets, only Schuyler was even born when the game was first played in Yves Tanguy’s lodgings on the rue du Château in late 1925, the Exquisite Corpse had a paradigmatic status for the New York School. Not only did it model the poets’ own playful experiments in collective creativity, it also signaled a curious circuit of transatlantic cultural exchange, as the Corpse passed in a series of relays from one generation to another and between painters and poets. For in the 1950s the New York School poets took their concept of artistic collaboration directly from the example of the New York Abstract Expressionist painters. And the likes of Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell had in turn been introduced to the Exquisite Corpse in New York during the early 1940s by the major Surrealists; encouraging the Americans to play with the Corpse, the Surrealists in exile from occupied France had, as Cynthia Jaffee McCabe notes, “transferred the concept of artistic collaboration to the young artists of their host nation.”<sup>4</sup> In the late 1950s two of the four New York School poets then retraced the journey of the French Surrealists in the opposite direction, so that by the time they published *LOCUS SOLUS*, Ashbery and Matthews were already living as expatriates in Paris, home of the Corpse.<sup>5</sup>

This episode of cultural history marked by the magazine of the New York School poets creates the context for what follows, which is focused on the experiments of another American in Paris in the early sixties. For *LOCUS SOLUS II* also included texts that signaled another new engagement by expatriate writers with the material methods and group affiliations of the historical avant-garde. These were examples of the “cut-up” method, initially discovered by the painter Brion Gysin in September 1959, and then, in a career move that was an extraordinary act of brinkmanship for a novelist, taken up and developed by William Burroughs throughout the sixties. Far from

coincidentally, as with the Corpse, the cut-up project originated in Paris, in the so-called Beat Hotel. Situated on rue Git-le-Coeur, just three kilometers from rue du Château on the other side of the Jardin du Luxembourg, the Left Bank hotel was the on-and-off home to Burroughs and Gysin for five years, and port of call for poet friends and cut-up collaborators including Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Sinclair Beiles, and Harold Norse. It was in Paris that Burroughs met Ashbery, discussed the use of cut-up methods, and so came to contribute to *LOCUS SOLUS*.<sup>6</sup>

As for Burroughs' cut-up contributions, the two texts published in the magazine ("Everywhere March Your Head" and "Sons of Your In") had a very particular history and identity. Originally they had appeared a year earlier in *Minutes to Go*, the launching manifesto of the cut-up method, coauthored by Burroughs, Corso, Gysin, and Beiles. Irrespective of their content, the texts therefore made an implicit polemical connection to *LOCUS SOLUS* in its own function as a group manifesto. Geoff Ward's observation of how precisely the magazine "theorized and historicized" collaborative writing<sup>7</sup> is borne out equally by the specific content of these cut-up texts and by the way they were presented here.

An explanatory note, taken from *Minutes to Go* and given after both texts, clarifies that the two texts were each a "Cut up of Rimbaud's 'To a Reason,' arrangement by Burroughs & Corso."<sup>8</sup> Within *Minutes to Go*, these two texts had accorded Rimbaud a unique prominence—one given historical meaning by the fact that the Surrealists had claimed him as one of their own. While Burroughs made the relationship fully explicit in following texts, the very fact of choosing to cut up Rimbaud's poetry tacitly defined the cut-up method in relation to the canons and methods of Surrealism. The choice of a Rimbaud cut-up was therefore ideal from the point of view of *LOCUS SOLUS* and the literary histories it was bringing together. If the selection of texts had a particular resonance, so too the presentation: for here, at the top of the page, the cut-ups are attributed to "William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, & Arthur Rimbaud"—a much more striking statement of coauthorship than the note given in *Minutes to Go*.<sup>9</sup> The texts seemed to fulfill *both* forms of literary collaboration theorized by Kenneth Koch in his "Note on

This Issue,” for these were not only texts made by “two or more poets actually together while they wrote” but also “composed by poets working with already existing texts.”<sup>10</sup>

Burroughs criticism has often noted the legacy of Surrealism, usually by recycling his own polemical statements on the relation, but there has been no more than a single, passing, comparison of the cut-up with the Exquisite Corpse.<sup>11</sup> This oversight probably reflects the fact that neither Burroughs nor Gysin mentioned it directly, and the only time examples of both methods ever appeared together was in *LOCUS SOLUS II*. Although this unique point of intersection is narrow with respect to the full range of the cut-up project—the variety of methods used over time, purposes theorized, and results achieved across several media (photomontage, collage scrapbooks, tape recordings, films)—it does open up for comparative analysis specific histories of related cultural and textual experiment. Building on other studies of its aesthetic and political dimensions,<sup>12</sup> here I want to put the cut-up project beside the Exquisite Corpse on Lautréamont’s operating table, and see what emerges from their encounter.

#### Four young explorers

For Kenneth Koch, collaboration between poets was inherently and radically inspiring: “The strangeness of the collaborating situation, many have felt, might lead them to the unknown, or at least to some dazzling insights at which they could never have arrived consciously or alone.”<sup>13</sup> While he went on to identify two broad understandings of literary collaboration—one where writers compose together, the other where they work with already written texts—Koch was happy to see the second as a variant on the first, so conflating an important distinction with regard to the Exquisite Corpse and the cut-up.<sup>14</sup> However, before considering the acts themselves in these terms, and before making any concrete textual analysis of their results, it’s necessary to address the collaborative *movement* that was the context for the discovery and development of each.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the cut-up method, like the Exquisite Corpse game, was the paradigmatic creative act of a collaborative group. After all, *Minutes to Go* was the manifesto of four writers, and not just in the same sense that *LOCUS SOLUS* had

four contributing editors. Firstly, it was an openly proselytizing polemic, directly promoting the method to its readers and inviting them to apply it. And secondly, the ideology informing its joint authorship was spelled out in a grid on the front cover which seemed to apply the cut-up method to their very names, creating four new composite authors: “Wm Bubrio, Rroungy Ghsin, Sincgreg Lairory, and Beilcors Eso.” The deconstruction signaled a critique of individual originality that coincided with the production of new hybrid identities, very much in the manner of the Exquisite Corpse.

The number of collaborators here—four—is itself not without significance, since it corresponded to the quartering operation of the basic cut-up action, as described by Burroughs in “The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin” (first published in January 1961): “The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and across the middle. You now have four sections. . . . Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three.”<sup>15</sup>

Burroughs’ instructions for dividing the page into four sections offer interesting parallels to the collaborative practice of the Exquisite Corpse, although it’s revealing that it is the *pictorial*—rather than verbal version—that it most resembles, in two key respects.

Firstly, in a very broad sense, Burroughs’ quartering of the textual body as if it were *material* declares the method’s painterly origins. It recalls both the general context and precise circumstances of Gysin’s original act of discovery: “While cutting a mount for a drawing in room 25, I sliced through a pile of newspapers with my Stanley Blade and thought of what I had said to Burroughs some six months earlier about the necessity for turning painters’ techniques directly onto writing.”<sup>16</sup>

Arising from a material accident occurring within a framework of inter-disciplinary artistic discussion, the method answered Gysin’s now-famous proposition to Burroughs that “Writing is fifty years behind painting,” because of writers’ failure to apply the revolutionary potentials of collage practices. Collage had in turn long been understood in terms of collaborative creativity, as in Max Ernst’s proposal that “the systematic fusion of the thoughts of two or more authors in the same work (otherwise called ‘collaboration’) can also be con-

sidered a relation of collage.”<sup>17</sup> Gysin was well aware of such definitions, having known Ernst in the Surrealist circles of Paris in the 1930s and in New York during the 1940s. Burroughs’ description of the simplest cut-up method was actually informed, via Gysin, by a sophisticated grasp of the history of fertilizing crossovers between visual and verbal media and different modes of collage and collaboration.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, there is a precise relation between the quartering method of cutting-up and the creation of a pictorial Corpse because four was also the preferred—or rather, the *perfect*—number for the drawing game, as is evident from the many examples showing three creased horizontal lines, visible marks of the folding process that creates the four sections from which the Corpse is constructed. (As Koch notes in *LOCUS SOLUS*, the ideal number for the written version was *five*, corresponding to the syntactical rules by which a sentence was produced.)<sup>19</sup> Although *three* would become the special number in Burroughs and Gysin’s well-known theory of collaboration, magically arising from two—“The third mind is there when two minds collaborate”<sup>20</sup>—in the early days of the cut-up project Burroughs was definitely fascinated by four as the number of collaboration. Hence, in both *Minutes to Go* and the first edition of *The Soft Machine* (1961), he alludes to a narrative, also published separately, “based on recent newspaper account of ? four young explorers”: “it seems the party were given to exchange of identifications . . . and even to writing in each other’s diaries an unheard of intimacy in any modern expedition.”<sup>21</sup> This mysterious quartet clearly paralleled the four cut-up “explorers” of *Minutes to Go*, and in fact the most revealing evidence for seeing the method itself as part of a collaborative “expedition” again features the magic number four. It comes as a suggestion Burroughs made in July 1960, when writing to the publisher of *The Exterminator* (the sequel to *Minutes to Go*): “Perhaps a game would do it. Like, say four people each write a page on any subject comes to mind. Then cut and rearrange. With squared paper and the cut lines drawn you dig.”<sup>22</sup>

Burroughs’ cut-up game sounds a lot like the Exquisite Corpse, and evokes a similar scene of group activity, one where the social



pleasure of play produces a collective outcome that is more than the sum of its rearranged parts.

It comes as no surprise to find that, over a year before it was put to new polemical use in *LOCUS SOLUS II*, Burroughs had himself taken up Lautréamont's famous call to collective arms (although he always misattributed it to Tristan Tzara): "Say it again: 'Poetry is for everyone.'" <sup>23</sup> The communal Corpse of Surrealism had seemingly been resurrected by cutting it up.

"Will//////// ughs ////////// ward//////// Burro// iam / Se."

Such evidence for what the Exquisite Corpse and the cut-up method shared as collaborative activities can all be viewed in a very different light, however. Take the game Burroughs proposed. When he suggested, "a game would do it," this isn't to say that he thought the cut-up method was itself a game. For the "it" here refers to his desire to *promote* the method: he looked to a game, another form of activity altogether, as a way to get others involved in cutting up so that they could better understand his practice.<sup>24</sup> Equally Burroughs' idea takes on a different meaning when it is placed in relation to the chronology of his cut-up publications. *Minutes to Go* had appeared in April 1960, but by the time *The Exterminator* came out later that year, the number of collaborators had halved. Four had become two, as Burroughs acknowledged in another letter to *The Exterminator's* publisher: "Difficulties with my colleagues resulted in a considerable shift of material as you can see. Leaves only two names connected with THE EXTERMINATOR."<sup>25</sup> Since this was written in March, and Burroughs came up with his game for four players in July, the idea seems to arise in defiance of his own recent experience of a *failure* to sustain group collaboration.

This little scenario suggests the need to rethink not only the relationship between the Corpse and the cut-up, but equally the relation between Burroughs' method, collaborative creativity, and the context of a movement.

At the most basic level, the methods can be distinguished according to Koch's two types of collaboration. Self-evidently, the Corpse game exemplified his first type because it was *inherently* collaborative in terms of participants working together; if not four or five, it required the input of at least two. At this point, we begin to see just

how particular the selection of cut-up texts was for *LOCUS SOLUS*. For it not only presented examples uniquely based on “collaborating” with Rimbaud’s writing—an instance of Koch’s second type—but also two of the very few published instances of texts resulting from the collaboration of two cut-up practitioners. The cut-up books for which Burroughs is famous—his trilogy of novels—were collaborative only in marginal or secondary senses, and there are only three conventionally coauthored works in his oeuvre.<sup>26</sup> Equally, the standard bibliography lists over 350 magazine publications covering the period 1957–1973, but the Burroughs-Corso collaborations are two of only four texts credited to more than one author. Although it wouldn’t be accurate to say that those published in *LOCUS SOLUS* were atypical—since it falsely presumes the existence of a *typical* cut-up text—they were certainly not representative.

The primary theoretical support for the cut-up as an exercise in collaboration is Burroughs and Gysin’s *The Third Mind* (which included as an introduction the only critical essay to compare cutting up with the Exquisite Corpse). And yet its coauthorship follows the example of *The Exterminator*—also by Burroughs and Gysin—rather than *Minutes to Go*. Once again the reduction of four to two implies a limited collaborative practice. In addition, what’s striking about *The Third Mind* is that the texts collected in it are all signed by either Burroughs or Gysin; none are credited to their collaborative authorship. In fact, although Gysin dismissed “Breton’s precious and pseudoautomatic writing” as irrelevant,<sup>27</sup> one book that did exemplify the “third mind” was *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920) by Breton and Philippe Soupault. Their names appear on the cover, but the sections inside are not credited to either, so that the writing can only be attributed to a mysterious, composite third.

Finally, on closer inspection, “collaboration” is a term hardly used in *The Third Mind*, and when it is defined here it is in *relation* to cutting up rather than as integral to it. In “Fold-ins” (originally presented to the Edinburgh Writers Conference in 1962), Burroughs comments: “The method could also lead to a collaboration between writers on an unprecedented scale to produce works that were the composite effort of any number of writers living and dead.”<sup>28</sup> Note the threefold qualification—*could also lead to*—and the conflation of writers *living and dead*. As in Koch’s second type of collaboration,

Burroughs is talking about intertextuality, in which it is *writings* that produce a “composite” work, not *writers*. In this context, the “*tous*” in Lautréamont’s dictum is equated with “any number” of texts, and is worked on “*par un*.”

A polyphonic signifying practice that critiqued language as a transparent medium of expression, the cut-up method implied that this “*un*” was in fact many—a radically decentered hybrid like the scrambled identities on the cover of *Minutes to Go*. However, whereas the Exquisite Corpse required the participation of other practitioners, the cut-up writer needed only a sheet of typed paper and a pair of scissors. There was nothing inherent in the method that required others to practice it or that they work collaboratively. What emerges, in short, is that collaboration was promoted along with the cut-up method in the context of launching a *movement*.

From the outset, Burroughs and Gysin defined their discovery in relation to techniques of the historical avant-garde—collage, chance operations, automatism—and, as a consequence, in relation to the collective projects of which they were a part. As James Grauerholz observes: “In true Surrealist fashion, Burroughs and Gysin envisioned their discovery as the foundation of a new worldwide movement in all the arts, but specifically in writing—and a literary ‘Cut-Up Movement’ took root during the middle to late 1960s in Germany, England, and the United States.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, Burroughs and Gysin didn’t so much model their movement on Surrealism, as they defined it in an openly antagonistic relation.

Again and again in the early polemical writings, the Dadaist Tristan Tzara is invoked (for his proto-cut-up method, “pour faire un poème dadaïste”) in order to blast the Surrealists. Thus in *Minutes to Go*, acknowledging that cut-ups “are not a new Discovery,” Gysin praised the revolutionary potentials of Tzara’s method only to complain that he had been “diverted into the Communist Panic by the Art Wing of the Freudian Conspiracy calling itself Surrealism under André Breton. We don’t want to see it happen again. Above all I don’t.”<sup>30</sup> As a young painter, Gysin had been expelled from a Surrealist exhibition by Breton, and his final phrases confirm that the antipathy towards Communism and Freudianism—which he shared with Burroughs—and the art-historical knowledge he brought to cut-up

methods—which he passed on to Burroughs—were shaped by bitter personal experience of the historical art movements. Gysin's hostility to comparisons with the Surrealists would only have been heightened by Burroughs's and Corso's recent experience at the hands of French art-magazine interviewers. Corso, who had no axe to grind, reported that "they wanted me to say the Beat Generation is founded on Surrealism," a notion he rejected on the grounds it had been an elitist "social clique," whereas "the Beat claim that it is possible for any man to write a poem . . . if he only 'free' himself."<sup>31</sup>

Burroughs and Gysin declared what they called an "Open Bank" policy, which applied the logic of Lautréamont's call by freely giving away their discovery; as Burroughs recalled, their "basic postulate, *Poetry for all*, dictated that the method be revealed and explained."<sup>32</sup> Or as Gysin announced in *Minutes to Go*, "the writing machine is for everybody."<sup>33</sup> The other side of the coin was an understanding of cutting up as a way to deconstruct a possessive authorial ego, and it was in keeping with this that they promoted the method as part of a collective (but non-ideological) movement, rather than any one writer's invention. Hence the critique they directed at Breton, put most forcefully by Harold Norse in his cut-up collection, *Beat Hotel*: "MY IDEA! MY INVENTION! MY WORDS'—MY God!—makes you puke—never credit sources know what I mean? Every movement has one—always a Pope."<sup>34</sup> Ironically, Burroughs's own introduction to Norse's book implied a certain symmetry between the cut-up and Surrealist movements: "We were well on the way to launching a literary movement, complete with *copains* and enemies. (It is said that André Breton, dictator of the Surrealists, wrote and answered twenty abusive letters a day.)"<sup>35</sup>

There were no excommunications of cut-up collaborators, but the "difficulties" with colleagues that left only Burroughs and Gysin as contributors to *The Exterminator* did represent a crucial splitting of the initial cut-up movement. Although Sinclair Beiles had withdrawn because he suffered a breakdown, Gregory Corso left because, after an initial enthusiasm, he now wanted no further part in it. *Minutes to Go* even included as a "Post-script" the dramatic statement of Corso's retraction. At its center was a distinction between "uninspired machine-poetry" and what Corso (like Ginsberg) gen-

erally termed “poesy”: “Word poetry is for everyman, but soul poetry—alas, is not heavily distributed.”<sup>36</sup> While this wasn’t quite an abusive letter, it’s still significant that Burroughs’s reaction was to *cut up* Corso’s postscript—clearly to be understood as a hostile act.<sup>37</sup>

Corso’s withdrawal from the cut-up group of four was an index of how old alliances were breaking down around Burroughs as new ones emerged, a shift in aesthetic direction that is unfortunately disguised by the fact that cut-up headquarters took the name “Beat Hotel.” For two months after Ginsberg left (in July 1958), Gysin moved in, and from then on Burroughs began to break from his old, loosely grouped, Beat literary associations: Corso belonged to that past, and his hostility to Burroughs’ new method (and, by association, to his new circle) was of a piece with the reactions of Ginsberg and Kerouac. Opening up a distance between the cut-up and Beat movements was a by-product, if not the intention, of including Corso’s retraction within *Minutes to Go*.<sup>38</sup>

Burroughs’ reference to “*copains* and enemies” suggests the way in which a movement needs an external other for self-definition—especially a movement that invested its methods with political as well as aesthetic ambitions, and that was held together by a shared sense of radical possibilities during that “hectic, portentous time in Paris.”<sup>39</sup> But this dynamic also points toward the intimacies—creative as well as social—encouraged by the group identity. And in this respect both the cut-up method and the Exquisite Corpse game did seem to inspire a distinct communal experience.

In Paris during the 1920s and 1960s very similar accounts were given of the spooky, apparently transpersonal communication that arose from both practices. From playing the Corpse and taking part in other experimental exercises in spontaneous creative collaboration, all in an atmosphere of “comradely excitement,”<sup>40</sup> Breton deduced his “*mise en commun*” or pooling of thought.<sup>41</sup> In relation to the Exquisite Corpse, he drew attention to the “considerable enigma” posed by “the frequent encounter of elements with similar associational origins in the course of the collective production of a sentence or a drawing.”<sup>42</sup> Four decades later, Harold Norse found equally inexplicable congruence in cut-ups produced individually by residents of the Beat Hotel: “Comparing our works, we found whole word-

clusters and images, as well as style, astonishingly related, often identical.”<sup>43</sup> Such coincidences might well be explained in terms of the fervent communal atmospheres in which they arose, but they also point toward a specific psychological aspect of each activity: the paradox of expecting the unexpected. For in both cutting up texts and in writing or drawing the Corpse, the surprise for the practitioner, and the fascination, arises from anticipating the apparently chance production of significance.

Consider the initial reactions to each discovery, first of the Corpse (in Simone Collinet’s account) and then of the cut-up (in Brion Gysin’s):<sup>44</sup>

André shouted for joy, and immediately saw in [the Exquisite Corpse] one of those natural sources or cascades of inspiration that he so loved discovering. . . . The suggestive power of these arbitrary juxtapositions of words was so stupefying and dazzling, it so brilliantly verified the Surrealist thesis and mentality, that the game became a system, a research method . . . perhaps even a drug.

I picked up the raw words and began to piece together texts which later appeared as “First Cut Ups” in *Minutes to Go*. At the time I thought them hilariously funny and hysterically meaningful. I laughed so loud my neighbors thought I’d flipped.

Each account features the immediate and intense pleasure of discovery and the equally important sense of *recognition*, of having found by accident something that made perfect sense. Then again, in both cases what was discovered answered to a larger underlying *need*—whether Breton’s for a new, exciting game to unify his group, or Gysin’s for a collage technique that Burroughs could apply “directly onto writing.” The intoxication of discovery was, in a sense, only to be expected.

The original experiences inaugurated a dialectical relationship between surprise and expectation, novelty and repetition. The game or method is found “hysterically meaningful,” comes to fascinate the practitioner, and is taken up obsessively, like a drug. There is something of the *séance* and the Ouija board about both practices (“Table

tapping? Perhaps”),<sup>45</sup> an auratic or fetishistic pleasure in its results, and it is not surprising that Burroughs and Gysin—who, like many of the Surrealists, were attracted to the occult—embraced cutting up as a technique of divination. For in both activities, meaning is not expressed but discovered, isn’t put into words but comes from them. Very soon accidents are invited, cryptic personal messages anticipated, and fragments collected together like pieces of a puzzle. Since chance played a vital role in both collage and automatism within Surrealism, Breton’s notion of *hazard objectif* might help clarify the psychology of desire operating in the game of the Corpse and the method of cutting up.

In Hal Foster’s psychoanalytical reading, while it may seem “spontaneous,” objective chance is not free of causality: *imprévu* and *déjà vu* coincide.<sup>46</sup> What appear to be remarkable coincidences and mysterious messages denote a “‘hysterical’ confusion between internal impulse and external sign”: “its instances are taken as external ‘signals’ of future events rather than internal signs of past states; the anxious is projected as portentous.” In other words, the role that chance plays in both the Exquisite Corpse and the text produced by cutting up is actually a ruse for mediating the return of the repressed. What Donald Kuspit says of the fragments found in collage compositions therefore applies equally here: “Chance is a disguise for the uncertain yet highly personal significance they are felt to have. . . . The fragments are experienced as profoundly meaningful, but the meaning cannot be spelled out completely and never seems to truly surface.”<sup>47</sup> Burroughs was certainly aware of how accidental procedures (rather than spontaneous ones)<sup>48</sup> allowed him to exceed his own reach, his own control and conditioning, and so served his definition of art’s purpose: to make us aware of what we know but don’t know we know. The found object is really a lost object regained, and the unknown turns out to be secretly familiar—that is, the Freudian uncanny.

Burroughs also credited cut-up methods with a radical therapeutic efficacy, from the outset seeing them as a way to deal with buried past traumas by repeatedly conjuring and exorcising obsessive personal material. He modeled this application of the method on techniques used in Scientology—something else he learned from

Gysin—and promoted it as an alternative to psychoanalytic treatment (which he had begun in the early 1940s and resumed in Paris). There’s no need to rehearse here the integral relationship between Surrealism and psychoanalysis, but it is interesting to note that when the psychoanalyst Maria Torok described a particularly traumatic form of secret knowledge, an identity entombed within the subject and liable to return in cryptic linguistic form, she called it the “exquisite corpse.”<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, if we return to the actual procedures involved in composing the Corpse and making a cut-up text, whether we approach them in terms of magical, psychic, or creative operations, a fundamental difference remains. The uncanny aspect of the Surrealist game depended on the *collective* production of a sentence or a human figure. It was the juxtaposition of elements arrived at independently in an intersubjective context—in ignorance of the contributions of others—that invested the result with a miraculous potency for all. In the case of cutting up, an element of ignorance—of the precise outcome of the scissors’ arbitrary action—was also essential, so that the results never merely conformed to expectations. But the process entails what one critic calls “*motivated chance*,”<sup>50</sup> because the material to be cut up had to be chosen in the first place (while the results could also be selected). Far from starting with a blank page and awaiting the input of others, it was the *détournement* of an already existing received text that produced uncanny results for the practitioner. The real thrust of the cut-up method’s claims to decondition identity by deconstructing language was not, therefore, best represented by the scrambling together of names on the cover of *Minutes to Go* but by a version on the inside. Here Burroughs cut up and reassembled his own name—his original “received” text: “**Will///// ughs ///// ward///// Burro// iam / Se.**”<sup>51</sup>

Now we see the significance of Burroughs’ always attributing Lautréamont’s dictum to Tristan Tzara—embraced for his “cut-up” *poème dadaïste*, rather than any collective Surrealist practices.<sup>52</sup> Likewise when Gysin seemed to echo Lautréamont—“the writing machine is for everybody”—it’s noticeable that any *collaborative* potential, any social dimension, was immediately qualified in his very next line: “do it yourself.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, underlying this critique of



traditional artistic hierarchies of production and consumption was a vision of radical individual autonomy. As Burroughs himself put it: “ANYONE CAN RECORD WORDS — CUT UP your own *hustling myself*.”<sup>54</sup>

#### Four letter words

The above account has necessarily generalized the Exquisite Corpse game and the cut-up method, compounding a critical tendency to take for granted the relation of theory to practice. So to complete this comparative analysis we need to introduce some textual specificity.

The cut-up texts published in *LOCUS SOLUS* do not offer promising examples for close reading, although the reasons why are themselves instructive. Firstly, in reordering the individual words of a single, short text, they approximate the verbal Corpse (and Tzara’s *poème dadaïste*) in terms of unit length, which means they can tell us very little about how the cut-up method operated in the great majority of Burroughs’ texts. Secondly, they fragment an original—Rimbaud’s poem—without making visible the process of transformation introduced by the scissors; indeed, the words are too fragmented for the reader to even recognize the source. What identifies cutting up as a true collage practice, however, is that the material act of production is dynamic, the metamorphic process visible on the page. Collage produces a “paradoxical presence,” as Elza Adamowicz says, “a material reality in the incipient stages of configuration, an embryonic monster in the phase of gestation, the body in the process of being reconfigured.”<sup>55</sup> She captures here both the formal dimension of the cut-up text—whereby the reader recognizes the redistribution of fragments cut from different sources and juxtaposed to make new compounds—and the relation between textual and physical bodies in the process of mutation.

We can see this process of assemblage in action, and grasp a significant relationship to the Exquisite Corpse, by examining typical instances from “I AM DYING, MEESTER?” published as the conclusion to *The Yage Letters* (1963).<sup>56</sup>

These are the opening half-dozen lines:<sup>57</sup>

Panama clung to our bodies—Probably cut—Anything made this dream—It has consumed the customers of fossil orgasm—Ran into my old friend Jones—So badly off, forgotten, coughing in 1920 movie—Vaudeville voices hustle sick dawn breath on bed service—Idiot Mambo spattered backwards—I nearly suffocated trying on the boy's breath—That's Panama—

Even before beginning to read the words, one feature is immediately apparent. Made from blocks of short phrases bridged by dashes (seventy altogether, in a piece less than 700 words long), the physical appearance of the text on the page insistently foregrounds the material procedures of its own making. Since each dash signals the scissors' cut, the second phrase block ("—Probably cut—") even seems to turn this material self-reflexivity into a joke. There's a certain visual similarity therefore with the verbal *Exquisite Corpse*, whose division into five syntactical units was sometimes also physically marked by dashes: "*Le cadavre—exquis—boira—le vin—nouveau.*"<sup>58</sup>

The most significant similarity, however, is with the phrase blocks themselves. For whereas the dashes stand in for cuts and make immediately visible the collage process of (de)composition, the phrase blocks are the real, because unexpected, site of surprise. They turn out to be composites of fragments forced together to make strange hybrid lines such as "I nearly suffocated trying on the boy's breath." Two features especially recall the *Exquisite Corpse*. Firstly, a distorted, disruptive representation of the human body, given here across a number of phrases in displaced and partial form (orgasm, coughing, voices, breath). Secondly, an internal tension between phrasing that is grammatically correct but semantically impossible.

To take up the second, formalist point first, Adamowicz has described the importance for Breton of "radical syntagmatic combinations," which he traced back to the poetry of Lautréamont and Rimbaud.<sup>59</sup> Preserving syntax, she notes, yielded an appearance of formal cohesion, and this is the key source of the subversive potentials in both the verbal and visual *Exquisite Corpse*: "The common denominator to all Surrealist games is that they articulate a syntactic or compositional rule, and a semantic or iconic transgression. A rigidly mechanical rule is combined with the workings of chance

encounters in a paradoxical structure where incongruous statements and images clash within a fixed framework.” By similar means, then, the Corpse game and cutting up achieved a similar tension on the page between coherent syntax and jarring semantics to create disturbing results.

But we can give this similarity more precision by considering the process of verbal collage at work in Éluard and Péret’s Surrealist proverbs. Eight examples were included in *LOCUS SOLUS II*, including “Beat your mother while she is young” (“Battre sa mère quand elle est jeune”), which appropriated and reworked the well-known proverb, “Il faut battre le fer quand il est chaud.”<sup>60</sup> The distinction here is that, whereas the verbal Exquisite Corpse obeyed recognizable syntax, the proverbs *also* exploited the reader’s recognition of a specific and familiar original text, given a subversive twist. In this context, lines in “I AM DYING, MEESTER?” such as “I nearly suffocated trying on the boy’s breath” can be read as a kind of composite of the two principles represented by the Corpse and the proverb. The difference is that, in Burroughs’ case, the reworked “original” is not a familiar maxim that the reader might know already, but a line read previously in Burroughs’ own text: “I nearly suffocated myself trying to sniff enough of this crap to get a lift.”

The original line appears sixty pages earlier, in the conventionally written section of *The Yage Letters* (dating from ten years earlier), but its words, rhythm, and tone of voice are distinctive enough for readers to recognize. Clearly the cut-up version takes the opening phrase (“I nearly suffocated myself trying”) and, after losing “myself,” combines it with another phrase altogether (“on the boy’s breath”). Rather than being incongruous, this second half almost “fits,” creating an uncanny effect. Since this half doesn’t appear elsewhere in *The Yage Letters*, the cut-up phrase block combines two distinct elements: one recognizable from an earlier context and another that completes that original text syntactically while reorienting it semantically. Burroughs used this technique extensively in his cut-up trilogy, where the effect is rendered more uncanny still because the coherent “original” is usually given *after* we have read a fragmented and recombined version. The result in “I AM DYING, MEESTER?” is both surprise at the monstrous new hybrids and an unsettling sense of déjà vu.

However, there is more to this intertextuality, as the full context of the original line makes clear:<sup>61</sup>

I wonder what a Panamanian boy would be like? Probably cut. When they say anything goes they are referring to the joint not the customers.

I ran into my old friend Jones the cab driver, and bought some C off him that was cut to hell and back. I nearly suffocated myself trying to sniff enough of this crap to get a lift. That's Panama. Wouldn't surprise me if they cut the whores with sponge rubber.

Immediately, we now recognize several other fragments presented in the cut-up passage ("anything"; "the customers"; "ran into my old friend Jones"; "That's Panama"), all of which contribute to the eerie, faint familiarity of the lines on first reading, and then work as cues to direct the reader back into the original context. In retrospect, the phrase "Probably cut," which had seemed a contrived, self-reflexive pun on the cut-up method, now appears uncannily predictive. We begin to see how precise and deliberate, rather than arbitrary and obscure, are the processes of selection and recombination that make up Burroughs' textual body.

The two passages are also significant in terms of how Burroughs conceives and represents the *human* body. The original context for the cut-up phrases is visibly thick with references to *cuts*, again suggesting a precise choice of material thematically as well as formally. In modeling the "cutting" of boys and whores on the cutting of cocaine, Burroughs first reduces people to mere objects of sexual pleasure and then equates them with drugs that can be consumed. Their bodies can also be adulterated with inert material (white powder, sponge rubber). This is only consistent with Burroughs' general representation of the body as a "soft machine," occupied by parasitic inhuman forces, and so (as the opening section of the book of that title puts it), born "Dead on Arrival."<sup>62</sup>

Finally, we have to recall the relationship between the two Exquisite Corpses—namely the transition from collaborating to construct a sentence to collectively assembling the picture of a body. If there is

a tacit equivalence between the two—why else does it seem so natural a progression?—Burroughs would develop it explicitly through the understanding of language that went together with his cut-up methods. In *Minutes to Go* he made the relationship between language and the body explicit through newspaper articles, transforming the traditional use of this staple resource of modernist collage (to sabotage the mass media's reportage of reality), by focusing on the subject of genetic research: "The entire message of life is written in four letter words with our genes' Dr Stanley explained—adenine guanine thymine or cytosine—which are built into Thee whether it be one, two, three, four or one, two, four, three, for example links or letters are arranged to spell out man . . . 'We will be able to write out the message that is you.'"<sup>63</sup>

Confirming again the particular relevance of the number four, Burroughs' interest in the genetic code as a determinist "writing" of identity clearly establishes the relationship between the body's DNA and the subversive possibilities of cutting up and rearranging linguistic codes. Burroughs' method of constructing new hybrid creatures was based on rewriting and reordering the received text with his scissors. In other words, he literally cut up the Corpse.

## Notes

1. Shapiro, "Art as Collaboration," in McCabe, 50.
2. *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 5.
3. Schwitters and Hausmann, *PIN*, 23.
4. McCabe, "Artistic Collaboration," 38.
5. Once there, Matthews would become involved in OULIPO (formed officially in November 1960), yet another renewal of avant-garde literary experiment and Surrealist game-playing.
6. Actually the evidence is only circumstantial, but Burroughs did write to Ted Berrigan—concerning his magazine, *C*, which was publishing a cut-up text alongside work by Ashbery—to say: "Yes I have talked with John Ashbery who has been using cut ups for years. Before I talked with him I knew that he was using cut ups from reading his work." (Burroughs to Berrigan, September 10, 1964; Northwestern University.)
7. Ward, *Statutes of Liberty*, 126.
8. *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 149 and 151.
9. *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 149 and 151. There's also a third text—"Cut Up," attrib-

uted to Gregory Corso and Dwight Eisenhower—that was also first published in *Minutes to Go*.

10. Koch, in *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 196.

11. See Gérard-Georges Lemaire, “23 Stitches Taken,” in Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, 11–12.

12. See Harris, “Cutting up Politics” and Harris, “Burroughs is a poet too, really.”

13. Koch, in *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 193.

14. Koch says that existing texts are used “as if they were other poets in the room,” *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 193.

15. Burroughs, in *The Third Mind*, 31.

16. Gysin, “CUT-UPS: A Project For Disastrous Success,” in *Brion Gysin Let the Mice In*, 4.

17. Ernst, “Beyond Painting,” 132.

18. This isn’t to overlook all that predisposed Burroughs to embrace cut-up methods—from his previous experiences of collaborative writing to his creating *Naked Lunch* as a montage of routines—only to insist on the breakthrough made possible by a practical technique.

19. Koch, *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 202–3. “These one-line works were composed five at a time by persons sitting around a table. Each poet began by writing a noun on a sheet of paper, which, after folding so that the noun was invisible, he would pass to the poet on his left. In similar fashion an adjective (or adjectival phrase), a verb, another noun, and another adjective or adjectival phrase were added.”

20. Burroughs, “Introductions,” *The Third Mind*, 25.

21. Burroughs, “But All Is Back Seat of Dreaming,” 13–14.

22. Burroughs to David Hazelwood, July 26, 1960 (Auerhahn Press: General correspondence 1959–1967; University of California, Berkeley).

23. Burroughs, *The Third Mind*, 31. See footnote 52 for evidence that Burroughs took up Lautréamont’s call at least as early as 1960.

24. “I find that people read *MINUTES TO GO* without ever using the cut up method themselves. But when they once do it themselves they see.” Burroughs to Hazelwood, July 26, 1960 (Auerhahn Press: General Correspondence 1959–1967; University of California, Berkeley).

25. Burroughs to Hazelwood, March 21, 1960 (Auerhahn Press: General correspondence 1959–1967; University of California, Berkeley).

26. An acknowledgment in *The Ticket That Exploded* notes that two sections were “written in collaboration with Michael Portman” and credits Gysin with a page of calligraphy, while in *Nova Express* a note says that one section was “written in collaboration with Mr. Ian Sommerville.” The three coauthored works are *The Yage Letters* (1963), with Allen Ginsberg; *So Who Owns Death TV?*

(1967), with Claude Pélieu and Carl Weissner; and *Brion Gysin Let the Mice In* (1973), with Brion Gysin.

27. Gysin in Wilson, *Here to Go*, 184.
28. Burroughs, "Fold-ins," in *The Third Mind*, 96.
29. Grauerholz, 120.
30. Gysin, *Minutes to Go*, 42, 43. See also note 52.
31. Corso to Laughlin, December 25, 1959, in Morgan, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 228.
32. Burroughs, "Foreword" to Norse, *Beat Hotel*, viii.
33. Gysin, *Minutes to Go*, 5.
34. Norse, *Beat Hotel*, 14.
35. Burroughs, "Foreword" to Norse, *Beat Hotel*, vii–viii.
36. Corso, "Post-script," *Minutes to Go*, 63.
37. In Burroughs's May 16, 1960 letter to Gysin, he enclosed "a cut-up of Corso's anti cut-up note." In Miles Associates, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the William S. Burroughs Archive*, 44.
38. In this context—the relation between creative methods and the politics of manifestos and movements—it's interesting to note that one aim of *LOCUS SOLUS II* had been to distinguish the New York School from the Beat and Black Mountain poets. See Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, 52.
39. Burroughs, *The Western Lands*, 252.
40. Short, *Dada and Surrealism*, 127.
41. Breton, Note to "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 179.
42. Breton, "Le Cadavre Exquis" (1948), in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 290.
43. Norse, "Cut-Up Magic" (1968), in *Beat Hotel*, 62.
44. Quoted in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 258; Brion Gysin, "CUT-UPS" in Gysin and Burroughs, *Brion Gysin Let the Mice In*, 4.
45. Burroughs, *The Third Mind*, 32.
46. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 29, 30.
47. Kuspit, "Collage," 46.
48. "Needless to say such obvious devices as automatic writing would never get by the Censor," Burroughs had recognized as early as 1956. In Burroughs, *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945–1959*, 311.
49. See Torok, "The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse," 107–24.
50. Motte, "Burroughs Takes a Chance," 216.
51. Burroughs, *Minutes to Go*, 59.
52. It seems Burroughs's published misattributions were not accidental: "The Surrealist [sic] said 'Poetry for everybody.' And Tristan Tzara was the first to demonstrate publicly The Cut Up Method. The Cut Up Method Poetry For

Everybody was sold out to the Freudian Conspiracy and Communist Party.” Burroughs to Jon Webb, August 21, 1960 (*The Outsider* Collection, Northwestern University).

53. Gysin, *Minutes to Go*, 5.

54. Burroughs, *Minutes to Go*, 60 (my emphasis).

55. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 195.

56. A good deal might be said here about the particular relevance of *The Yage Letters*, not as a coauthored book but as a composite of Burroughs’ writing across decades. For the relationship it makes visible between Burroughs’ montage writing inspired by the hallucinogen *yagé* in 1953, his cut-up methods, and Rimbaud’s “derangement of all the senses,” see Harris, *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination*.

57. Burroughs, *The Yage Letters Redux*, 76.

58. As in Breton and Éluard’s *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, cited in Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 55.

59. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 45, 55.

60. *LOCUS SOLUS II*, 67.

61. Burroughs, *The Yage Letters Redux*, 5.

62. Although the material is present in the first edition, this chapter title was added for the second (1966) edition of *The Soft Machine*.

63. Burroughs, *Minutes to Go*, 60–61.





Artistic Collectivity  
and Literary Creation

two



## The Corpse Encore

INGRID SCHAFFNER

# 5

*Yes, it is frustrating to read references to drawings one cannot see. But even in this essay's original publication, relatively few of the more than six hundred "cadavre exquis" that are its subject were reproduced. The idea is to speak of a collective body as one that is as much signified by, as it is irreducible to, any one of its parts. To call out individual artists and their contributions is to point to a massive sense of particularity in general. I hope that this sense may be conveyed by the present text, which at its most effective will dispatch the reader to find a copy of *The Return of The Cadavre Exquis* (Drawing Center, 1993) in order to see for herself more of these marvelous drawings. Published in New York on the occasion of an eponymous exhibition, this catalog includes essay contributions by art historian Mary Ann Caws and poet Charles Simic, along with a complete list of the more than twelve hundred artists who participated over the course of a two-year drawing project (1991–1993) inspired by the Surrealist game of the Exquisite Corpse.*

*How did it begin? Artists Kim Jones and Leonard Titzer were playing the game when I paid a curatorial visit to their adjoining studios. Our conversation prompted a proposal to Ann Philbin, then director of the Drawing Center, for a worldwide art collaboration . . . and the Exquisite Corpse was reborn. How did it end? So many drawings were created that two spaces had to be commandeered to show the entire corpus. In one installation a selection was framed and presented with historic*

*examples. In the other, drawings were push-pinned cheek-to-jowl (often literally, given the imagery) into a surreal salon. To thwart questions of ownership—and thanks to the generosity of all who played—the drawings were dispersed in a lottery to benefit the Drawing Center. How does it read today? It's interesting to see the Corpse return in the midst of a resurgence of collage-based practices across culture—from mash-ups in music to digital imaging. More salient than ever is Elizabeth Finch's essay contribution on "Collage." Back in the early 1990s, with the culture wars on and the art market gone bust, the vitality of the Corpse seemed an affirmation of community and imagination among artists themselves. In 2009, following the boom and bust of the Bush years, artists along with everyone else face hard times again. Always good at picking up the pieces, the Corpse might be an ideal global citizen for productive play once more.*

PHILADELPHIA, 2006

## Apres Exquis

INGRID SCHAFFNER, WITH A

CONTRIBUTION BY ELIZABETH FINCH

Walter Benjamin, a connoisseur of radical montage, wrote, "The father of surrealism was dada; its mother was an arcade."<sup>1</sup> Seen in this light the *cadavre exquis*, Surrealism's abject offspring, is a visual department store disgorged of its goods, an assembly line of absurd—at times, sublime—expressions. So how, one may well ask, do we read it?

One heeds in the interpretation of original *cadavre exquis* drawings a caution against too singular a reading, a caution that the works themselves support. With only a few important exceptions, historic *cadavre exquis* have been exhibited as secondary works, treated within the larger context of Surrealist games and automatism.<sup>2</sup> Much has been written on technique. Famous sessions have been documented, but there is very little in print about individual *cadavres*.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, these works exist as uninterpreted records, novel apparitions of *point sublime*, that spot on the distant horizon where every-

thing—rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious, abstract and concrete—converges.

One of the first guides to this Surrealist arcadia was Julien Levy's book *Surrealism*, published in 1936 by the legendary Black Sun Press. Bound with jacket covers by Joseph Cornell, and printed on a rainbow of colored paper, this book sings like a synthetic scrapbook of Surrealist precepts and personages. It contains, under headings such as CINEMA, FETICHISM [*sic*], and BEHAVIOR, everything from the screenplay for the Luis Buñuel/Salvador Dalí film, *Un Chien Andalou*, to a passage from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, from pictures of work by Max Ernst to poems by Paul Éluard. For surveying the aftermath of *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, Levy's approach seems a ready model. Allow the fragments to take issue, to form, and fall as they will, although today these fragments do not coalesce at *point sublime*.

## Surrealism

In 1916 Guillaume Apollinaire named a poetic spirit adrift throughout the ages "surrealism."<sup>4</sup> By its first historical account, recorded in Levy's book, Surrealism claimed amongst its forebears the Marquis de Sade "in sadism," Edgar Allan Poe "in adventure," Rimbaud "in life and elsewhere."<sup>5</sup> Others include the satiric illustrator de Granville, the symbolist writer Isidore Ducasse (a.k.a., Comte de Lautréamont), and the photographer of Paris, Atget. Those ordained: the Marx Brothers, and Frida Kahlo, who coyly commented upon her own induction, "I never knew I was a surrealist till André Breton came to Mexico and told me I was."<sup>6</sup> Working outside Breton's jurisprudence, David Lynch's ant's-eye view, Angela Carter's violet pornography, Bob Dylan's tombstone blues, and virtual reality could also be called surrealist.

As called forth by *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, Surrealism's essence, a montage of irresolute fragments, appears impossible to contain. Teased by Linda Herritt, Surrealism's coif, stiff as shellacked drapery, tumbles down in the luxuriant fall of Millie Wilson's hairpiece. Its head is buried alive by Jim Shaw under a mound of delicately rendered octopi. (The image of an octopus recurs as legs in a

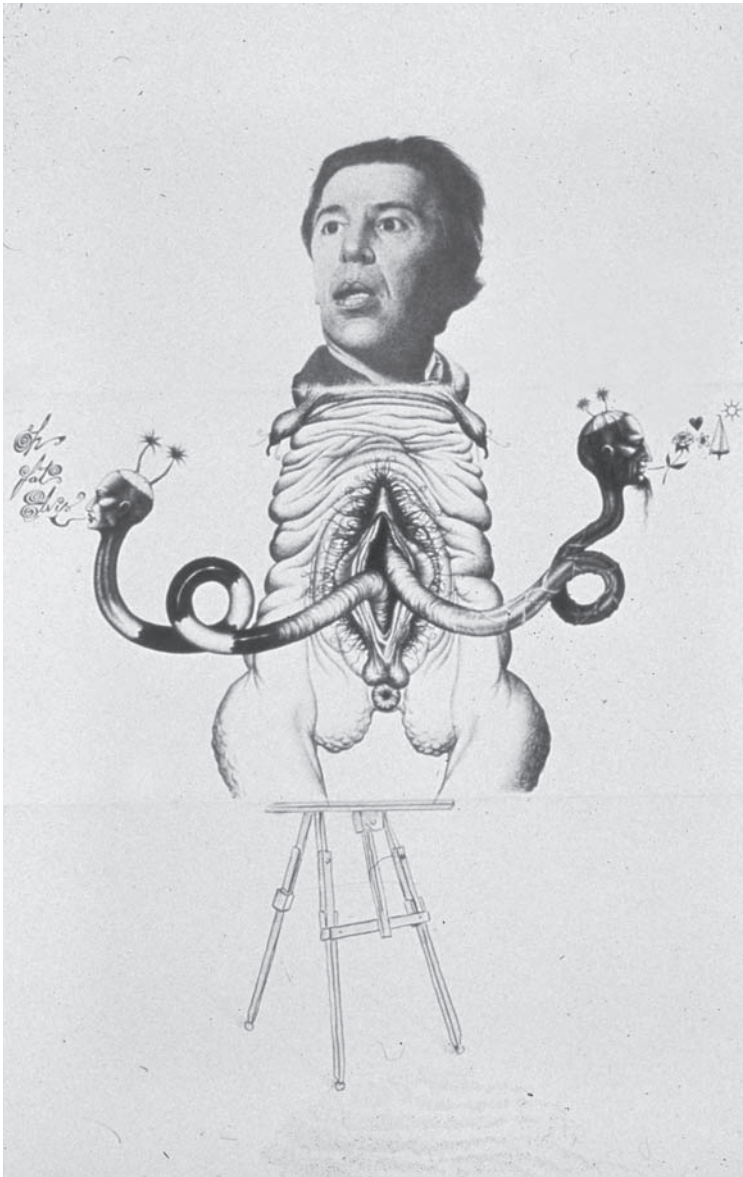
photogram by Kunie Sugiura.) Drawn by Lawrence Gipe, the face of a freight train comes to light, only to be extinguished by Lawrence Weiner, who attributes to Surrealism no features at all. Sporting a dirty velvet cummerbund, courtesy Maurizio Pellegrin, with Kevin Buck's body of text, Surrealism's sex is indeterminate, but—as Don Ed Hardy would have it—voracious, or, even—according to John Wesley—orgiastic. Standing back for the panoramic view, Surrealism's style is both elegantly calligraphic and compulsively blunt. Language colloquial. Surrealism is humorous, certainly sports a tattoo, may have served time in prison, frequently stalks on animal legs.

### Surrealisms

Author of the movement's polemics, André Breton was Surrealism's inspired leader and tyrannical prince. It's ironic and indicative of Surrealist spirit that Breton, who attempted to encode it, define it, even determine its politics, was ultimately eluded by it. Impressed by Salvador Dalí's remarkable imagery and exasperated by his behavior, Breton dispelled Dalí from the ranks of the Surrealists in 1938. And yet in the popular mind it's Dalí who is most closely linked with historic Surrealism. In retrospect and of late, Georges Bataille, now seen as Surrealism's critical author, has similarly displaced Breton.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Breton's Surrealism distills itself into objects—a bowler hat, a biscuit, a woman's glove—Bataille envisions it as an image of diffusion, an excess of energy that obscures containment. He called this the “informe” and ascribed it with the “job” of rendering the formed object, idea, emotion, or sign into a state of formlessness, noting that “*Formless* is thus not merely an adjective with such and such a meaning but a term for lowering status with its implied requirements that everything have form. Whatever it (formless) designates lacks entitlement in every sense and is crushed on the spot, like a spider or an earthworm.”<sup>8</sup> The Surrealist movement governed by Breton tends to reside resonantly in particulars—clocks, dolls, and found objects—which are themselves dated in appearance. However, as conjured by Bataille, Surrealism is transgressive. It exceeds the parameters of time, the strictures of space, and is thereby elusive.

Both Surrealisms have come into play during the course of this game. Sometimes as direct bodily evocations. Inspired by Man Ray's



8. Steve Wolfe, Ashley Bickerton, and Jan Hashey. 1993. Graphite, ink and watercolor. 22.5 x 14.25 inches. Catalog image courtesy of the Drawing Center, New York.



famous photographic portrait comes a drawing by Steve Wolfe of André Breton's head. Cindy Bernard uses the text of Bataille's "Big Toe," which declares this appendage to be the most human part of the body.

Other times these two Surrealists appear as oblique points of reference: Bretonian collage, displacement, and found objects are drawn together with Bataille's tattoos, scars, animism, excessive expenditures, and pictures of spiritual ecstasy. The former is captured in a drawing, rich with nostalgia, by Doug Ashford, Ruth Liberman, and Anita Madeira, which starts with a poem and ends with collage on little cat feet. Elements of the latter Surrealism are lodged in the hectic, scribbled drawing that hovers over an image of mannequin legs akimbo in the *cadavre* by Alan Turner, Carroll Dunham, and Laurie Simmons.

At its most poetic, this game remains as Breton intended it—and Bataille may have played it—with critical spirits expelled on holiday, an informal evocation of surreal possibilities. It's the critical burn in Bataille's look which transforms Breton's game of *cadavre exquis* into a postmodern possibility.

## Games

Play might be considered the discipline of this century. Voicing every thought that came to mind, Sigmund Freud played by the rules of free-association to enter into the realm of his own unconscious and thereby formulate a modern picture of the mind. Likening their exhilarating progress to mountain climbing and aviation, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso worked closely and competitively to invent Cubism, opening pictorial space up to radical speculation and abstraction. Albert Einstein called it relativity. Accomplishing a similar feat in the field of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure—himself an avid anagram player—reenvisioned the structure of language after the game of chess by equating words with game pieces, each dependent on the play of context for meanings mutable and strategic. For Foucault, this notion of language as an object of knowledge, open to historical change and arbitrary deformation, marks the inception of the modern era.

Play is the essence of abstract thinking and creative invention, a

form of behavior with no anticipated goals or results other than pleasure itself. In the wild, young animals frisk about as a way of learning how to behave. For almost the exact opposite reason, we humans continue to romp as adults in order to refresh our minds and bodies from the restrictions of routine approaches and activities. As an alternative to the conduct that led a world to war, Dada gambled on misbehavior in order to transgress all etiquette and establish a new cultural (dis)order.

Applying themselves more systematically to this project, the Surrealists adopted games as a form of experimentation. They played hard at scores of word and picture games in order to escape what they knew and discover what could be imagined.<sup>9</sup> Making art in this vein, Alberto Giacometti constructed his series of sculptural game boards in the thirties. Max Ernst's late sculptures are iconic chess-board figures. Disciples of the European avant-garde, the American Abstract Expressionists also dutifully played Surrealist games.

Not exactly a team player, Marcel Duchamp allegedly abandoned art—with all its knowable forms—for chess. It is interesting to note that in formulating a theory of games, the mathematician John von Neumann discounted chess. As it relies on tactics that are short-term “if” actions, with calculable results, it doesn't resemble those real games we constantly play in life, which are based on strategies or more open-ended “what-if” abstractions.<sup>10</sup> Though relatively few people play chess these days, such enigmatic strategies have endured. Aleatory, what-if abstractions structured art of the sixties and seventies, making it spontaneous and lifelike. Daring silence, John Cage invited chance to play in the midst of his piano performances. Jean Tingley's self-destructive sculptures played themselves to death. Games such as these moved art into real time and space.

As so evidently portrayed in the Drawing Center's exhibition, the art world's facture has grown increasingly dispersed, its community decentralized and insular. As we so well discovered during the process of this project, ferreting artists out of their studios all over the world, there are no café headquarters. In turn the nature of play has changed. Presaged by such (Surrealist) examples as Claude Cahun's gender-bending photographs and Leonor Fini's performance-art approach to life, these games seem based more on role-playing and au-

tobiography than on movements and conquest. The big games are now, in fact, small ones, inspired by those private (often childish) forms of amusement one tends to pursue alone, like dress-up, dolls, and make-believe. Forfeiting the utopian, or merely group-minded aspects of earlier pursuits, players today scrimmage, not by prescribed rules, but according to personal whim and individual preference.

So why, less than ten years short of the new millennium, do we reenact this early twentieth-century game? In retrospect of *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, experimental intentions come forward, but initially we played in pious keeping with orthodox Surrealism. Because it's fun.

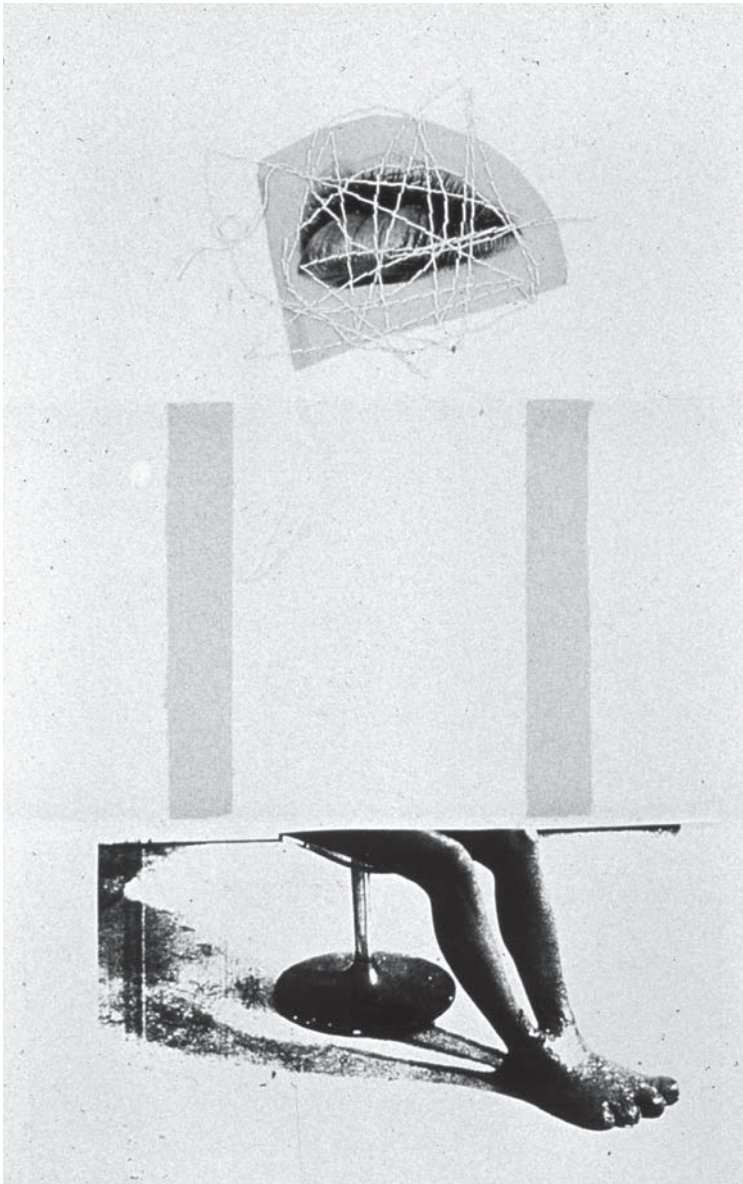
If there is one activity in Surrealism which has most invited the derision of imbeciles, it is our playing of games . . . Although as a defensive measure we sometimes described such activity as "experimental" we were looking to it primarily for entertainment, and those reward-ing discoveries yielded in relation to knowledge only came later. **André Breton**, 1954<sup>11</sup>

## Collaboration

All our collaborators must be handsome so we can publish their portraits. **René Magritte** ("The Five Commandments," quoted in Lippard, *Surrealists on Art*, 155)

As a joint venture, collaboration defies logic: the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts. The total picture stands to topple over if the *cadavre exquis* is all earrings or if individual organs fail to communicate. Rather, collaboration is a dialectical process. What is shared counts as much as that which has been withheld. The creative outcome of a successful collaboration is a new work, independent of any single contribution. In a collaboration by Christian Marclay, Olivier Mosset, and Alix Lambert, a pair of sutured lips, two green stripes, and a pair of legs cemented into one clay foot yields an image of thwarted expression, an evocation of censorship that not one of its parts belie.

So good-natured by name, collaboration is not entirely generous in spirit.<sup>12</sup> Like Lex Luthor, it calls for the death of the artist super-



9. Christian Marclay, Olivier Mosset, and Alix Lambert. 1993. Acrylic, string, and color photocopy, with collage. 22.5 x 14.25 inches. Catalog image courtesy of the Drawing Center, New York.

man. Listening for the collective voice, collaboration reproduces the interpretive and communicative aspects of art at the very level of its creation. Authenticity also takes a flying leap. Trespassing time and authorship, Marcel Duchamp drew a moustache on the *Mona Lisa*, making Leonardo da Vinci an unwitting accomplice to this collaborative work of art. We find Aubrey Beardsley, Constantin Brancusi, Gustave Courbet, Ezra Pound, an unknown Rajistani artist as well as Duchamp himself, among the many drawn into cahoots with the creators of contemporary *cadavres exquis*.

Bypassing the author can cause quite a snarl. The challenge in collaboration is striking the delicate balance between retaining commitment and relinquishing control. Ironically the mechanism that seems to keep collaboration healthy is competition. It is, in part, this self-conscious measure that accounts for the metamorphosis of the Surrealist *cadavres exquis* from the pure noodlings that first appeared in the October 1927 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* into the considerably more engaging works of art that these collaborations eventually produced.<sup>13</sup>

## Collage

ELIZABETH FINCH

Collage was the Surrealist's umbrella aesthetic, sheltering a diversity of practices, from painting and poetry to the *cadavre exquis*. As a collection of things jumbled and juxtaposed, collage captured the experience of an aimless wander through crowded city streets and desolate alleyways. But collage was not about getting lost. Rather it was a practice that required the purposeful selection, arrangement, and affixing of images. Collage-making was about looking, about locating the dream image in the everyday.

Although faithful in spirit to the principal of collage, the Surrealists often bypassed the process of affixing images for the seamless effects achieved through photography, either in-camera or during the printing process. Compositions of trimmed snips of paper, whose cut edges openly displayed the marks of their making, were more expressive of the cacophony of Dada. The Surrealists, on the other

hand, effectively subsumed collage within the technology of photography. As the given automatic eye, the camera offered a range of techniques through which an image could be altered, for example, by doubling, flipping, and solarizing the negative. While Dadaists were indifferent to the power of photography's apparent objectivity, the Surrealists were seduced by the uncanny "realness" generated by the manipulated photograph.

Relegated to the periphery, hands-on collage nonetheless remained a central and reigning principle of Surrealist practice. It became integral to the popular Surrealist diversion *cadavre exquis*. Early examples of the game, composed entirely of drawing, were superseded by more elaborate works augmented by the addition of bits of paper and ephemera clipped from magazines, catalogues, and photographs. The *Cadavre exquis* was a curiosity to the Surrealists precisely because it laid bare the workings of collage. In the preface to an exhibition catalogue of Max Ernst's photo collages, Breton described the process of making collage as "attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience, of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact."<sup>14</sup>

Governed by chance, the *cadavre exquis* playfully tested collage, fanning a gentle breeze to the match struck between images. Failures were as instructive and as pleasurable as successes.

Although not a technique commonly practiced in contemporary art, with this most recent round of *cadavre exquis*, collage has returned with a vengeance. To appreciate this recourse to collage, it is helpful to consider the *cadavre exquis* origin as a word game. Read top to bottom, some of the drawings suggest the completion and closure of sentences. Such is the case with a drawing by Julie Ault, Cindy Sherman, and Marc Tauss, where the head, composed of a snapshot of a rocket, grows the body of a sinuous, card-playing nude. To this body, ready to test the winds of fate, is grafted a pair of ponderous go-nowhere feet. More often the drawings are open-ended, as in the *cadavre* by Curtis Anderson, Joseph Nechtvatal, and Rosemarie Trockel. Unified by a common media—the nineteenth-century scientific illustrations and maps—meaning here resides in the loose, rhyming association of the combined parts.

Interestingly the technology of photography, the linchpin of the

Surrealist collage aesthetic, remains ever present in the contemporary game. Despite the advent of the computer, it is the technology of the camera that still dominates. Noted additions to the camera's repertoire include photocopies, both color and black-and-white. In fact photocopies have overtaken the collaged clippings of the past—pieces of yellowed newspapers and magazines have given way to the mundane shadow of the photocopied image. But like the Surrealists' embrace of photography, contemporary artists have been quick to make use of the potential of new technologies. In the drawing by the Critical Art Ensemble and Faith Wilding, a computer-generated head and torso is attached to collaged Xeroxes of repeating legs of armor. Processes common to Surrealist photography, such as doubling, are now easily obtained through the use of the photocopier or the computer.

These contemporary works, however, rarely engage the everyday urban detritus that so fascinated the Surrealists. Rather, present-day *cadavres exquis* logically quote a range of styles characteristic of contemporary art. Today's artists, caught playing a game that in all probability is not central to their practice, reach for a bit of the familiar. Still others responded by suspending their usual practice. Many of the collage images they created are consciously dated, depicting outmoded machines and ghostlike grainy images from the past. Although the Surrealists themselves were attracted to the forgotten and slightly out of fashion, contemporary artists have resorted to the past out of nostalgia. Whether seamless printouts or elbow-deep in clippings and glue, these images pay homage to the Surrealist collage aesthetic.

### Grotesque

This is the other art history. Accompanied by Boschian bagpipes, the Grotesque tracks a bloody footprint on the road to Calvary, farts, eats off Archimbaldo's plate, burps, drinks from Meret Oppenheim's tea cup, shits, dances to Goya's capriccios, fucks, and sleeps to dreams of H. C. Westermann's death ship. Shock and schism are its means, rupture its golden rule. The *cadavre exquis*, playing on all of the Grotesque's styles and strategies, is its Adonis, Venus, Marilyn, and Mickey.





10. Roy Dowell, Tom Knechtel, Megan Williams, and Lari Pitman. 1993. Colored pencil, graphite, acrylic, and spray paint, with collage. 14.25 x 10.25 inches. Catalog image courtesy the Drawing Center, New York.



Traditionally the Grotesque appears heaped to either side of the Renaissance, in its overwrought aspirant—the Gothic—and aftermath—the Baroque. In style and content, both canons are highly visible in this exhibition. With a medievalist's eye for the minute, Meg Belichick lifts images of potato eyes and astral bodies for a torso made using found printer's plates. Her partner, Joanne Brockley, depicts the sacred "temple of the mind" as a ruin of industrial architecture. A horny male dog's haunches, drawn by Peter Cain, completes this Boschian hybrid on a low, animalistic note. Conflating human attributes and natural imagery is a device of the gothic grotesque brought up to date by Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Claire Pentecost, and Eve Andrée Laramée. The tension between the head's explosive burst of color and the body's shackled cornstalk is poised—like Baba Yaga's house—on a giant pair of chicken legs, collaged from road maps. This image suggests that, at its best, nature's meeting with culture is an ambivalent one.

On the march with Brockley's automaton, a proliferation of *cadavres exquis* have been scrapped together by idolatrous engineers, who gleefully tinker with the machine of human anatomy. A drawing by Tony Oursler, James Casebere—both corroborating with mechanical modes of reproduction—and Charles Golden, recasts the model of classical perfection into a dehumanized pile of junk. Oursler's photograph of a television antenna mounted atop Casebere's image of a prison-cell toilet, set on Golden's biomorph of fabric flocking, portrays the body as a dubious technological wonder.

Matching the standards of postmodern culture, manufacture has taken on grotesque possibilities. Today we all stand ready to be made into Exquisite Corpses. Pump it up. Suck it off. Tear it out. Reconstruct. Be all you can be, with the help of plastics, polymers, personal training, and, of course, the knife. Because the body is yours for the making. Constructing its identity cell by cell, the Exquisite Corpse realizes the ultimate, post-human fantasy of the flesh.

By giving way to grotesque displays of feeling, the Corpse often upsets the equilibrium of emotions held in check by intellectual control. An agitated *cadavre* headed by Dottie Attie shouts and twists itself into a dramatic contrapposto, rendered by Mark Tansey, so that legs, by Steve Mendelson, seem to buckle under the impact. Con-

flating spiritual and bodily ecstasy, Eran Shakine's imprints of what appear to be the ephemeral contents of a mind swirl above collage contributions by James Elaine and Peter Gilmore of a martyred Saint Sebastian set above a miasma of organic matter. Emotionally acute, humanly critical, heaven-kissing and ground-hugging, the *cadavre exquis* cultivates its energy and imagery from outside the classic mainstream of art history to encompass the often otherwise inexplicable excesses and margins of existence

Indeed the grotesque Corpse seems patterned in direct opposition to what Alberti, "the very founder of the theory of art, called *convenienza* or *conformità*." As Erwin Panofsky elaborated, "It would be absurd if Milo the athlete were to be represented with frail hips or Ganymede with limbs of a porter, and 'if the hands of Helen or Iphigeneia were aged and knotty.'"<sup>15</sup> This kind of physical comedy is the very meat of the *cadavre exquis*, just as mockery and satire present grotesque standards upon which the *cadavre* visibly thrives.

A traditional underpinning of painting, the cartoon has long since slid out on its own subversive mission. This might be simply comic—like the (tee-hee) he-man by underground comic artists Mark Beyer and Charles Burns, with artist Peter Saul. Or given more pointed caricature, a lampoon attack. In a *cadavre* concocted during the 1992 election campaign, Robin Tewes turns the Republican ticket (Misters Bush and Quayle) into a two-headed hydra, which Megan Williams endows with a whirling dervish of breasts. Gary Panter adds a fecund female body, which Elliot Green finally carries away on a pair of fishy wet feet. Laughing itself to hysterical tears, a *cadavre exquis* by Jim Shaw, Sue Williams, and Nicole Eisenman amplifies satire to a level of such ridiculous absurdity that it verges on tragedy. Shaw's caricature of one of the kings of comedy, Jerry Lewis, emits a gaseous cloud drawn by Williams, which erupts over a field of destruction, landscaped by Eisenman.

Aching with the absurd, the Grotesque rips a hole in the sides of both convention and conventional response, through which the Exquisite Corpse easily passes. The corpse emerges on the other side as a transcendent being, whose body performs the rituals of life—including death—with vigorous regularity.

## Sex

Bimorphic, polymorphic, hermaphroditic, transsexual, homosexual, heterosexual—the *cadavre* is well-sexed. Perhaps it was simply the circumstances—a group creative effort—which started these juices flowing. Or else it was the prospect of Surrealism—whose environs are the uninhibited unconscious mind—which elicited such licentious responses. Erotic energy courses through the collaboration of Bay Area artists, Brett Reichman, Caitlin Mitchell-Dayton, and Peter Mitchell-Dayton. A writhing bulb of gothic ornament, dripping with the oily patina of *temps perdu*, precipitates over the ample, bending, body of a late Marilyn, who, in white bikini, hands on hips, steps out of a bed shared with Betty at an orgy with other Archie comics characters, and even with just regular folks. Jughead's crown is on the bedpost.

## The Corpse

Leveling humanity to its organic essentials, flesh, excrement, and organs prove all equal in the eyes of the coroner. A veritable morgue, *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis* details an autopsy of spilt blood and gore. In a *cadavre* by Chicago-based artists Story Mann, Mary Lou Zelazny, and Roderigo Avila, a portrait image of Abraham Lincoln is abolished to a slurry of guts and animal matter. In an adjacent operating room, Annette Lemieux performs an ink transfer upon an anatomical study of a head. This is joined to a photo-based image, by Doug and Mike Starn, of the body of Christ (certainly the most famous *cadavre exquis*), and blasphemously polished off by Timothy Greenfield-Sander's photographic fashion plate.

There are also plenty of skeletons filling the ranks of the *cadavre exquis* and even a couple of X-rays. With death so near at hand in both the name of the game and the images the game evoked, it is interesting to note that these specters are patently metaphoric. The plagues inflicted by the AIDS virus and breast cancer, which constitute such an urgent component of today's cultural politics, are—almost without exception—not named here. Such omission sheds light on the true nature of the *cadavre exquis* as a cathartic being, whose imagery and activity envelops the particular into a raucous, transcendental body.



11. Marilyn Minter, David Sandlin, and Sue Williams. 1993. Enamel and graphite with silkscreen decals. 22.5 x 14.25 inches. Catalog image courtesy the Drawing Center, New York.

## Time and the Body

In the two years it took to generate the many drawings that went into making this exhibition, the Exquisite Corpse marked time. Imagery based on the 1992 presidential election has already been mentioned in regards to the Grotesque. As if in response to the campaign button that read, "Elect Hillary's Husband," Bill Clinton does not appear here, though his wife does, in a collage contribution from Laura Fields. The national hoopla celebrating Christopher Columbus's arrival in America some five hundred years ago is quietly noted in the margins of a drawing by Moyo Coyatzin. (Marching backward in history, the torso of this *cadavre* by Douglas McClellan is a collage homage to Chairman Mao's colon.) *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis* also straddles the American Year of the Woman. Coincidentally her body is here—with and without precedent—one of Surrealism's most graphic physical sites.

Piquant *femme enfant*, man-eating sphinx—Surrealism appears obsessed with fantastic images of women. Equating sexual and creative freedom, the Surrealists subscribed wholeheartedly to the psychoanalytic concepts of Eros and the libido as liberating life forces. Arousing muses of heterosexual love, women stood as communicating vessels between men and the marvelous. Yet there was very little place accorded her in the movement's everyday membership, despite the participation of girlfriends and wives in *cadavre exquis*.<sup>16</sup>

Here, with the *cadavre's* return, women artists play in near equal numbers to men. Her body moves outside the bounds of a privileged male gaze, into the realm of a desiring or defiant female subject. Pantyhose legs contributed by Maureen Connor run to exhaustion and snarl with rebellious savagery. A simple slit cut through a torso section by Siobhan Liddell turns up the acme fetish of castrating female. And there were abundant snippets of pornography, like David Humphrey's little girl inquiring after a great big "O." On the other hand, many depictions comply with a traditional feminine cast. Within the framework of *cadavre exquis*, these old parts were often handled to critical or comic effect. In a drawing by artists Bradley Rubenstein, Andrea Champlin, and Daniel Wasserman, a sinuously turning odalisque spins to a halt between her blandly bisexual head and jerry-rigged spring base.

Sex, difference, death, beauty, birth, and ugliness are embodied by this grotesquely gorgeous being whose vertiginous flip-flops between male and female, animal and object, culture and nature, sensual and cerebral, confound readings based on reason. Leading well beyond the *point sublime*, or bypassing it entirely, there is no svelte zeitgeist lurking within *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, though there are plenty of demons. Preying on the bugbears of an exclusive and synthetic approach to art, this inclusive body of work culminates in the antithesis of modernist principles. Collective and complicated, as opposed to singular and reductive, the *cadavre exquis* transgresses the traditionally masculine construct of modernism and listens for a postmodern, feminine ideal.

## Notes

This essay was originally published in 1993 by the Drawing Center, New York, on the occasion of the exhibition *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*. It is reprinted here with permission from the authors and the Drawing Center.

1. Benjamin, quoted in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 275.
2. The first exhibition of *cadavre exquis* was held in October 1927 at La Sur-réaliste in Paris. Breton's account of the invention of the game appears as the catalogue text for the next important exhibition held at Galerie La Dragonne, Paris, in October 1948. This text was reprinted for the occasion of an exhibition of historic *cadavres exquis* held at Galleria Schwartz in Milan in 1975. More recently, *cadavres exquis* were included in *Inventions Surréalistes: Collages, Frottages, Fumages, Cadavres Exquis*, presented at Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, New York, 1992.
3. For firsthand accounts, see Breton, *Le Cadavre exquis*, and McCabe, *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*.
4. As William Rubin points out, it was William Lieberman who identified the origins of the word "surrealism" in Apollinaire's text for the program of Diaghilev's ballet, "Parade." See Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage*, 192.
5. Levy, *Surrealism*, 4.
6. Quoted in Wolfe, "Rise of Another Rivera," 64.
7. For an exemplary discussion of Bataille's Surrealism, see Krauss, *L'Amour Fou: Surrealism and Photography*.
8. Bataille, quoted in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 30.
9. Brochie and Gooding, *Surrealist Games*. This instructive, boxed compilation documents the history, rules, and results of Surrealist games and collaborative techniques.

10. Von Neumann and Morgenstern, *A Theory of Play and Economic Behavior*.
11. This excerpt is from Breton's only essay on games; quoted in Gooding, 137.
12. According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, one definition of collaboration is "to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force."
13. Verbal and visual examples of *cadavres exquis* were first published anonymously in *La Révolution surréaliste*, October 1, 1927. Both appear intermittently throughout the text.
14. Breton, quoted in Ades, *Photomontage*, 190.
15. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 190.
16. Breton, quoted in Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 27.



## The Exquisite Corpse Is Alive and Well and Living in Montréal

RAY ELLENWOOD

# 6

In 1948 when André Breton wrote “*Le cadavre exquis, son exaltation*” (later published in *Le surréalisme et la peinture*) for an exhibition in Paris of collaborative works by Yves Tanguy, Juan Miró, Man Ray, and others, Surrealist-oriented groups had been active in Montréal for a few years. The painter Alfred Pellán, who had studied, worked, and exhibited in Paris since the late 1920s, returned to Montréal in 1940, bringing with him information about various avant-garde artistic groups, including Surrealism, and their interests. This he shared with Canadian friends and colleagues, and with the students he eventually taught at the École des Beaux-arts, including Jean Benoît and Mimi Parent, who eventually went to live in Paris in 1947 and have since become recognized as important, eccentric figures in the history of postwar Surrealist art.<sup>1</sup> A series of *cadavres exquis*—in this case written texts combined with drawings—done by Pellán, Benoît, Parent, Simone Jobidon, and Françoise Sullivan, probably in 1946, are now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada and were shown in the spring of 1996 in an exhibition entitled “Towards Automatism.” “Automatism” was the name applied to a movement of young visual artists, poets, dancers and designers, highly influenced by French Surrealism, who were particularly active as a group in Montréal between 1945 and 1955.



It should be said that the impact of French Surrealism in Québec was earlier and more direct than in the rest of Canada simply because of language. Manifestos, books of poems, and tracts were sent back to Montréal by writers and artists who were in Europe during and after the war, and these were quickly distributed. The Automatist group corresponded with André Breton when he was in New York, ordering copies of *VVV*, receiving an offer to align themselves formally and publicly with Surrealism (politely declined), and maintaining contact with Breton after he returned to Paris. One of the members of that group, Jean-Paul Riopelle, was a signatory of the Paris Surrealist manifesto, *Rupture inaugurale*, in 1947, and was the subject of a trialogue between André Breton, Éliisa Breton, and Benjamin Péret, later published in *Le surréalisme et la peinture*. The Automatist group began forming around the painter Paul-Émile Borduas in the mid-forties, was especially active with exhibitions, newspaper polemics, and public demonstrations in 1947–1948, and published its manifesto, *Refus global*, in 1948, eliciting a strong negative reaction from church and state.<sup>2</sup> The church in Montréal at this time retained considerable moral and political power. Although it would soon lose much of its influence and stature, precipitously, in the so-called quiet revolution of the sixties, it could still react strongly in 1948 to *Refus global*'s announcement of the imminent death of decadent Christianity and to the manifesto's call for a new era driven by desire and spontaneity. Outraged attacks in the press came not only from the religious establishment, but also from Catholic intellectuals and journalists, with the result that Borduas was fired from his job as an art teacher at l'École du Meuble in Montréal, and his marriage broke up acrimoniously, essentially because of the text. The document has since been recognized as perhaps the single most important collective statement by a group of artists in Canadian history, setting the tone for a new spirit of liberalism that would eventually sweep through what had been an extremely conservative society.

In *Refus global*, Borduas announced categorically, "The Surrealists showed us the moral importance of non-preconceived acts," but he took pains to explain how the Montréal group was both influenced by, and different from, French Surrealism.<sup>3</sup> The philosophy and the state of mind of Surrealism were particularly important, as was its

emphasis on automatism in creative acts, with all the potential social impact they might have. Yet he argued that judgments made by the Surrealists in the past few years “show more and more signs of attention being paid to the intentions of the author. That concern has come to outweigh heavily any concern for the ‘convulsive’ quality of the works.” From this focus on intentionality, as opposed to true automatic spontaneity, came a quality of “literariness” in Surrealist visual art that the Montréal group deplored.

Most or all of the artists from Québec influenced by Surrealism probably played the game of *cadavre exquis* at one time or another,<sup>4</sup> but the Montreal Automatists, although they experimented with other forms made popular by Surrealism and its predecessors (such as photomontage, collage, decalcomania, and especially automatic writing and drawing), do not seem to have been much interested in the game. Françoise Sullivan, who also contributed to *Refus global*, was the exception, since she participated in making *cadavres exquis* with Jean Benoît, Alfred Pellán, and others, as mentioned earlier. The relative lack of interest by other Automatists may have been due to the fact that they, like a number of New York painters at the time, as well as members of the COBRA group, tended to move quickly in the direction of non-figuration. The traditional Surrealist visual *cadavre exquis*, even though it evolved into using a variety of media in a variety of formats, still tended toward the figurative. Thus, Jack J. Spector writes, “In the game of the *cadavre exquis* the nude body became the theme of a ritualized dismemberment and assemblage in which head, torso, and legs of diverse creatures are put together in correct order.”<sup>5</sup> Granted, his comment is part of a discussion of manipulation of the (usually female) body in Surrealist art, so it does not try to take into consideration the breadth of expression in the form, but it does indeed express a common perception that the results of the game usually take on a portrait quality, depicting a humanoid, obviously figurative shape, however monstrous and non-realistic. Early Automatist drawings certainly produced images with this figurative quality, but they soon gave way to more abstract works, not obviously applicable to a collaborative game where much of the fun comes from incongruous and unexpected combinations of a more-or-less familiar morphology.

The Exquisite Corpse, as a form practiced by serious artists who showed the results publicly, seems to have been defunct in Québec for almost forty years, but has found new life in Montréal, due to the efforts of (among others) Janine Carreau and Pierre Gauvreau. Gauvreau, a painter and signatory of *Refus global* in 1948, whose work is represented in all of the major national and provincial galleries of Canada, does not seem to have played the game in those early years, and has steadfastly continued in the Automatist trajectory of non-figuration. Yet it needs to be emphasized that the Montréal group, whatever the process of their art making, always shared the Surrealist enthusiasm for spontaneity and energy, as opposed to academic training and the whole tradition of realism, in all of their productions, from painting to theater to dance. The French academies and Canadian art schools in which a previous generation had been trained were dismissed as hopelessly decadent, and it is this non-academic philosophy that allows for a resurgence of the Exquisite Corpse in the work of Gauvreau and his friends. Gauvreau has also been strongly influenced by the “patenteux,” or folk artists of Québec, whose work tends to be absolutely unfettered in concept, material, and color. He has a large collection of work by eccentric, rural artists, and in addition he and his wife Janine Carreau, a photographer and painter, encourage and collect younger artists who are urban, yet untrained and spontaneous in the “patenteux” tradition. It was from within this context that Gauvreau and Carreau took up the Exquisite Corpse game with renewed energy.

There seems to have been no conscious decision to revive an old form, no “intention” in this return to the Corpse. It had everything to do with play and social exchange, provoked by Charles Binamé, a well-known Québec filmmaker and self-taught painter who convinced his friends to produce works in cooperation with him.<sup>6</sup> One example was a large portrait of Pierre Gauvreau in his garden, done by the filmmaker, in which a substantial rectangular section in the middle of the painting was left blank, to be filled in later by Gauvreau, in his nonrepresentational style. Momentum built slowly. One fine *cadavre exquis*, begun in 1982, was not finished until 1996. But in the mean time, other people became involved, the potentialities

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

12. Charles Biname, Pierre Gauvreau, and Janine Carreau. *Cadavre Exquis*. 1982–1996. Acrylic on canvas. 36 x 36 inches. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

of the form were evident, excitement was generated, and experimentation began.

The piece mentioned above, which took fourteen years to complete, is an example of the technique of creating independently on irregular sections of a shared canvas, with each contributor's work hidden from the others. In Figure 12, we can see this kind of collaboration between three artists with basically different techniques. The top and upper-left portions were done by Janine Carreau in vivid colors laid on by brush in a mixture of pointillist dots and long strokes. In the bottom and lower-right portion, Pierre Gauvreau uses a stencil method and spray paint with some patches of brushwork. The central portraits (which are of Gauvreau and Carreau) and the dark areas immediately surrounding them are by Charles Binamé, in a representational, though not realist, style. This work

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

13. Janine Carreau and Alexandre Boisseau. *cadavre exquis* “Faites durer le plaisir.” 1996. Mixed media on printer’s drawer. 32 x 37 inches. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

involves the basic elements of the Exquisite Corpse, with progressive collaboration and masking, but it does not have any kind of morphology. It juxtaposes very different styles and imageries, something we expect from the Exquisite Corpse, but it also has an astonishing sense of harmony. The same basic process can also be applied to three-dimensional works. Figure 13 shows a piece done by Janine Carreau and Alexandre Boisseau, one of the young artists I mentioned. The basic structure is provided by a wooden printer’s drawer that has been divided into more-or-less equal, alternating sections. Carreau’s contributions include photographs and texts and a wide variety of materials; Boisseau’s objects, including the plastic cowboy-and-Indian figurines around the outside, tend to be toys, trinkets, marbles. One of the quotations collaged into the piece by Carreau, “Faites durer le plaisir” (“Make pleasure last”), provides a title that is especially appropriate in conjunction with the old alarm clock applied by Boisseau. This is happy accident, of course, because (as

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

14. Janine Carreau and Luc Guerard. *cadavre exquis*. 1996. Mixed media on wood and irregular canvas. 31 x 49 inches. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

is traditional in the game) neither artist sees the other's work until the unveiling.

Another collaboration with Boisseau includes the legs of a mannequin projecting almost three feet horizontally into the viewing space. Figure 14 is a piece done by Janine Carreau and Luc Guérard, another Montréal “spontaneous” artist (the term used by Pierre Gauvreau, who dislikes “folk,” “naïf” and certainly “primitive”), showing how the shape and dimensions of a piece might explode in all directions. Of course, the same effects can and have been achieved by individual artists using found objects. The difference with the Exquisite Corpse is that the result cannot be controlled or predicted and—most importantly, perhaps—in the cooperative project there is often a sense of competition that makes the contributors want to surprise each other, and indeed push each other to extremes, especially if they do an extended series together. Thus Carreau and Boisseau, in several works based on printer's drawers, stimulate each other to find ingenious ways of subverting the rectilinear base using unexpected materials.

A highly adaptable technique developed by Janine Carreau, and

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

15. Pierre Gauvreau and Janine Carreau. *cadavre exquis*. 1996.  
Mixed media on thirty matteboard panels. 36 x 30 inches. © 2006  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

which I have not seen practiced elsewhere, was to cut a piece of matte board into sections of equal size, and to distribute those among two or more contributors. Each could then work independently on the sections, in whatever chosen medium, and, when finished, would number the sections indicating the preferred order. The parts of the Corpse would then be assembled according to an anatomy dictated by the number of players and their chosen order. Thus player A's first board would be placed above or alongside player B's first board, followed by the first board of player C, or the second board of player A,

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

16. Pierre Gauvreau and Janine Carreau. *Sans réponses, mais non sans questions*. 2002. Acrylic on canvas., 67 x 44 inches. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

and so on. Whereas the traditional Exquisite Corpse required players to be together at a given time, working on one surface, this method opens space and time, allowing contributors to work at a distance from each other, at their own pace, combining their work when they are finished. If two people are involved, usually two sets of panels are provided, resulting in two works, one for each contributor. Janine Carreau and Pierre Gauvreau have produced many of these in rectangular, square, circular and mixed forms, always following the same principle (see Figures 15, 16, 17).



In the scores of collaborations done between Pierre Gauvreau and Janine Carreau, his contributions tend to be purely abstract, gestural when he uses a brush, still non-figurative when he uses other techniques such as spray paint. Whatever the materials, his work maintains a high-modernist quality. Carreau's panels combine gestural brush strokes, text, and photographic images, often with a documentary or biographical impulse (see especially Figure 15, in which the top left panel is by Carreau, followed by Gauvreau, and so on down, and to the right). The contrast between techniques is striking, and when the two sets of panels are combined, they provide a commentary on each other, since photography inevitably comments on painting, and non-figuration inevitably reflects on figuration, and vice versa. One could even read into them contrasting modernist and postmodernist, masculine and feminine "voices." But there is a sense of harmony that arrives, paradoxically, even with such disparate styles. Carreau remarks that she is often astonished to discover a "unity of light" in these *Exquisite Corpses*, even though they involve so much the element of chance.

In the years following 1982, Carreau did a series of such works with a dozen friends and fellow artists, often blurring boundaries, as we have seen, between painting, collage, found objects, and sculpture. Pierre Gauvreau started more slowly, collaborating with his granddaughter and then with a widening group of friends from various disciplines, including actors, film directors, and writers. Gauvreau and Carreau did a series for exhibition in the spring of 1995, and there was another burst of activity during the weeks preceding the large exhibition *Célébrer la vie* (Celebrate Life) organized by Janine Carreau at the request of Pierre Gauvreau's cardiologist—but this requires some explanation.

In 1995 Pierre Gauvreau had a major coronary bypass operation, and during the process suffered a stroke that threatened to end his career, if not his life. Neurological complications affected his vision, he was in almost constant pain, and his balance was unsteady. Nonetheless he was back to painting with a speed that astonished his doctors, given his more than seventy years of age. Gauvreau's cardiologist, who became a close friend, happened to be involved with the organization of an international conference on cardiac emergencies scheduled for that year in Montréal, and suggested an art ex-

hibition to give a cultural dimension to the event. Janine Carreau responded with an extraordinary, large, vibrant exhibition of more than 150 collaborative pieces—*cadavres exquis* involving painting, sculpture, and mixed media—done by people aged eight to eighty, some well-known artists, others completely unknown, some famous in other fields such as television or theater. The results were hugely energetic and obviously exciting for a large crowd that gathered at the opening to see the Exquisite Corpse dance in a celebration of life sponsored by a medical conference on a deadly illness. The artists and cardiologists would have been sardonically amused by all the ironies involved, but there is a certain appropriateness as well. The visual Exquisite Corpse, as I mentioned earlier, often evokes the body, sometimes in monstrous ways. And although collaborations by Gauvreau and Carreau do not depict the body in the same way, text and photographic elements in Carreau's contributions often refer to moments of passion, illness, and death.

In a video documentary made of the Célébrer la vie event by Pierre-Mathieu Fortin, Pierre Gauvreau remarks that the Exquisite Corpse belongs to none and to all of its makers, that it is always a surprise at the unveiling, and that he is often astonished at how much his own contributions are in tune with the work of his “partners,” even though in the nature of the game none can control the result. In the years since that exhibition, Gauvreau and Carreau have continued to collaborate with dozens of people, of various ages and professions, on many works, while doing more than a hundred together. Recent examples were shown at the Galerie Montcalm in Gatineau, Québec, through the summer of 2005, and it is worth taking a closer look at several specific pieces.

Figure 17 shows an example of how the Corpse composed of regular elements cut from matte board can take shapes other than rectangular, given the system used by Carreau and Gauvreau. The panels at 9:00, 1:00, 4:00, and 7:00 show Gauvreau using a favorite technique of stenciling with sprayed acrylic over lace, fabric, or household objects, to give abstract designs of surprising depth; the others show Carreau applying acrylic by brush or from the tube, laying it on in small fields of bright color. There is a wide range of “temperature”

Image masked. Please refer to the print version of the book to view this image.

17. Pierre Gauvreau and Janine Carreau. *Exquisite corpse* "La jeunesse est en nous et nous sommes la jeunesse," (Claude Gavreau). 2004. Acrylic on 8 matteboard panels. 24 inches in diameter. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SODRAC, Montreal.

in the colors of the various panels, but the overall impression is of strong, hot yellow. Again, the complementariness is accidental. Another very different piece (see Figure 18) is a composition by Pierre Gauvreau and his daughter, Annick. Each did five rectangular panels, working independently as usual. Gauvreau's stenciled effects (in this case quite Cubist to my eye) are sections 2,4,6,8,10 reading from the top. According to the usual rules of the game, these were eventually combined with the five panels done by Annick Gauvreau, her three-dimensional, more figurative style contrasting well with his. Then the assembled cadaver was set in a sculptural, totemic frame by Annick, who explains some of the elements of her contributions in notes she made during the construction:



The totem is Abenaki, raised in memory of my father's grandmother. I'll include the frame and photo of the Indian girl and my father's family library. Under the photograph, I'll glue the little card my mother sent to my father's aunt, not long after I was born. It's inscribed *Annick Gauvreau*. I've asked [my daughter] to write or draw something in one of the minuscule books. I explained it was a ritual. I'm going to ask the rest of the family to do the same, then I'll seal the library with melted plastic so that nobody can read what's written. It's a private Lilliputian library. . . . The mountains I'm going to paint come from the Sainte-Adèle region. Adèle, my father's grandmother, came from there. I've found a little wooden whistle that used to belong to the kids. It has a bird perched on it. My father had cages full of all kinds of birds when I was young. I'll rig [she uses the verb *patenter* which is the root of *patenteux*] a system to hang the whistle so that children and childish adults can pick it up and use it. . . . Every panel is so full of color and objects I was afraid they might clash. [My husband] said, "Stop worrying, your father's sections will have intermediate colors and make a perfect match." That's what I decided to believe. Otherwise I would have had trouble going on.<sup>7</sup>

Her remarks underline the biographical/domestic/historical underpinning of Annick Gauvreau's contributions to this work. Amerindian ancestry, not uncommon in Québec families, is still often kept secret. Annick Gauvreau's totem asserts both a matrilineal and Amerindian line. The reference to the family library underscores this gently subversive quality because a mythical figure in Gauvreau family history is a freethinking grandfather who had an impressive library with many books once on the Catholic Church's index of forbidden titles, a library fundamental to the education of two very public writers: Pierre Gauvreau (intransigent polemicist and writer for film and television) and his brother Claude, the Automatist, avant-garde poet, and critic. Note how the library in this *cadaver exquis*-as-totem is certainly familial, but less patriarchal, very small (approximately 1½ by ¾ by ½ inches), and intensely private. As another example of the kind of serendipitous accident the game can produce, note

how the leaf/feather shape in the sixth panel echoes the headdress of the Abenaki girl in panel five. And this work is another instance in which highly referential, even ritualistic elements contrast strongly with the non-figurative coolness of Pierre Gauvreau's contributions. Incidentally, Annick's notes show another characteristic of the game: curiosity, sometimes even anxiety, about how one's efforts might complement or clash with other contributors.

I hope I have made it clear that there are a number of things striking about these newest Canadian experiments in the genre of the Exquisite Corpse. First of all, they have resulted in works astonishing for their variety of sizes, shapes, colors, materials, and techniques (my few examples barely scratch the surface). Since the "morphology" of the original *cadavre exquis* no longer applies, the Montréal method (as I'll call it) allows for a mixture of representational and nonrepresentational styles. It also seems to have created an ever-widening network of contributors, and as a result the Exquisite Corpse is no longer an occasional parlor game for an artistic elite or for students in Surrealism 101, but a stimulus for collaboration between well-known artists and others from a variety of backgrounds, and of widely different ages. It has not only reintroduced chance and play into art making (reducing the importance of authorship, technical facility, and academic notions of beauty—as was the original intention of the Exquisite Corpse), but communalized the production. Since enough works are made so that each participant can have one, there is a quality of exchange, and an inclusion of the broader community in this art-making process, a sharing and diffusion of the work of well-known individual artists in a kind of potlatch. Whether or not the results find favor in galleries does not seem to be a major concern for the people involved. Carreau and Gauvreau see this as an invigorating sharing of inspiration and resources, worthwhile in its own right. And so the game goes on.

At the proofing stages of this essay, in January of 2009, Pierre Gauvreau is physically very weak, and has become, as he says, "a Sunday painter." But he continues to work as much as he can, particularly on a series of *cadavres exquis* with his wife.

## Notes

1. For more information on Benoît and Parent, and for an example of one of these early Exquisite Corpses, see Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, *Mimi Parent, Jean Benoît: Surréalistes*. See also Breton, *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, 288–91. Mimi Parent died June 14, 2005.
2. For general information on this movement and its context, see Gagnon, *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois, 1941–1954*, and Ellenwood, *Egregore: A History of the Montréal Automatist Movement*.
3. Borduas, “Refus Global/Total Refusal.”
4. Much more could be said about the interaction between Canadian writers and artists and the French Surrealists. Another printmaker and poet from Québec, Roland Giguère, was a longtime collaborator with Édouard Jaguer and the *Phases* group. For examples of Surrealist-inspired drawing in Québec, including some Exquisite Corpses, see Montréal Musée d’Art Contemporain, *Dessin et surréalisme au Québec*.
5. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919/39*, 169.
6. Binamé is also the author of a full-length documentary film on Pierre Gauvreau, *Gauvreau, ou L’obligation de la liberté*.
7. Cited in Carreau, “La jeunesse est en nous et nous sommes la jeunesse,” 58–59. Annick Gauvreau has taken to artwork with great energy and considerable success in her middle age. The Abenaki are an Amerindian people of northern Québec.

# An Anatomy of Alfred Chester's *Exquisite Corpse*

ALLEN HIBBARD

7

The carrier pigeons and emergency kisses  
merged with the beautiful stranger's breasts **André Breton**, "Sunflower"

Alfred Chester's novel *The Exquisite Corpse*, first published by Simon and Schuster in 1967, clearly owes a debt to the Surrealist game that inspired its title.<sup>1</sup> "It didn't involve the folding over of sheets of paper passed around a table of friends, but a deliberate folding of memories, feelings & fantasies coming out of Alfred's own rather bizarre life," Ira Cohen writes of the novel in a piece originally published in Andrei Codrescu's journal *The Exquisite Corpse*.<sup>2</sup>

The novel has been entombed, buried, and subsequently disinterred several times since its original publication. In 1986, Carroll and Graf reissued *The Exquisite Corpse*, with a new cover and introduction by Diana Athill. The novel again went out of print until Black Sparrow brought it back into circulation in 2004, with a new cover and the Athill essay placed as an afterword. With each new life the novel has had to situate itself amidst a new cultural landscape. Each reappearance has been accompanied by a fresh reception from a new generation of readers. It may well be that *The Exquisite Corpse* was ahead of its time and that we have only gradually, with each disinterment, with each fresh look at its well-embalmed body, come to appreciate its place and value. It is a body unlike any other body—surreal and surprising; a novel unlike any other novel—a nar-



rative analogue to the Surrealist game that opened up fresh possibilities, that defied established conventions and forms; a performance that becomes part of the game's legacy. The novel demonstrates how the game—as conceit as well as operating principle—became, for Chester, a way of unifying a variety of impulses (desire, queer performance), styles (postmodern, camp) and themes (fractured identity, mask), all within the context of literary-historical developments of the 1960s.

I

*The Exquisite Corpse* is composed of forty-nine brief vignettes, some that continue preceding narrative threads, and others that initiate and propel discrete, seemingly unrelated narrative lines. This produces a literary effect analogous to that produced by the Surrealist game, giving the whole a fragmented quality, almost as though these different pieces were arbitrarily attached to one another, without a great deal of attention to what came before, unburdened of obligations to complete any particular story line or establish logical relations between one story line and another. “Thank God it doesn’t matter whether there’s any logic in the book at all,” Chester wrote to his friend Edward Field on November 30, 1964.<sup>3</sup> Despite its disjointed quality, however, the novel displays a strange and luminous sense of coherence, in large measure through its consistent, scintillating style.

The formation of identity is announced as a central thematic preoccupation in the opening scene, where we see the character of John Anthony in his attic as he passes a bassinet and catches a glimpse of a “stranger’s face” in “a bit of looking glass.” Unable to reconcile himself with the image, he recoils. “His eyes felt bruised,” Chester writes, with Anthony proclaiming to the image: “You will make me crazy.” He then begins sobbing, hugging himself, and cooing, “[p]oor baby, poor. Poor poor baby. Baby poor poor.” And then, with a burst of ferocious anger, he grabbed the mirror out of the bassinet and flung his fierce chin against it. He bellowed through the empty house: “Why? Why must I suffer your destiny?”<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent episodes introduce a host of other characters, briefly tracing the threads of their stories. As narrative lines unreel, how-

ever, the very nature of autonomous, stable identity is challenged. Baby Poorpoor, after being named and called into being in the first chapter, undergoes a series of transformations through which tight connections between name and identity are unhinged. Xavier, introduced in the third chapter, could be a reincarnation or permutation of Baby Poorpoor. In chapter 5, featuring Xavier and his dying father, Papa, the father insists on calling his son “Dickie.” (Is this the same Dickie, Dickie Gold, who John Anthony fantasizes about and tries to track down in chapter 26?) In chapter 7, set at Coney Island, T. S. Ferguson (a.k.a. the sadist John Doe), married and closeted, comes upon Baby Poorpoor whom he renames James Madison (the name of the high school emblazoned on Poorpoor’s windbreaker); John Doe sets up James Madison in a secluded apartment and makes him into a sex slave. When Mary Poorpoor, in chapter 10, gives birth (to Baby, a.k.a. Emilio), she becomes convinced that her friend Emily must be the father since “she and Emily had played with the frankfurters.”<sup>5</sup> Even more strangely, a band (or swarm) of fairies comes and swaps Baby for a “pale fairy child.”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Mary Poorpoor, who is “married” to Emily, pushes Emilio around in a perambulator in an exclusive, gated community garden along with other ladies who parade around their imaginary babies. Only when she begins to play their game, adopting their illusions concerning the “real” status of their children, is Mary accepted into the social network.

Queer desire, drag performance, and masquerade are flagrantly displayed in chapter 11 where we are introduced to Tommy and his sexy, young Latin lover, Ismael, who (in the following chapter) writes to Dr. Franzblau, a kind of Miss Lonely Hearts or Ann Landers, under the name Isobel Rosa (“You could refer to me as Yellow Rose”<sup>7</sup>) to ask for help with her love life. Tommy appears in later vignettes with John Anthony (who, in yet other scenes is found hustling, in drag, under the name Veronica), in his attic space called “The Aviary,” which is filled with homemade masks, surrounding a three-foot-high crucifix. “Except for the crucifix, every inch of wall was covered by masks. Hundreds of them, all made by John Anthony at the long worktable near the window. Among the masks were saints, freaks, demons, princesses, movie stars and heroes. But there weren’t too many of these. Mostly the faces were of ordinary people, with

a variety of everyday expressions, of which horror, pain, greed and nothing were the most common.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet another narrative strand, apparently set in an African jungle, begins in chapter 13 and features Tomtom Jim, who (rather like Enkidu in *Gilgamesh*) lives in harmony with his fellow jungle creatures until Mary Poorpoor (God knows how) chances upon him.

The novel thus presents us with a multifaceted fantasy landscape, difficult to fix in time or space, in which identities are fluid and even names seem unable to attach themselves permanently to particular characters. In purposeful defiance of Aristotelian logic, the novel supplies no tidy conclusions; its actions largely remain unresolved. Mary is transported somehow, inexplicably, from the African jungle and plopped down in Manhattan where she wanders the “harsh night streets” of the city with Emilio, “aimless and alone.”<sup>9</sup> When she chances upon a masked ball, she thinks it “must be fairyland.”<sup>10</sup> She bumps into a gentleman, also named Emilio, who sets off toward “home” with Mary and her son in his chauffeur-driven limousine. As Emilio draws Mary’s hand to his crotch, she finds it “empty and very wet.”<sup>11</sup>

In the last section devoted to James Madison, he has tracked down Ferguson/John Doe in the suburbs and peered through the window into his comfortable, bourgeois family life, only to be told by Ferguson that they won’t be able to meet again. Profoundly dejected, we assume, James Madison retreats to “a silvery evergreen forest filled with smoky gray light” where “he had come to die.”<sup>12</sup> After trying to call his mother collect (from a phone booth in a forest clearing!), James Madison impales himself with a tree branch.

The penultimate scene shows John Anthony and Xavier walking off, hand in hand, to sing Christmas carols at a prison. “They walked in the snow and in the moonlight. Practicing how he would project his voice up at the prison, Xavier threw his golden head back, opened wide his mouth and joined the distant carolers in their song. Snow dissolved on his warm pink tongue.”<sup>13</sup>

The last scene of the novel shows Tommy and Ismael “together at last and happy as could be in the back room of the Rosas’ apartment.”<sup>14</sup> After Ismael’s face is disfigured in an accident (“His glazed green eyes were like leaves of sugared mint stuck on a huge toasted

marshmallow”), John Anthony makes a mask “of Ismael’s face as it had been before the tragedy,” which Tommy would often wear, kneeling before Ismael: “Look into the mirror, darling. Look at your own loveliness.”<sup>15</sup> Ismael, finding that his deformed face provokes pity (or disgust) from strangers, begins to panhandle. “They think it’s me, he said to himself, holding his mouth so as not to stain the streets with his laughter. They think it’s me.”<sup>16</sup> Just as in the first scene of the novel, the character is unable to reconcile two competing, conflicting self-images.

Abjection, pain, loss, and longing for connection emerge as the dominant feelings and moods in *The Exquisite Corpse*, despite the occasional glimmer of hope and fleeting possibilities for satisfying relationships. “How hard it is to live,” sighs James Madison as he escapes the tenement where he has been held (for how long? days? months? years? He cannot tell), a voluntary captive of Ferguson/John Doe (who teases him with the prospect of one day seeing his cock). Once out on the street, “He saw a single and colossal tide of madness with everything caught in it. The world swirled and struggled, drowning. While he had been high and dry up in the fifth-floor apartment, the universe had opened all its dams. There were no longer any rivers or navigable currents. There were no more directions. If he took just one more step, he would be swept from the shore and flung into the amorphous oceanic upheaval.”<sup>17</sup>

Steven Shaviro has recently written about the carnivalesque quality of *The Exquisite Corpse*. “Each character in the novel burns with extravagant desires,” he writes. “And each wears some sort of mask. . . . One mask leads to another.” John Anthony, as Shaviro notes, “makes masks obsessively.”<sup>18</sup> And, Ismael, writing as Isobel to Dr. Franzblau, describes Tommy’s face as mask-like, after some kind of apparent cosmetic surgery: “Tommy was sitting in a chair under the floor lamp with all the light shining on his face. Like a stage set. He’d prepared it. He was sitting there waiting for me to look at him. I thought at first he was wearing a mask, except it moved. . . . It was sort of pulled around to one side, but it didn’t always stay there. It dropped sometimes. It slid around here and there like it was alive or something. I stood there unable to believe my eyes. My handsome

winsome Tommy!”<sup>19</sup> In the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*, thus, identities are mere poses meant to be struck, held momentarily, then set aside, disavowed, or struck again.

## II

The novel, as surreal as it seems, emerges as an aesthetic response to a variety of specific biographical and historical conditions as well as literary influences. As early as 1953, when he was living in Paris, Alfred Chester conceived of a fictional work along the lines of what would later be called *The Exquisite Corpse*. He wrote to his friend and fellow writer Curtis Harnack about his plans to write “a wierd [*sic*] novel—not really wierd, just odd—the hero of which is forever changing identities and sexes and finally gets himself pregnant.”<sup>20</sup> During the late fifties Chester worked on a project he called *I, Etcetera*, never finished, that involved fragmented characters, temporal flights, and formal innovations similar to those he later deployed in *The Exquisite Corpse*.<sup>21</sup>

It was not until he moved to Morocco in 1963, responding to an invitation from Paul Bowles to visit, that Chester found the conditions right for pouring his energies back into fiction and fulfilling his innovative novelistic vision.<sup>22</sup> Chester seemed eager to make a break from consuming social networks in New York (editors, publishers, friends, family, bars, etc.), and get out of the rut of writing reviews. (During the early sixties he developed a reputation for being a sharp critic, taking on contemporaries such as John Updike, Vladimir Nabokov, J. D. Salinger, Mary McCarthy, John Rechy, William Burroughs, Truman Capote, and others.<sup>23</sup>)

By the time Chester arrived there, Tangier was no longer the city Bowles had first laid eyes on in the early thirties; nor was it the Tangier Burroughs encountered for the first time in the mid-fifties. Though the city was now a part of independent Morocco, the myth of Tangier as an exotic locale, a liminal space conducive to writing—where drugs and sex were readily available and generally unregulated—was powerfully alive in Chester’s imagination. In his study *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs and Chester Write Tangier*, Greg Mullins identifies and analyzes the liminal space of Tangier, a site where imperial power, racial difference, and sexual desire oper-

ate in intriguing ways. “Expatriate writing in Tangier,” he writes, “articulates the desire to exceed national and other forms of identity through representations of sex, and especially through representations of marginalized forms of sex and sexuality.”<sup>24</sup> Tangier, thus, with its reputation as tangled meeting place of writers and illicit adventure, served as a midwife for Chester’s wondrous, strange, literary offspring.

Soon after he arrived in Morocco in the summer of 1963, Alfred Chester began composing what was to become *The Exquisite Corpse*. Early in February of 1964, he wrote his friend Edward Field telling of his progress on the work he then thought of calling *His*.

I’m writing my novel. Would you believe it? I’ve only done six pages so far, but I feel right, now. It’s really ridiculous and sort of endless, and the whole point is to make it go as I feel like going, so I don’t have to feel responsible about art and so on. It’s full of sex and monstrosity. . . . It is going to be exactly one hundred fifty pages long in print. I think the 19th Century idea of a novel is ridiculous. If you can’t say what you have to say in a hundred and fifty pages, then you are an ass.<sup>25</sup>

On the same day, Chester wrote to his friend, the British writer Norman Glass, whom he had met in Morocco, saying that he wasn’t taking the work seriously, hoping that “then maybe it will get written.” The first pages “sort of slipped out, fartlike,” taking him unaware, he told Glass, whom he credited for helping find the form for the novel.<sup>26</sup> This was to be the first volume of a project called *Do You Believe in Alfred Chester?*, to which he expected to devote the next twenty years. (He could not have known then that his life would end in Jerusalem just seven years later.)

Six months later, in another letter to Field, Chester excitedly reported that he was now planning to title his novel *The Exquisite Corpse* after being introduced to the Surrealist game by Remy Charlip,<sup>27</sup> who was in Morocco at the time.

It’s from that game where everyone draws another part of the body. Remy is here and we did it last night with Dris [al Kasri]

and Norman [Glass], very kified, and they are gorgeous. I want to use one on my book jacket too. It's a robot's head with a childlike torso, a pile of sort of dead cocks at the groin (I drew that) and a kind of spiral whirlwind for feet. My other contributions were a torso with arms chopped off, two heads, Siamese twins, a skeleton for the pelvic area, a man-dog being fucked, and a pair of feet torn from the legs with a hill and a crucifix on it and the inscription Goodbye World. It makes me think I must be very sick.

Am I?<sup>28</sup>

Chester's experience with the game was especially timely, for it so perfectly captured the spirit and nature of his own literary experiment—its playful, unlikely juxtapositions and erotic potential. He thus seized the game's title and affixed it to the novel he was then writing.

While his expatriation, particularly in such a radically different kind of place, opened up and stimulated Chester's imagination, it also had a profoundly destabilizing effect on him. Francis Poole has noted that "the effect Tangier has on the unbalanced, neurotic or paranoid psyche is often to magnify and intensify the individual's mental disturbance, sometimes resulting in a fatal push over the 'edge' into extreme disorientation, depersonalization, or even madness."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Chester's unstable mental condition, along with his experimentation with LSD and heavy consumption of alcohol while he was living in Morocco, might have something to do with the surreal, hallucinogenic quality of the novel.<sup>30</sup> Chester registers his fragile grip on reality in a February 19, 1964 letter to Field: "The terrible thing about being so alone here, I mean, having no point of reference, is that I keep thinking I'm crazy. I mean you're not here to say what a good boy I am, and I keep thinking I am mad . . . I'm scared. It really scares me . . . Don't you think I'm crazy? No, I'm not. Am I?"<sup>31</sup>

It was in Morocco, too, that Chester met Dris El Kasri, one of the great loves of his life, to whom he dedicates *The Exquisite Corpse*. Without coming to hard and fast conclusions as to whether the overall effects of living in Morocco were positive or negative, we can safely say that *The Exquisite Corpse*, in the form we know it, would

not have been produced had Chester not sojourned in Tangier from 1963 to 1965. As he wrote to Dennis Selby several months after arriving in Morocco: "I am slightly changed—Morocco, kif, Dris."<sup>32</sup>

A number of substantial literary influences can be felt in the novel as well. Partly as a result of reading Pirandello (namely *Six Characters in Search of an Author*), Chester developed the notion of what he called the "situational I," in which a person's or character's identity was formed primarily by the surrounding context. This notion of a contingent, fluid identity, socially constructed, resembles views of the self that have been posited by any number of post-structuralist theorists (Jacques Derrida, and others). In letters from Morocco, Chester discusses reading Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. The themes in Hesse's novel, such as the shattering of self in the face of modernity, Chester saw as closely associated with those in his own work. He also read *Siddhartha*, *Ulysses*, and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* during this time. *Nightwood* (which he critiqued for a Dutch publication in the early 1950s), he noted, "is the game I was playing with my ladies all these years. Susan [Sontag] was Robin. Irene [Fornes] was Jenny. Harriet [Sohmers Zwerling] was Nora. I of course was Dr. O'Connor."<sup>33</sup> There is undoubtedly a kinship between Barnes and Chester. Chester would likely have been aware that Barnes worked on *Nightwood* (which then she called *Bow Down*) while she and Charles-Henri Ford were visiting Tangier in the early 1930s. Paul Bowles may even have shared with Alfred his recollections of Barnes, recorded in his autobiography *Without Stopping*:

Djuna came and explained that she wanted to find a house. Someone suggested that since I used my house on the Marshan only to work in, it was logical that she should use it to sleep in. Charles-Henri Ford moved in with her, on the understanding that after one thirty in the afternoon I could always count on their being out of it. Before she would unpack, Djuna insisted on removing all seventeen jackal pelts from the walls where I had hung them; she also rolled up the python skin and put it away. . . . We used to sit at the Café Central in the Zoco Chico, and because Djuna's makeup was blue, purple, and green in a day when no one used such colors, she was an object of interest to everyone.<sup>34</sup>



Such remembrances provide an index of Chester's self-selected literary ancestors.

Diana Athill, Chester's friend and editor at André Deutsch, notes the fairytale qualities of *The Exquisite Corpse* in her introduction to the 1986 Carroll and Graf edition: "The writing—so natural, so spontaneous-feeling, so precise—makes the pages sparkle with a kind of fairy-tale freshness; makes them, as Alfred claimed, delicious. The book's strangeness lies entirely in the events, as it does in a fairy-story—remote though Alfred's events are (and they could hardly be remoter) from those of Hans Andersen."<sup>35</sup>

The novel certainly does have a fantastic, surreal, fairy-tale air. Yet at the same time its material is drawn from Chester's life experiences. Models can often be found for fictional characters, as radically transformed as they become. There is no doubt that Papa, Xavier's father, is based on Alfred's own father, Jake Chester, just as Mama is based on Alfred's mother, Annie. The scenes surrounding Papa's death were constructed from Alfred's memories of his own father's death and funeral. Indeed, Alfred, like so many avant-garde writers of the twentieth century, linked writing and death. "Whenever I write fiction, I always get terrified of death," he wrote in a letter to Glass just as he was beginning serious work on the novel that became *The Exquisite Corpse*.<sup>36</sup> He refers in particular to the death of his father, "the Jew, about whom I am only now beginning to write. My poor suffering father whom I was not allowed to love."<sup>37</sup>

Xavier, he says in one letter, was based on Extro, a lover from his Greenwich Village days in the early sixties, though the character seems also to be a surrogate for Chester himself.<sup>38</sup> (A portion of Chester's character seems, as well, to be invested in Tommy. Perhaps every character is a permutation of the author.) It has been suggested that Mary Poorpoor might be loosely modeled after Susan Sontag.<sup>39</sup> And John Anthony, the Jew-turned-Catholic drag queen, is certainly an incarnation of Chester's friend (and erstwhile lover) Walter Kerell, whom he had met first in Paris in the mid-1950s. In fact, in one letter from Morocco, written after he had completed the novel, Chester worries about how Kerell might respond to the portrayal. Would he recognize himself? If so, would he take offense?<sup>40</sup>

The landscape of the novel, similarly, is an amalgam of the real

and the fantastic. Chester draws from his own experience as he creates scenes in the garment district of Manhattan (where the family fur business, Alfred Fur, was located) and Coney Island. Xavier's encounter with death takes place, it seems, at Chester's boyhood home in Brooklyn, on 327 Avenue O, with its rose bushes, wild cherry, and snowball. "You do have a marvelous garden here," the character of Death remarks to Xavier. "It's the nicest on the whole street."<sup>41</sup> And the gated park where the women go to push their perambulators is no doubt Gramercy Park.<sup>42</sup>

Traces of the real will be found in the surreal, as shown in this examination of the various forces, influences, and memories that coalesced in the matrix from which *The Exquisite Corpse* was born. Just as his characters construct marvelous and poignant fantasies from their encounters with others, Chester radically transformed the material of his life in creating this fantastic, surreal novel. Tangier served as the matrix, providing the conditions conducive to writing. Drugs provided the alchemical elixir that twisted reality. Dris supplied erotic inspiration. Friends, relatives, and acquaintances became models for characters, and places he knew became settings. Chester's reading suggested possibilities for handling his material.

In his "First Surrealist Manifesto" (1924), André Breton proclaimed that in the face of a superfluity of the real, all modern man could do "is turn back toward his childhood."<sup>43</sup> It is in that space, recalled and re-created, free from the anxieties associated with adulthood, that dreams reside, that the imagination takes hold and soars. In Tangier, as he worked on the novel, Chester crawled back into that space of childhood. The resulting novel is an example of that sought-after state Breton describes in a famous passage from his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1929), "a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions."

### III

Initial critical responses to Chester's novel, supplemented by more recent theoretical insights, are particularly suggestive and can serve as a starting point for an assessment of *The Exquisite Corpse* and its

relation to various literary movements, styles, and intellectual contexts. Particularly suggestive are associations made between the novel, the changing shape of experimental literature in the 1960s, camp, and French literary traditions.

Equivocations are common in assessments of avant-garde works. Reviewers of *The Exquisite Corpse*, almost without exception, recognized its innovative, daring qualities, yet they often had difficulty determining, ultimately, its level of success or its place in the literary landscape. In his long and thoughtful piece in *Book Week*, John Ashbery calls the novel “a lively macabre diversion, recommended to readers with strong stomachs,” and goes on to ask if there is “still anybody who hasn’t one?”<sup>44</sup> Ashbery judges this novel as “far more satisfying” than Chester’s first novel, *Jamie Is My Heart’s Desire*, but holds out for his next novel which “could be the major statement that has been awaited from him.”<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Chester’s life ended without him having completed that anticipated work. Like other reviewers, Ashbery notes the looseness of plot and the ways in which characters transform themselves into other characters: “These shifting Pirandellian transformations eventually take on tragic urgency through sheer repetition, and when a series of long-anticipated deaths finally arrives, it is as though a miniature world were crumbling.”<sup>46</sup> Though he appreciates Chester’s authenticity, adventurousness, rich language and scintillating visions, Ashbery stops short of unconditional praise for the author and his novel: “One is left feeling impatient with him for his occasionally slapdash handling of some marvelous raw materials; for loose ends; for his teenager’s fascination with the gothic and grotesque and for things that look, smell, taste, and sound bad.”<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Charles T. Samuels, reviewing the novel in *The Nation*, tries to sort out the work’s successes and shortcomings. “[I]t constructs a crazy-house world of erotic anguish,” he writes, in a piece called “High Camp in the Underground.”<sup>48</sup> While he acknowledges the origins of the novel’s title in the Surrealist parlor game, he suggests that “what is compositionally valid in visual terms need not be applicable to fiction.”<sup>49</sup> “[I]n some bizarre subplots,” he writes, “Chester manages to find the right situation for his peculiar truth. . . . In other parts of the novel, the action is so bizarre as to block any response except bemused curiosity.”<sup>50</sup> Samuels concludes that

“when Chester controls the grotesqueness, he can be both insightful and liberatingly comic.”<sup>51</sup>

Leslie Schaffer pairs Chester’s novel with Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver’s translation of the Marquis de Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom*, in a review titled “The Hypochondriacal Vision,” published in the *New Republic*. In a less equivocal appraisal of *The Exquisite Corpse*, Schaffer writes that the work is “decidedly clever, sometimes repulsively savage but often richly comical satire.”<sup>52</sup> Schaffer also takes note of the collaborative nature of the surrealist game evoked by the title and proposes that the characters in the novel similarly seem to collaborate in making each other: “[E]ach seems exclusively to be the fictitious invention of the other, and this other is no less a reductive fiction than his invention.”<sup>53</sup> In the end Chester seems to fare as well, if not better, than de Sade: “Chester has succeeded admirably, even with a thoroughly ruthless precision, in portraying that absurdly reductive, almost hypochondriacal vision of the human condition that seems increasingly popular in our age. . . . Chester has made an appropriately unpleasant comedy which, like all good comedy, is never merely funny.”<sup>54</sup>

Seeking to place the novel within categories it purposefully sought to question, disrupt, and dismantle, reviewers frequently considered Chester’s novel within an emerging vein of “homosexual” prose that collapsed writers such as Genet, Burroughs, Rechy, and Hubert Selby Jr. together.<sup>55</sup> The *Library Journal* billed the novel as “a specimen of hysterical camp,” stating that “it pushes the trappings of camp, homosexuality, fancy dress, and inflated language into the frenzy of nightmare.”<sup>56</sup> Along the same lines, Eliot Fremont-Smith suggests, in his review for the *New York Times*, that the novel “might be called a picaresque novel of transvestism,” whose “characters are a half-dozen or so ludicrously frustrated, possibly lobotomized homosexuals, as tenuously connected to each other as to reality.”<sup>57</sup> In the end, Fremont-Smith finds that “what remains interesting is Mr. Chester’s esthetic dilemma,” apparently how to make effective art from the lives of “the utter isolation and desolation of all these self-enclosed, self-devouring people.”<sup>58</sup>

In their biography of Susan Sontag, Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, in a discussion of the genesis and content of her famous “Notes

on ‘Camp,’” suggest that “perhaps it was Alfred Chester who showed her the way.”<sup>59</sup> Chester and Sontag were close at the time, when both were living in New York, after having met in France in the fifties. Sontag had before her, in the figure of Chester, who was openly gay and prone to over-the-top performances and brilliant flashes of wit, a living model of camp (though in camp the play between revealing and concealing is perhaps more pronounced than it was in Chester’s self-performance). Rollyson and Paddock point to Chester’s enthusiastic response to a W. H. Auden review of Oscar Wilde’s letters published in the *New Yorker* on March 9, 1963, in which the poet reflected upon connections between sexuality and the artist’s style. Chester likely shared his views with Sontag, who picks up the theme when she writes, “Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense.”<sup>60</sup> Sontag emphasizes the primacy placed on artifice and exaggeration in her enumeration of the style’s central features and characteristics. “Notes on ‘Camp’” was first published the same year as Chester’s essay on Genet.

Jack Babuscio, in his treatment of the relation between camp and what he calls “gay sensibility,” identifies four characteristics of camp style: irony (“any incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association,” particularly contrasts between “masculine/feminine”);<sup>61</sup> aestheticism (attentiveness to style, arrangement, timing, tone, etc.); theatricality (role-playing, impersonation, and performance, particularly with respect to gender, that results in a blurring of “real” and “artificial”); and humor (deployed as a “means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity”).<sup>62</sup> With its surprising, unlikely juxtapositions, the Surrealist game shares many of these traits of camp. Certainly all of these elements can be found in *The Exquisite Corpse* where sexual identity is constantly being performed and created in performance and where masquerade seems to be a way of being.

Chester’s handling of gender in the novel is consistent with the views of gender performance submitted by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Gender, rather than being fixed and stable, is performed, Butler asserts: “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior

space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.<sup>63</sup> Drag serves as a key illustration of this instability, for it “fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.”<sup>64</sup> These notions of self and identity are at the heart of camp, as well as the postmodern. Theorists such as Shaviro and Butler build and elaborate on key notions regarding the self associated with post-structuralist thought: the self is in a continual process of motion, becoming; to insist on stable, fixed identity is thus absurd, if not impossible.

Josh Greenfield, in the *New York Times Book Review*, very usefully suggests that the novel should be considered in “the French tradition. It has a kind of Chelsea Boys formlessness, creaking the unsupported stresses and strains implicit in freewheeling experiment. But if it were offered as a translation from the French, it might very well be hailed as a small masterpiece. Presented in its original English, as matters now stand, the danger is that it might be dismissed altogether as a large bore. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in between; it is a little of each.”<sup>65</sup>

Greenfield continues to weigh and measure Chester’s achievements, noting that Chester was “out to shock, to dazzle, to shake up, to offend—and is offensive—in a dirty-word, self-consciously aggressive, puerile way.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, he also strives “to creatively record the implications of an obsession, to document the tyranny and anguish of compulsive fantasy, to chronicle the torments of the nightmare world that can grow out of idle daydreams.”<sup>67</sup> Greenfield concludes what is generally a favorable review by saying that “even if one does not fully understand or accept *The Exquisite Corpse*, one should not ignore it.”<sup>68</sup> He places Chester alongside Henry Miller and William Burroughs, “two other Americans working in the French tradition,” and proclaims him a “born writer with a zestful imagination and a poet’s gift for creating provocative and unforgettable images.”<sup>69</sup>

It should not be surprising that some critics linked Chester’s novel to French literary traditions. His work has the candor of de Sade, the lyricism of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the decadence of Huysmans, the erotic beauty of Genet. Above all, we can, as already suggested, trace Chester’s lineage back through the French Surrealist tradition,

through Lautréamont and Breton, who are his literary ancestors. From them he inherits a commitment to breaking conventional narrative patterns and an impulse to celebrate the erotic potentials in individual consciousness and language. With a discernible bias toward realism and works that clearly display “American” qualities (whatever those are), scholars of American literature have not always known what to do with works that deviate from established conventions and expectations integrally tied to realism. Poe, who has been warmly embraced by the French, is a case in point. Chester may well be another.

During his extended stay in France in the fifties, Chester became thoroughly acquainted with French style and traditions. Just prior to writing *The Exquisite Corpse*, after arriving in Morocco, he devoted considerable time to an essay, “Looking for Genet,” in which he expressed his admiration for the author of *Our Lady of the Flowers*, *The Balcony*, and *The Thief’s Journal*, with whom he obviously felt a strong connection. Chester especially appreciated the way Genet represented self-conscious performance and masquerade in an era where “the individual and the institution, the man and the role he plays, become more and more separate.”<sup>70</sup> “Who is the man?” he asks. “Behind the mask that he still forces himself to believe in, there is an eyeless, noseless face, barely anything at all, a guilty blob without identity. If he doesn’t believe in the mask, he believes still less in the man who is wearing it. Hypocrisy here turns into schizophrenia.”<sup>71</sup> Surrealism, similarly, is a response to disjunctions between inner feelings and outward articulations of the self in the modern world. The fantastic, bizarre, or marvelous were for Breton and his followers a means of resisting purely mechanical, rational thought and action, and preserving or recovering human imaginative potential.

#### IV

A consideration of *The Exquisite Corpse* allows us to see more clearly the relationship between Surrealism, camp, and the postmodern, particularly as they are played out in the 1960s. If the ancestry of Chester’s novel lies in Surrealist traditions, its birth and subsequent dissemination occurred within a postmodern context. From our vantage nearly four decades after the publication of *The Exquisite Corpse*, we

can perhaps see more clearly how Chester's work fits into that contemporary landscape. As insightful and appreciative as early reviews were, we might be struck, looking at them from our own historical moment, that there was scarcely a mention of the term "postmodern," which we have now become accustomed to as characterizing so many of the qualities of *The Exquisite Corpse*. Indeed, at the time Chester was writing the novel, the term "postmodern" had only begun to be used in its later lexicographical deployments. In the mid-sixties, just around the time Chester was completing his novel, the critic Leslie Fiedler, in an address to a conference set up by the CIA under the auspices of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, used the term "postmodern" as he heralded a new generation of talent, primarily within the cultural context of the sixties. A certain nonchalance, an anti-establishment stance, disconnection, drug-induced alternative perceptions, breakdown of the line between the esoteric and the vulgar, as well as political support for civil rights all seemed to be characteristics of this movement as Fiedler envisioned it.<sup>72</sup>

A number of works we now recognize as postmodern were also published within a few years of Chester's novel: Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* (1967), John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), and Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969), to name just a few. *The Exquisite Corpse*, however, has less in common with these works, marked as they are by intertextuality, metafiction, and hyper-plottedness, than with a strain of postmodern fiction that includes figures such as Burroughs, Kathy Acker, and Jeanette Winterson. Like this latter group of writers, Chester celebrates "an erotics of art," to use a phrase from Sontag's "Against Interpretation," included in a collection that included her famous "Camp" essay. Like works of these writers, *The Exquisite Corpse* defies strict, logical development of narrative lines, contains unabashedly erotic content, and tilts toward fantasy. Once again the identification of these elements and this strain of the postmodern allows us to see connections between Surrealism and postmodernism that have not yet been sufficiently examined or explored.

Chester's novel, we might also note, was published the same year Derrida delivered his seminal lecture "Sign, Structure and Play in the Human Sciences," the death knell of structuralism, announcing an



epistemic change that radically challenged the very notion of center and fixed structures. Various theoretical perspectives and approaches associated with or springing from poststructuralist thought can productively be brought to bear on *The Exquisite Corpse*. Already, we have seen how Judith Butler's work on gender and performativity applies neatly to Chester's project. The novel also exemplifies rhizomatic principles described and celebrated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In fact the kind of collaborative assemblage produced in the Surrealist game—highly unpredictable and full of previously unimagined possibilities—would itself, it seems, be an example of the kind of work Deleuze and Guattari found so appealing. In Chester's novel, as in Deleuze and Guattari's prescriptive scheme, a kind of free-floating desire propels characters and the narrative line, rather than a preexisting, determinate plot outline. "Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented," Deleuze and Guattari write in *Anti-Oedipus*. "Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows."<sup>73</sup> Desire, thus, has the capacity to break loose from traditionally established channels and designs (e.g., the oedipal family scheme) and form new attachments and combinations. This kind of randomness and uncertainty, abandonment of logical arrangement and rejection of even the possibility (let alone the desirability) of strict mimetic representation, and openness to new combinations free from teleological control is much like the celebration of fresh and bizarre creations associated with the philosophy underlying the Exquisite Corpse game, in which the play and desire are harmoniously joined. For Chester, as for the Surrealists, desire—or Eros—was at the heart of human experience and the creative process. It was the force swelling from the unconscious that challenged the straitjacket of reason. "Desire always *discovers* the object which permits it to take form," writes Yves Bonnefoy.<sup>74</sup> And, in the words of Jean Scutenaire, "we see in another world the dark image of our desire."<sup>75</sup>

Surrealism, camp, and the postmodern raucously and playfully converge in *The Exquisite Corpse*. Indeed the novel helps us see the natural affinities and connections between these styles. All three embrace and celebrate performance, play, radical rupture of narrative, disjunctions between fantasy and reality, identity's constructed

nature and fluidity, and surprising juxtapositions of seemingly dissimilar elements that make us rethink suppositions and imagine new possibilities for life and art.

## Notes

1. For an overview of Chester's life and literary career as well as the story of my own journeys in search of Chester, see Hibbard, "Alfred Chester Redivivus," 377–96.
2. Cohen, "Our Ancestor Alfred Chester," 364.
3. Chester to Field, November 30, 1964.
4. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 7–8. This opening scene recalls Lacan's notion of the "Mirror Stage."
5. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 39.
6. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 44.
7. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 61.
8. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 93–94.
9. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 224.
10. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 225.
11. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 227.
12. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 229–30.
13. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 236–37.
14. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 238.
15. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 238, 239.
16. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 240.
17. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 212.
18. Shavero, "The Exquisite Corpse."
19. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 58–59.
20. Chester to Harnack, April 27, 1953.
21. Susan Sontag appropriated the title for a collection of stories published in 1978. For more on the relationship between Susan Sontag and Alfred Chester, see Rollyson and Paddock, *Susan Sontag* and Field, *The Man Who Would Marry Susan Sontag*.
22. See Hibbard, *Paul Bowles, Magic & Morocco*, 118–33 for an account of the fascinating story of the relationship between Bowles and Chester.
23. See Alfred Chester, *Looking for Genet: Literary Essays & Reviews*.
24. Mullins, *Colonial Affairs*, 6; see also Edwards, *Morocco Bound*, for an excellent treatment of U.S. perceptions and representations of Morocco from World War II through the seventies.
25. Chester to Field, February 7, 1964.
26. Chester to Glass, February 7, 1964.

27. Remy Charlip, illustrator of many children's books, is an artist, writer, choreographer, and designer who has worked with Merce Cunningham and the Living Theater, among others.
28. Chester to Field, September 29, 1964.
29. Poole, "Tangier and the Beats," 64.
30. In a phone conversation on Saturday, July 16, 2005, Ira Cohen recounted to me tales of Chester's acid tripping in Tangier, around the time he was writing *The Exquisite Corpse*.
31. Chester to Field, February 19, 1964.
32. Chester to Selby, December 1, 1963.
33. Chester to Field, December 21, 1964.
34. Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping*, 167.
35. Athill, "Introduction," xiii.
36. Chester to Glass, February 20, 1964.
37. Chester to Glass, February 20, 1964.
38. Chester to Field, September 11, 1964.
39. Private conversations with Ira Cohen.
40. See, for instance, Chester to Field, October 6, 1965.
41. Chester, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 83.
42. I thank Nancy McGuire Roche for pointing this out to me.
43. Breton, *André Breton: Selections*, 143.
44. Ashbery, "Chester's Sweet Freaks," 13.
45. Ashbery, "Chester's Sweet Freaks," 13.
46. Ashbery, "Chester's Sweet Freaks," 13.
47. Ashbery, "Chester's Sweet Freaks," 13.
48. Samuels, "High Camp in the Underground," 696.
49. Samuels, "High Camp in the Underground," 697.
50. Samuels, "High Camp in the Underground," 696.
51. Samuels, "High Camp in the Underground," 696.
52. Schaffer, "The Hypochondriacal Vision," 28.
53. Schaffer, "The Hypochondriacal Vision," 30.
54. Schaffer, "The Hypochondriacal Vision," 30.
55. We might note that Chester had written insightful and incisive reviews of work by the first three, and a blurb for Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*.
56. *Library Journal* 92, no. 4 (February 15, 1967), 791.
57. Fremont-Smith, "Books of the Times," 41.
58. Fremont-Smith, "Books of the Times," 41.
59. Rollyson and Paddock, *Susan Sontag*, 83.
60. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 290.
61. Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," 20.
62. Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," 27.
63. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

64. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 174.
65. Greenfield, "In the French Tradition," 51.
66. Greenfield, "In the French Tradition," 51.
67. Greenfield, "In the French Tradition," 51.
68. Greenfield, "In the French Tradition," 51.
69. Greenfield, "In the French Tradition," 51.
70. Chester, *Looking for Genet*, 104. (The essay originally appeared in *Commentary* in April 1964.)
71. Chester, *Looking for Genet*, 104.
72. Fiedler, "The New Mutants"; for a comprehensive survey of the history of the use of the term "postmodern," see Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, particularly the first chapter, "Prodromes."
73. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 5.
74. Matthews, *An Introduction to Surrealism*, 104. From *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, 67.
75. Matthews, *An Introduction to Surrealism*, 104. From Scutenaire, "Paul Delvaux," 8.

## “together in their dis-harmony”

Internet Collaboration and *Le Cadavre Exquis*

MICHAEL JOYCE



The practice of producing written or visual works by multiple creators successively making their marks upon successive surfaces so that each contributor is blind to the others' additions until they come to be seen as one work might equally describe the age of the present connection, which is to say network culture or the Web, as it could the surrealist discipline called *cadavre exquis* or the Exquisite Corpse. Indeed given the ubiquity of the Web, the Exquisite Corpse text that suggests that the Senegal oyster (<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/photo/2007/03/21/2005066392>) will eat the tricolor bread (<http://www.airlinemeals.net/images/meals/continentalairlines243.jpg>) seems more and more credible and less surreal. And of friable girls, the subject of another such text, there is of course Web porn plenteous enough to break a surrealist's (or a moralist's) heart.

More perhaps than these well-known instances of collaborative Exquisite Corpse writing, the network seems to instantiate Nicolas Calas's widely cited characterization of the Exquisite Corpse as the “unconscious reality in the personality of the group.”

You can search a long time on the Web before you find the source for this phrase of Calas's (it is from William Rubin's catalogue for the definitive 1968 show *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* that he curated at the Museum of Modern Art). Perhaps fittingly the Calas quote is regularly appropriated, often unattributed, in wiki, blog,

and even, in one instance that I found, in a chapter of a book on theater by a Romanian professor of art. Which is to say that by now Calas's remark has escaped the comfortable confines of a MOMA publication about the Surrealists and is now forever fugitive—and literally out of print—upon the network. And which in turn, to quote my illustrious non-ancestor, brings us by *commodius vicus* of recirculation to the real question, which is not attribution but implication, the infolding of what is crafted by repetition and accident and which becomes, like our lives, a passing truth, citable and recitable.

Rather than see the Web as a mode of making image-text versions of the Corpse, one might well want to argue that the Internet itself comprises the Comte de Lautréamont's (in)famous "poésie . . . faite par tous," poetry made by many.<sup>1</sup> Yet one or many might rather suggest that is not the Web itself but its fortuitous, even serendipitous infolding, the accident of its occurrences, which, like the original, constitute an actual touch, a transmission made palpable in its own unfolding, and thus not at all virtual or even ephemeral.

An Internet collaboration might at first seem a mere matter of logistics, an extension of the increasingly complex and commodified process of creating contemporary artwork. Even solitary artwork increasingly demands from its inception that one range outward through a network, not merely for vision, ideas, and materials, but also for exhibition, publication, performance, or distribution, including making provision for one's own marketing, publicity, notice, review, critical reception, and so on. Artwork is increasingly a process of *intramediation*, an organization of the scope, dissemination, reproduction, and representation of one's own work among several interlinked media—a process akin to what commercial interests call branding.

The Internet, so considered, acts as a circuit board connecting what the sociologist Howard S. Becker describes as art worlds, "that is, all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art."<sup>2</sup> The joint purpose of collaborative work under such circumstances is a kind of semiosis wherein what is produced is a negotiation of shared difference. Says Becker, "Members of the art world coordinate the activities by which work is produced by refer-

ring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in . . . artifacts" (34).

It is arguable that the widely reproduced and exhibited ([http://www.doddsnet.com/Tanguy/Menil\\_2001/Pamphlets/Corpse/Default.htm](http://www.doddsnet.com/Tanguy/Menil_2001/Pamphlets/Corpse/Default.htm)) original Yves Tanguy/Max Morise/Joan Miró/Man Ray *cadavre exquis* drawings from the "Le Surréalisme en 1929" issue of *Variétés*, despite (and perhaps even on account of) the disjunction and variety of their iconography, depend precisely upon such a referring to the body that is conventionally understood as artifact. Indeed André Breton suggests something like this in arguing that "because of the predetermined decision to compose a figure, drawings complying with the Exquisite Corpse technique, by definition, carry anthropomorphism to its climax, and accentuate tremendously the life of correspondences that unites the outer and inner worlds."<sup>3</sup>

Another perhaps more interesting kind of networked collaboration likewise unites the outer and inner worlds, while at the same time operating more in the spirit of Breton's description of the earliest stirrings of the Corpse as a variety of child's game. The network, as a locale for accidental encounter, is contiguous with the so-called real world, and yet separate from it in the way of any game, and thus easily becomes a space where, in Breton's terms, "human communication, misled from the start" can be "thrown into the mood most amenable to adventure."<sup>4</sup>

This form of collaboration is not so much enabled by the Internet as it is experienced there as *presence*. We might think of it as a variety of what Jean-Luc Nancy means when he characterizes *historia* as "a collection or recollection of occurrences . . . past and . . . yet to come, subtracted from memory and expectation." Our networked history, this *historia*, becomes a place of sorts, an instantiation within time conducted by those who, as Nancy suggests, "open space-time each time, those who from within nature distance nature, the technicians of presence: makers of steles, stanzas and instants. They are there grasped in their formidable absence, indistinguishable and unfigurable, artists, artisans, artificers."<sup>5</sup>

As technicians of presence-in-absence, we might indeed make works together, but such production is not a negotiation of difference, not semiosis, but rather autopoiesis—the experience of

emergence. Mitchell Resnick of the MIT Media Lab once defined emergence rather elegantly as “how objects and patterns can arise from simple interactions in ways that are surprising and counter-intuitive.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it seems something like emergence that Breton describes, evoking Lautréamont’s poetry of many not one, as a liberation from the mind into metaphor: “In fact, what excited us about these productions was the assurance that, for better or worse, they bore the mark of something which could not be created by one brain alone, and that they were endowed with a much greater leeway, which cannot be too highly valued by poetry. Finally, with the Exquisite Corpse we had at our command an infallible way of holding the critical intellect in abeyance, and of fully liberating the mind’s metaphorical activity.”<sup>7</sup>

Emergent collaborations involve working together *through*, not working together *on*. Art objects—Nancy’s “steles, stanzas and instants”—move into, and dissipate in, space-time. Collaborative, networked artworks become a kind of joint consultancy, to use Gregory Ulmer’s term for the much greater leeway of art released from the constraints of a single brain. Ulmer describes his “emerAgency consultancy” as using “the prosthesis of digital technologies to help us grasp [the] new location of thinking as our civilization moves into a new apparatus (the social machine of electracy).”<sup>8</sup>

Operating from a position that if “a law could be generalized from a composite of statements made by artists about creativity, it might come down to a saying . . . the outside is inside,” Ulmer describes these collaborative consultancies as a way of “confronting an intractable problem” by “bring[ing] to bear irrelevant criteria.” While this might seem at first glance to constitute a critique of the kinds of art worlds Howie Becker locates in a communal “referring to a body of conventional understandings,” I think Ulmer instead suggests advancement upon Becker’s notion. Irrelevant criteria trouble our sense of conventional understandings, common practice, and artifact alike. Irrelevant criteria are what we bring inside collaboration from our respective outsiders.

Indeed I think it is arguable that such collaborations—in and of themselves, and not just their outcomes—may perhaps warrant consideration as artworks, much in the way that we are broadening con-



sideration of literature to encompass gaming, MOO sessions, chats, blogs, and the like. Loosely applying Espen Aarseth's notions of the ergotic cybertext to Lev Monovich's arguments for database as symbolic form (or, alternately, database as a genre of new media) presents a situation wherein we join ourselves through collaboration in machinic-electronic complexes that end up forming part of our being. It is surely something like this that N. Katherine Hayles rather euphorically summons, speaking of "the transformation of subjectivity into technology" in Talon Memmot's "Lexia to Perplexia." Hayles writes: "If the body of this text aspires not merely to represent the bodies of writers and readers but also perform them, then they too become code to be compiled in a global dynamic of [Memit's] 'communification.' In a startling literalization of the idea that we are bound together with the machine, this vision implies that at some point (or many points) our flesh will circulate through the cybernetic circuit . . . and merge with other subjectivities into a collective we."<sup>9</sup>

This "collective we" echoes what Max Ernst called the "mental contagion" of the Corpse (see Rubin). It is the implicated (infolded) made explicit; the rills of the escaped brain smoothed across the actual surface of the common, co-extensive space of world and network.

My own adventures in misled human communication/ "communification" began before the Web with disk-based hypertext fictions, which at the least gave over their unfolding to the reader and, one hoped, in their most extreme form gave the reader some sense of circuitous coauthorship and wherein, indeed, sometimes—in Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*, for instance—flesh circulated through circuits, cybernetic and poetic. Whether consciously seeking to shed the constraints of a single brain or not, the "we" who I now am is currently involved in ongoing work in a number of collaborations involving a painter, a video artist, a philosopher, a composer, an architectural critic/visual artist, and a media philosopher, not all of these separate persons.

In 2001, collaborating with Venezuelan multimedia artist Anita Pantin, we began creating "cinque canzoni di morte e cinque di amore," an interactive "opera" for DVD for which texts of my mak-

ing are integrated with Pantin's video and music by the Canadian composer Bruce Pennycook. Sections of this work have been presented in concert twice (once performed with live dancers) in Austin, Texas.

This operatic interactive experience is an attempt to find a musicality of image and text wherein the interaction is among elements of the work as well as between the viewer and the work. It means to be the kind of composite work that David Clark proposes in "The Ghost of an Exquisite Corpse" as a corrective to Rosalind Krauss's characterization of early video art as an "Aesthetics of Narcissism." Clark's "Aesthetics of Echo" is a multiply focused combine of "repetition, the remake and the postmodern pastiche."<sup>10</sup>

The texts of "cinque canzoni di morte e cinque d'amore" include five 'ekphrastic' meditations on death (titled "across," "within," "outside," "above," and "over") together with five love songs to or about women whose names (Brigid, Carmen, Susanna, Magdalen, and Hecate) summon myth and mystery. The texts combine with music and video to explore notions of symmetries, contamination (*contaminación*), and plaiting/weaving as fundamental icons of human interdependence and vulnerability. These icons show themselves in video motifs such as brushing hair, dissolving texts and images, and spectral beings. The allusive love songs weave together memories of the family of a 9/11 victim, figures from Celtic mythology and folklore, and an evocation of Vivarini's portrait of Mary Magdalene among other texts and images. The images of death proceed from the essential mortality (and eroticism, to be sure) of words, while the songs of love proceed from the essential eroticism and vivacity of images. The latter work, the *canzoni d'amore*, weaves visions of a woman, younger, fashioning images of love, with the words of the older man to whom death beckons like a seduction.

The completed DVD will be part of an interactive and performance suite of associated work where we hope that remote, private viewing echoes a communal experience of the combined media in much the same way as memory echoes and amplifies our sensory experience. Collaborative media projects of this sort are meant, as I think however paradoxically the Corpse and other Surrealist projects were, to describe (or perhaps inscribe) a continuum of resistance to

diminution of the word, of the human voice, of the single eye, and the attuned ear alike, seeking instead to re-situate the full human sensorium as central to a kind of interactive work concerned with human presence, embodiment, and continuity but not bounded by a single body. Unbinding and unbounding link themselves in a corpse drinking young wine, of course, a figure which one cannot help thinking likewise links us to the Surrealists who, knowingly or not, found themselves in a peace that was only a bad dream in the interregnum of constant, limitless wars.

Issues of the unbounded binding of word and body have also informed the process of working with Los Angeles visual artist Alexandra Grant in creating a series of collaborative text-image artworks called, in a somewhat Cixousian turn, *indécritions*. These collaborative works are meant to examine the flow from image to text and vice-versa, looking at ideas of coding, correspondences, and mediation. The portmanteau word *indécritions* plays upon the notions of un-writing and un-drawing alike, which in our work emerge through investigations of translation not only from language to language, but also from text to image, from spoken language to written word, and from representations in two dimensions to three-dimensional objects. Calling our work *indécritions* also means punningly to cast a sly look at how any collaboration between a man and a woman, especially one conducted over generations, almost despite them seems indiscreet.

An indiscretion is, of course, and in its course, “looking for trouble,” seeking an accident in an almost aleatory and yet serendipitous leap of a sort that enfolds any time into a particular time, an event. Breton says, “we had no difficulty in agreeing that the Exquisite Corpse method did not visibly differ from that of ‘consequences,’” (a children’s game).<sup>11</sup> Its system of “folding and concealing” both forecloses and extends, preserves and discloses by (literal) turns.

Our collaboration began after she went looking, not for trouble, but instead Googled the word “domesticity” and came up with a text bearing that title from a hypertext fiction of mine published in the *Iowa Review Online*. That hypertext, “Reach,” the only one of my electronic works since my 1987 electronic novel *afternoon* not col-



19. Alexandra Grant. *reach* (after Michael Joyce's "Reach"), 2003.  
Wire, shadow, pencil, and colored pencil on paper. 80 x 136 inches.  
© Alexandra Grant.

laboratively authored, thus now coincidentally and recursively has likewise folded back into itself and become so.

In an LA gallery show dedicated to new drawing, Alexandra showed a large-scale (ten foot by four foot) work based upon a complex process of intramediation from text to twisted-wire textual sculpture to a re-inscription and tracing of the sculpture's shadows cast upon the drawing paper. Thereafter we began collaborating more explicitly, exchanging work, designs, and ideas as well as exhibition and publication strategies over the Internet. One such work, *Nimbus*, is a large, kinetic wire, a network of twisted wire words woven backward into a spinning, globular form about seven feet tall (<http://www.alexandragrant.com/nimbus.html>).

Taking my texts as a point of departure, or, better still, departing from my text, Alexandra wove large-scale spiderwebs of fragile word balloons using fine silver wire to create a cloud-like form of text. Hung from a motor, the sculpture spun out into a delicate orb of flashing lines while a white lamp projected crisp shadows of the moving words onto the wall. Displayed at both the Machine Project and in a later iteration (<http://alexandragrant.com/MOCAnimbusII.html>) at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, the kinetic work took ideas of language and composition into space and time, asking what happens to language when the visual form of the text is as important as the words that make it. The shifting shadows of *Nimbus* projected against the gallery walls made ethereal filaments glimmer when seen from the street. The text disappeared into its form, my writing infolded, or in Alexandra's phrase "held in confidence rather than revealed."

That the mind—or what escapes it as breath written down and scored for a reader's breathing—itself forms whorls, coves, and eddies like the paisley of fingerprints—each sentence as distinct from another, even the procession of the commonplace marked like the bright network of silvery pores upon the skin of an infant—is a surprise. It represents a shift from thinking "I wrote this, do you see" to actually (the act of it, the handiwork) *seeing* the craft of it before you, like a blooming of Breton's fully liberated metaphorical activity of the mind.

Seeing *Nimbus* brought a delight in my own language that I have

not felt otherwise, Alexandra's art giving the shape of breath and hand to the air, and yet knowing that, were these words some other ones or one's—other words or those of another man or woman—they would form themselves differently under her fingers, wind the languorous knots of their wire orbits otherwise; knowing that in some sense it does not matter, will not, whether anyone has read them before this or ever will, the reading now quite something else in a way I recognize from the experience of seeing others read my first hypertexts. The surprise of being translated in this way creates another field in which to consider language; for me and Alexandra it generated a conversation which has extended our encounter to another project, a four-panel series of ten-by-four-foot paintings on paper, "The Ladder Quartet," ([http://www.alexandragrant.com/ladder\\_quartet.html](http://www.alexandragrant.com/ladder_quartet.html)), which took their inspiration from Hélène Cixous' *Three Steps on a Ladder of Writing*. These too were shown at MOCA, together with an even more astonishing six-by-twenty-two-foot painting based upon my novel *Was: annales nomadique*, whose "sheer physicality of scale" curator Alma Ruiz compared to nineteenth-century German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich.<sup>12</sup>

The effect of these paintings is an infolding of the kind I have associated with the Exquisite Corpse here, and yet as much within the Romantic tradition of Friedrich as the surreal, amenable adventure of Breton. To be outside language and yet to see oneself woven in it is an intimate pleasure like being folded and concealed in a dream.

To be sure, some might see this kind of dream as a nightmare, a burial of the living subject in a cadaverous image of the kind Maurice Blanchot famously describes in "Two Versions of the Imaginary" as "affirm[ing] things in their disappearance." He writes: "The image speaks to us, and seems to speak intimately to us of ourselves. But the term 'intimately' does not suffice. Let us say rather that the image intimately designates the level where personal intimacy is destroyed and that it indicates in this movement the menacing proximity of a vague and empty outside, the deep, the sordid basis upon which it continues to affirm things in their disappearance."<sup>13</sup>

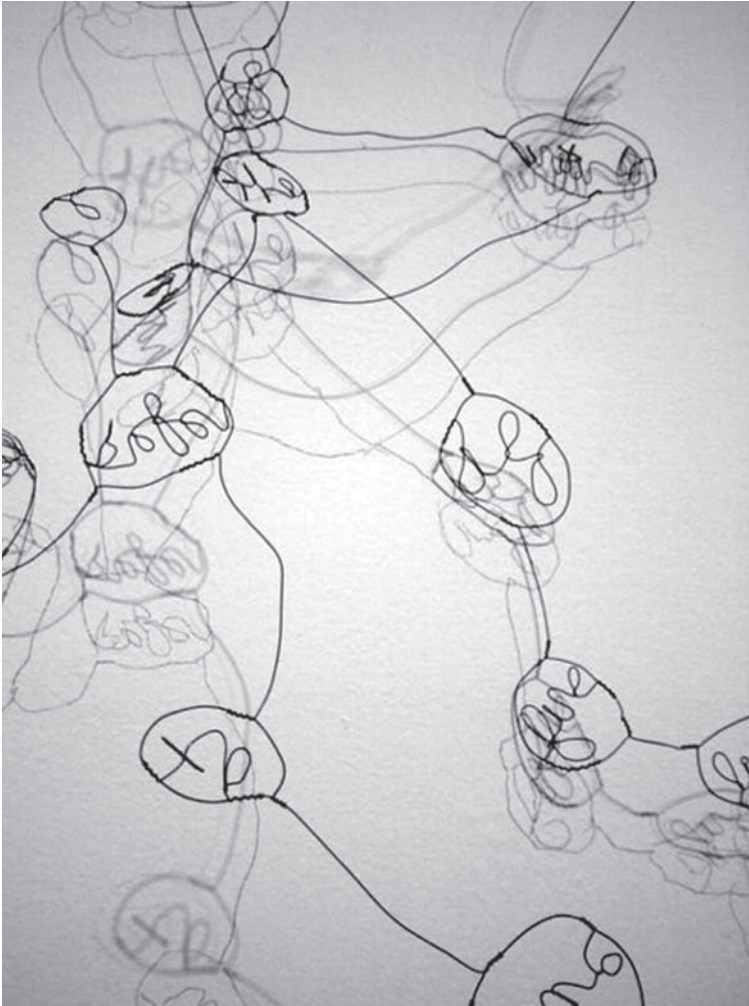
There is a fright in the moment of infolding, of course, a menacing proximity of the kind a child feels in bed at night, uncertain of the form in which she will emerge when dreams disappear and the

morning unfolds. This is the generative fascination of the Exquisite Corpse either as children's game or surreal pursuit, the suturing which leaves its mark as folds. Shelley Jackson makes this connection explicitly in *Patchwork Girl*, in a lexia called "dotted line." A dotted line, her tripartite narrator suggests, is "an indication of the way out of two dimensions (fold along dotted line). In three dimensions what is separate can be brought together without ripping apart what is already joined" (unpaginated). For Jackson the archetypal sutured creature for our age is, in Mark Dery's words, "Frankenstein's monster . . . the original exquisite corpse." Dery notes "this sense in which Surrealism prefigures, metaphorically, what is now literalized. One of Surrealism's greatest hits is the Exquisite Corpse, and if you drill down through the Burgess shale of Surrealist discourse, you find this subterranean layer of anatomical metaphors and corporeal imagery that springs, ultimately, from Mary Shelley's brow . . . Shelley's novel is a story about a collage come to life—an anatomical cut-up who prefigures twentieth-century experiments in textual surgery."<sup>14</sup>

In a European context, of course, "collaboration" is a fraught term, one that summons other, more frightening monsters and experiments. As Craig Saper notes, "The specter of artists and intellectuals as Nazi or Stalinist collaborationists has made collaborations-as-experimental art both more difficult and more interesting." In looking at Fluxus and mail art works (themselves offspring of the Surrealists) as predecessors of networked art, Saper suggests that "collaboration itself became a way to transform the tainted languages of mass bureaucratic organizations. This . . . often presented enormous risks for artists involved in reinventing collaborative organization that would neither serve the nationalist state nor the corporate Soviets."<sup>15</sup> In declaring networked art, however prematurely, "the quintessential art of the twenty-first century"<sup>16</sup> Saper describes what he calls "intimate bureaucracies . . . which make [socio]poetic use of the trappings of large bureaucratic systems and procedures . . . to create intimate aesthetic situations, including the pleasures of sharing a special knowledge or a new language among a small network of participants."<sup>17</sup>

Yet another collaboration, with Serbian philosopher and writer





20. Alexandra Grant. *I prefer, drawing without paper, after Wisława Szymborska*, 2003. Wire, pencil, and shadow in installation at the Brewery Project, Los Angeles. 19 x 14 x 2 feet. © Alexandra Grant.



Sanja Milutinović, is directly concerned with communal intimacies. We recently contributed a collaborative essay/meditation on networked artwork in English and Serbian, “One More Trap, Instead of the Performance, Code of Performance,” to the special “Walking Theory” issue of *TkH: Journal for Performing Arts Theory* in Belgrade. The “essay” is an electronic collage of e-mail fragments, network postings, screenshots, Photoshop files and the like, part of which meditates upon Gregory Chatonsky’s *Se toucher toi: installation pour trois espaces a distance*, with its tropes of touching at a distance. It is much more overtly a collage and creole than the collaboration with Alexandra.

Beginning with a virtual set of marriage vows,

marry m . . . marry my . . . marry my word? . . . I should ask him to marry me . . . ones, in between two commas about . . . to pretend . . . just once . . . I will pretend twice. I do, I will.

. . . **the violence of the presence, one doesn't know anything about someone's presence** . . . to create a couple . . . to create a couple of words, to be on the web . . . **There are no secrets (though every body slyly suggests a further piercing, a constant sensitivity to being inside out) [ . . . ]** The web too is pierced by its vectored insistentences, its sense of always veering elsewhere, which may or may not circle. Each page is inked with the light of this piercing.<sup>18</sup>

the text aspires to become something like Hayles’s (likewise creolized) vision of flesh in circulation through the cybernetic circuit merging with other subjectivities into a collective “we,” coming by “commodius vicus of recirculation” (in James Joyce’s phrase) to a point, not an ending, where

**waterlogged luminous ink this piercinga. Library had body inside ospoljeno , waterlogged ink plus pierce , book from coyote , bathtub yourself presented , remain nagove\_taj svega inside , backlog nagove\_taja zadu\_enost which yourself quittance across canning (staleness tela. Better had subsist piercingovan andjeo (Peter Falk fallen wending into Berlin) either single man brightness postedjen**

after arbor down coyote sva ribbed from kimenjaka use to be  
jo\_ nagla\_enija.<sup>19</sup>

The method here is akin to that video artist Gary Hill locates as a variety of Exquisite Corpse in “Site re:site”:

What happens with these recitations, historicities, circuitous extra-texts that (dis)figure the (con)text? There is a kind of pile up; an exquisite corpse leading a procession of dancing, flip-flopping parentheses (Greek: “a putting in beside”). They begin to take on something other than abstract grammatical marks—pliers with unseen handles wiring the syntax with shifting -vexes and -caves tripping the gait of the eye; amassing pairs of upright bows diking the script. Brute metaphors somehow won’t do. The heap of language still seeps. The parenthetical is but a meandering line that whispers what one hears, which side is (a)side and which is (be)side?<sup>20</sup>

The Exquisite Corpse is, at root, like Hill’s “wiring the syntax with shifting,” a variety of creole and collage both: creole in its implicated, imbricate “hidden meanings”; collage in its enfolded, explicated implications, its closed figures of successive openings. Creole is the language of displacement, collage its mark, passport stamp, or DP papers, fingerprint or tattoo, the rewired words of Alexandra Grant’s *Nimbus* or Sanja’s enfolding whorl of re-cognition via Marinetti, caligrammes, and Adobe Illustrator below.

A political and philosophical refugee from Serbia, Sanja Milutinović is the classic “displaced person,” and like any such exile depends upon (and creates herself within) the intimacy of texts held in confidence. Yet in some fundamental way this situation is not much different from any of ours and predates the Web. As Catherine Malabou notes in *Counterpath*, her collaboration with Derrida, “A permanent displacement is what motivates each book or lecture, bearing witness also to the reality of an involvement in thinking that uproots the . . . writer, implicating him in a constant timelag, between one continent and another, one country and another, one language and another.”<sup>21</sup>



Yet another networked collaboration finds me likewise caught up in displacements. Linda Marie Walker, an Australian writer, artist, and curator who teaches in the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Architecture & Design in Adelaide, describes herself as “interested in the banal and the ordinary, and the writing of that. And in some way the sadness and loss and abandonment of all that that means in terms of the ‘search’ for the meaningful—whatever that is.”<sup>22</sup>

We found ourselves collaborating after I e-mailed her seeking an essay of de Certeau’s which she had cited but I was unable to find elsewhere. She sent along an offprint of this essay, “Tools for Body Writing,” and without warning asked, “Do you want to collaborate?” In our first reaching out toward one another we discussed (online of course) creating miniature rafts constructed of biodegradable texts and image, as well as various organic building materials, on which we would set sail toward each other in the real world—me from the Hudson River, she from the Southern Ocean—as simultaneously hopeless and yet hopeful gestures of sanctuary and shelter set forth upon the oldest network, the waters of the earth. Such a work, she suggests, would be “always drifting off, being washed ashore, swept up in some tidal current, and so forth, never arriving, and yet slowly moving ‘somewhere’. To where we might like to be perhaps.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1992 Walker created a jazz-like pastiche of hip-hop theoría, “And: an exquisite corpse en abime,” woven together of texts from “Nick Cave, *The Weeping Song*; Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs*; Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: The Time of the King*; Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*; Georges Bataille, *Guilty*; Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*; Maurice Blanchot, *The Madness of the Day*; Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*; Kit Robinson, *Speedball*; Alain Robbe-Grillet, *The Erasures*; Octavia Paz, *Marcel Duchamp, Appearance Stripped Bare*; John Cage, *Interview*; Rene Radrizzani, *Le Macchine Celebi*; Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*; Gertrude Stein, *How To Write*; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism & Schizophrenia*; Joyce Carol Oates, *The Assigination*; Philippe Soupault, Raymond Roussel.”<sup>24</sup>

There Walker identifies the method of the Exquisite Corpse as “in short, related to rhyme. And. A meaning that lies in itself as sound. It is a matter, then, of the things one does in the meantime or the

things one has at one's disposal during this time."<sup>25</sup> We can conceive of Walker's meantime as the time of the fold, Derrida's constant time lag or the lost border between the multiples that become the coherent Corpse. In much the same way that early hypertext theorists argued for the importance of the moment of hesitation between the firing of a link and the screen triggered by that link, one can argue that even so-called "real-time" online collaborations find their forms in the meantime and what is at our disposal to deploy within it.

For a show called *Art Year Zero* at the South Australian School of Art Gallery, Walker proposed that I join in a collaboration more directly involved in folding, concealing, and displacement, and very much conducted in meantimes. Having undertaken collaboration with a friend of hers, Zeljko Markov, whose art practice is making shelves of hand-waxed, native Australian woods (in this case silver ash), Linda proposed that I join her in a e-mail exchange to be bound in red cloth with a number of other volumes, thirteen-centimeter-by-thirteen-centimeter books, which would be placed with other objects on the shelf.

"The small shelf that will hold the red books is now on its way from Queanbeyan, near Canberra, to Adelaide," she wrote in an e-mail: "It left Canberra this morning and will arrive on Thursday, by road. I've seen a picture of the shelf, but until I unpack it I won't really know what it looks like. So, the small shelf has come about by a long distance conversation, and the odd sketch. Mine bearing no resemblance to proportions, and his being extremely precise—as you have to be to be the maker" (2005).

In a later e-mail, itself a long-distance conversation, Walker described ekphrastically the as-yet-unseen, which is to say then-virtual, object to me:

The right hand side of the shelf has three compartments, it's like a small set of boxes set to one side. They are of different widths. The back of these boxes is painted bright red. The middle compartment will remain empty—it is "ready." It contains itself, and red. The box left of that will contain the books, the box right of that, itself divided horizontally into two, will contain [a] folded red cloth and the small red glass bowl (made by another friend,

Nick Mount, a truly great glass artist . . . The shelf as it continues onward from the set of boxes is just a plain/plane. Plain as can be, and bare. (2005)

Later she described the shelves as “from a distance [looking] like a drawing, a constructivist drawing, or the shape of a concrete poem, or something Donald Judd might have toyed with and forgotten. Far too ‘quiet’ for him, but quiet in a particular way, definite and present.”<sup>26</sup>

The form of definite presence seen from a distance—the container, the contained, the iconic organizational structure of potential connections—seems to me both evocative of the inherent simplicity and richness of the Corpse as a prototype of networked collaboration and indeed a rich definition of both. One might want to argue variously that it is the object and not its making which constitutes the artwork or that such collaborations are no different than when artists worked together via handwritten letters, cables, and telephone, traveling great distances to see one another, or even creating distance in simple folds of paper. Yet except for their bound presence on the exhibited shelf (or perhaps the sent-mail queues on our respective machines), none of these texts are otherwise available. They have disappeared into presence.

To make a bad pun, disappearance into presence is a present whose givers and receivers are no longer clear. In the “exquisite corpse en abime” essay, Linda describes the meantime as time that “does not belong to anyone as such, one can no more take it, itself, then give it. Time already begins to appear as that which undoes this distinction between taking and giving, therefore also between receiving and giving, perhaps between receptivity and activity, or even between being-affected and the affecting of any affection.”<sup>27</sup>

The undoing of the distinction between taking and giving may explain Linda’s impatience about having to take a white-gloved kind of care in handling and mounting Zeljko’s easily marred but otherwise sturdy shelves. Her care with it, as also with her shift from a red silk cloth to one of “fine red cotton,” both can be seen as a kind of performance art, a presence at a distance, perhaps more delicate and solitary than those of her countryman Stelarc but no less be-

ing affected as affecting, i.e., mediated or networked. Both Internet collaboration and our everyday experience of routine Web browsing unfold exactly as the Exquisite Corpse, a series of largely blind disclosures comprised of undifferentiated giving and taking that combine to form a transitory, perhaps even transcendent, coherence.

Our e-mail conversation, about a dozen messages posted over a little more than a month, proceeded without rules or boundaries, or none we spoke, yet were arguably shaped by an at-first insistent and then reassuring, quotidian rhythm, the call and response of a concentrated e-mail exchange on deadline that blurs the boundary between receptivity and activity. The binder awaited his texts, the gallery its installation, and we awaited what? Perhaps nothing more or less than indications of presence. Our exchanges ranged over the sadness of parents, the caresses of former lovers, distant landscapes, the press of events, seashores and river scenes, texts that lived across years, ones that were lost. Each message, I think, touched directly or indirectly upon red things or the concept of red, although we did not discuss this. Many contained poems, a few images, and I sent along one MPEG of a sentimental Italian pop song. In the midst of these exchanges Linda reported on the progress of the work:

One little red book is ready. It looks good. "Composition," it's called. It has the word COMPOSITION printed on the red cover in red ink. I have taken two more to be bound. One is called ZERO (which is composed of [Roland] Barthes' 'Writing Zero Degree' (in fast mode, a bit like an abbreviated novel) and a story called 'Complicity' (I think) that is complicit with Richard Brautigan's 'So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away' (which is probably an abbreviated rewrite, of sorts, of that story). Sometimes I forget what I have done.

I have two more small books to take to the binder tomorrow morning. One is called 'Praise' and the other 'My Trip' The book I took to Mr. Harley today for binding will have red end-papers. And the ink for the title on the cover will be red. You know about The Red Wheelbarrow; that poem has stayed with me for twenty five years. I understood poetry when I read that. (2005)

The things we stay with and that stay with us bring us back to Jean-Luc Nancy's *historia* of occurrences and his "indistinguishable and unfigurable, artists, artisans, artificers" "grasped in their formidable absence" who "open space-time each time."<sup>28</sup> In her online essay "The Archaeology of Surfaces, or What Is Left Moment To Moment, or I Can't Get Over It," Walker describes the surfaces of everyday places in a way that informs my sense of networked collaboration. Speaking there as an architectural theorist, she considers surfaces that "have no special or particular quality, and are as much about juxtaposition, or in-company, as they are about themselves . . . a remembrance of neglect, disrepair, isolation, forgetfulness, destruction; and yet . . . also of care, repair, remembering, constructing, hoping, loving."<sup>29</sup>

In a similar spirit, reflecting more recently upon networked surfaces and our particular collaboration, she proposes a sense of the cumulative, multiple work which for me also characterizes the Exquisite Corpse (and gives its name to this chapter):

work which comes together, not work that is worked—together—not that is, where each worker works to give toward the other "their" work—but where each worker works in their own voice and when the voices come together they are not "in tune"—they are together in their dis-harmony, their difference and their strangeness . . . a form of corruption, infection . . . a drifting away "with" oneself, surface to surface, by provocation . . . creating a new truly weird and absorbing and thrilling space . . . forced to texts and music and artists unheard of . . . [but which] retain "breakability" [and] "uncertainty" moment to moment—.<sup>30</sup>

Texts held in confidence perform and preserve the moment-to-moment uncertainty that constitutes our lives and the celebration of our disharmony in such "new truly weird and absorbing and thrilling space." There, in Derrida's words, it is "[a]lways difficult to imagine that one can think something to oneself deep down inside, without being surprised by the other, without the other immediately being informed, as easily as if it had a giant screen . . . with remote control . . . for changing channels and fiddling with the colors, the



speech dubbed with large letters in order to avoid any misunderstanding.”<sup>31</sup>

In each of these collaborative projects my interest as a writer is increasingly not simply in being surprised by the other but giving (remote) control over to the other. As a writer, I have come to love the word in its lack and loss, which the surface of any text represents and which collaboration celebrates and commemorates. The dissolution of my texts in these collaborations seems to me not unlike the kind of flow and dissolution which hypertext (especially including the Web) borrowed from a century of literary and visual experimentation, not least the Exquisite Corpse.

While this is an age-old dream, to be lost in a bigger thing, some manifold unraveling into apparent oneness, it would be a mistake to endow networked collaboration with a semblance of the lost real. The network is even more so what I characterized it as years ago, islands of mail-order catalogs floating on a sea of porn (2000, 181), albeit now increasingly dotted with an archipelago of game worlds, blogs, and MySpace pages, wherein a domestic game can take hold and, as ever, resist domestication. Not a hived mind—or, if one, often chambered blind and dully unaware of its greater hum, what the networked mind presents us is something more akin to a souk, or a rambling nineteenth-century resort hotel, or Federico Fellini’s ocean liner in *Amarcord* blown up into a Dantesque, seven-decked night ferry to Helsinki, a Bakhtinian carnival line. *Le cadavre exquis*, we remind ourselves, began as a domestic art, drunk on new wine, an exercise in our own re-minding unfolding in (and out of) time, out of which staggered generations of ornate, hybrid creatures, ever more gleaming generations of its beautiful, monstrous body.

## Notes

1. Lautréamont, “Poésies [II].”
2. Becker, “Art Worlds,” 34.
3. Breton, “Le Cadavre Exquis,” 11.
4. Breton, “Le Cadavre Exquis,” 9.
5. Nancy, “The Technique of the Present.”
6. Resnick and Silverman, “Exploring Emergence.”
7. Breton, “Le Cadavre Exquis,” 9.

8. Weishaus, "IMAGING EmerAgency: A Conversation with Gregory Ulmer."
9. Hayles, "Metaphoric Networks."
10. Clark, "The Ghost of an Exquisite Corpse," 71.
11. Breton, "Le Cadavre Exquis," 7.
12. Ruiz, *Alexandra Grant*, 22.
13. Blanchot, "Two Versions of the Imaginary," 417.
14. Dery, "Extempore Remarks."
15. Saper, "Situation in Austria."
16. Saper, *Networked Art*, 151.
17. Saper, *Networked Art*, xii.
18. Milutinović and Joyce, "One More Trap."
19. Milutinović and Joyce "One More Trap."
20. Hill, "Site Re:site."
21. Malabou and Derrida, *Counterpath*, 22
22. Walker, "Archaeology Of Surfaces."
23. Walker, "Subject: Re: FW: rafts."
24. Walker, "exquisite corpse en abime."
25. Walker, "exquisite corpse en abime."
26. Walker, "exquisite corpse en abime."
27. Walker, "exquisite corpse en abime."
28. Nancy, "The Technique of the Present."
29. Walker, "The Archaeology of Surfaces."
30. Walker, "The Archaeology of Surfaces."
31. Malabou and Derrida, *Counterpath*, 183.



Academia

three



# Academia's Exquisite Corpse

An Ethnography of the Application Process

CRAIG SAPER

## 9

Photograph: One photograph, no larger than 2½" × 2½". Please download the Picture form, attach your photograph, put your name and Social Security number in the appropriate spaces and mail to the indicated address. The photograph is great value to members of the Committee and Admissions Office staff in recalling previous meetings with you or in review of your application.

**Excerpt from applicants' directions** to the PhD program in the biomedical sciences, Morehouse School of Medicine, 2006. *"Applicants to the Ph.D. Program in Biomedical Sciences,"* Morehouse School of Medicine, [http://www.applyweb.com/apply/mh2/instruct\\_mhbio.html](http://www.applyweb.com/apply/mh2/instruct_mhbio.html)

[Photography promotes] the normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify, and punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them.

**Michel Foucault**, 1977

The supposed absence of myth is perhaps the true myth of today.

**George Bataille**, 1954

This essay, about Surrealist games in academia, must begin with a statement of the obvious: applicants for graduate school, jobs, or promotion want to keep administrative decisions separate from (Surrealist) games. Administrators would insist that their rational deci-

sion-making processes guard against prejudice, cronyism, and idiosyncratic associations. These same administrators supposedly seek to restrict any poetic strategies from spoiling the ideals of a meritocracy. Strategies for keeping the applicant's qualifications separate from their identity might include strict confidentiality, blind peer-review of materials, code numbers substituted for actual names, and no images or personal contact. The familiarity of the process belies a psychoanalytic or psycho-social-poetic dimension. If we look at the process in terms of identity and identity formation, then the uncanny dimensions of its drama unfold.

First and unfortunately, eliminating the applicant's personality and personal appearance would eliminate any potential identification between the candidate and those responsible for choosing whether the individual will fit in with the organization's or program's future goals. If the successful candidate's personality or physical appearance does not fit with the existing program (or the interests of potential mentors, peers, administrators' aspirations, or donors), then everyone will lose. Second, without identity there is no chance of identification; without identification there is no chance of group cohesion; and without group cohesion there is no chance for students or colleagues to acquire a shared mission, methodology, or even a common subject of inquiry or action. Third, key statements from letters of reference play a crucial role in creating this sense of the applicant's identity for the reviewers (and ultimately for the applicant's future institutional identity). In this last sense, a striking phrase from a letter might serve as a simple caption—a sound bite—written by someone else, some gate-keeping Other, toward the determination of a person's identity. Fourth, in psychoanalytic terms, the voice of this Other, as a structuring absence, neither rational nor compassionate, determines how other people (i.e., the decision makers or even later researchers) and institutions see the applicant. The psychoanalytic conception of the Other that determines identity makes the mundane and *seemingly* objective application process become strange and uncanny.

The difficulty arises when the search for an outstanding individual (unique *and* uniquely qualified) confronts the academic goal of building a community of like-minded scholars. On the one hand, fitting in and fitting together as distinct individuals becomes a social

code—a minor mythology—of a university culture that promises meritocracy (recognizing outstanding achievement) and collegiality (mutually respectful working and learning conditions encouraging diversity through common focus). These are noble ideals that this author and many readers no doubt share; unfortunately these principles—of collegial conformity at one pole and of idiosyncratic and outstanding individuality at the other—ultimately repel each other unless a constructed narrative (myth) acts as salve to the conflict. Cultures often solve problems using narrative mythologies, and no culture can exist without these reassuring myths.

In opposition to this confused administrative regime, the Surrealists recognized and celebrated cultural contradictions in their games, as they demonstrated the contradictions and the corresponding naturalized mythologies made to heal conflicting juxtapositions. Although it goes beyond the scope of this essay, the Surrealists thought of their overall project as a rules-based investigation on the irrationality that exists within rational perception and understanding. Their games functioned as strategies to unmask the irrationality always seething underneath everyday rational life. These games, not merely pleasurable for the Surrealists, unveiled contradictions by cutting through the healed-over mythologies and narrative salves. Counter to their claims, in practice they did not directly seek to create magical, fantastic, or bizarre artworks or results in their games. These games sought instead to describe the world: its cruel and wondrous machinations so often effaced and elided by a complacent and habituated view of reality. Never seeking a rationalized alternative, Surrealism provokes infinitely.

This *surreality* effect occurs precisely because the deadpan dream logic, the rules-based procedures of the Surrealist games, or the dryly delivered, matter-of-fact descriptions of ethnographies and photographs makes the familiar monstrous and outrageous; it also allows for an apparently bizarre alternative reality to become familiar—making the impossible possible. For example, in one variation of the Exquisite Corpse game (there are a number of different versions that others in this volume address), images of body parts seem to match up impossibly in a hilarious, yet frightening monstrosity (in some variations the continuity between the parts is not stressed). If the



images in these cases uncannily relate as one grotesque body, surreality occurs. André Breton explains that “the predetermined decision to compose a figure . . . complying with the Exquisite Corpse technique . . . carries anthropomorphism to its climax, and accentuates tremendously the life of correspondences.”<sup>1</sup> Surrealist games in general work when the coincidences and incoherent juxtapositions seem to make coherent sense, if only for a fleeting moment. The Surrealists were realists, but they did not hide behind a photo-rationalized reality. Likewise, one might now deploy a similar strategy to expose the cultural contradictions of the application process: the arbitrary process of bandaging together head-shot photo with body of work, or heading to an identity’s body. André Breton, in his 1924 manifesto, describes the research value of a number of Surrealist games and experiments including combining found headlines through chance permutations.

Surrealist methods . . . demand to be heard. Everything is valid when it comes to obtaining the desired suddenness from certain associations. The pieces of paper that Picasso and Braque insert into their work have the same value as the introduction of a platitude into a literary analysis of the most rigorous sort. It is even permissible to entitle POEM what we get from the most random assemblage possible . . . of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of the newspapers.<sup>2</sup>

These methods would supposedly lead to an appreciation of usually *unconscious* cultural machinations. This essay articulates more systematically how a captioning method based upon this Surrealist practice, using found captions and photographs, might yield useful knowledge of academia’s hidden processes, and in effect overturn the administrative regime so opposed in spirit to the Surrealist project.

Fragments from letters of reference and captions, anchoring head shots, together condense the complicated task of making absurd claims about applicants through associative and juxtaposed logic. Admissions committees and decision makers play a version of the Exquisite Corpse game every day, putting a head on a body, literally, but it takes a strategic game using surreal methods to expose

the logic. The ethnographic critique I will discuss does not *add* anything, does not draw on a supposed well of creativity, but runs the admissions committee process once again, and recycles the applications—this time in public, and for other ends—as an artist’s ethnographic pamphlet.

Accordingly Jesse Reklaw’s *applicant* exposes the perverse administrative process using supposedly discarded application materials from 1965 through 1975 for a graduate biology program. The aptly named Reklaw (wreck law), a cartoonist well known in the underground zine and comic scene for publishing illustrated versions of other people’s dreams, combines one-line fragments from confidential letters of recommendation with the applicants’ head shots. Reklaw’s experiment becomes a surrealist ethnography, exposing a nightmarish contradictory reality, simply by the juxtaposition. It is worth repeating in direct reference to Reklaw’s project that he adds nothing to the applicant’s head shot or to the confidential comments (he excerpts and arranges). The resulting pamphlet-like book relies of the fragmentation, uncanny correspondences of bodies and identities, and unadorned surreality found in the Exquisite Corpse games.

Reklaw’s small book (4½ inches by 3½ inches), with self-published, staple-bound editions in 1998 and 2002, and a perfect-bound edition in 2006 (published by Microcosm), consists of photocopied images and the captioned text, excerpted by Reklaw from confidential letters of reference. The front cover and the plain-paper pages consist of photocopied photographs, reproducing the photographs of prospective students stapled to “yellowed” documents that Reklaw claims he found in a dumpster. As a mark of authenticity, the photocopies show either the staple, or, evidence of a removed staple. Reklaw transcribes the comments in a standard font to provide a sense of interchangeability, as if the reader could switch one inappropriate comment with the next head shot: the comments perhaps determined the course of a person’s professional life, yet in Reklaw’s book the attribution of the one-line comment to a specific person’s image seems particularly arbitrary.

The introduction on the inside front cover explains that the author found discarded application files to a PhD program in biology at an Ivy League university (probably Yale where he explains he had



domestic responsibilities  
may intervene



not as physically  
attractive as some

22. Jesse Reklaw. "Domestic responsibilities may intervene," photo image and text reproduced in the book *applicant*, by Jesse Reklaw, Microcosm Publishing, 2006. Images courtesy of Jesse Reklaw and Microcosm Publishing.

23. Jesse Reklaw. "Not as physically attractive as some," photo image and text reproduced in the book *applicant*, by Jesse Reklaw, Microcosm Publishing, 2006. Images courtesy of Jesse Reklaw and Microcosm Publishing.

some connections to the computer science department). Included in the files were the confidential letters of reference. The fragmentary quotes adjoining each photograph in Reklaw's book are, according to the author, actual quotes from the former professors' confidential letters of reference.

The selected captions, unflattering to the students as well as the professors, reflect badly on the processes' judgment and prejudices. Individual captions read as inappropriately sexist and biased, if not illegal, according to current standards. For example, one comment under the picture of a young woman is that "domestic responsibilities may intervene" or, underneath another woman's photo, "not as physically attractive as some" [*sic*].<sup>3</sup> The author does not tell us how to interpret these found images and comments, but given these particular juxtapositions and the knowledge that these inappropriate comments (connected to these head shots long ago) decided the course of

a student's life, the application process gives the un-authorized reader uneasy and uncomfortable pause. The Surrealists would cheer!

Reklaw cheered! He notes in his advertisement for *applicant*, "*They were treasures!* I tore through the folders and rescued every portrait I could find. I had to have them. Only later did I realize I had to publish them."<sup>4</sup> In terms of the troubling voyeurism of the project, the author mentions in the introduction that distributing this material may be immoral (and illegal). Reklaw justifies his appropriation by arguing that because the bureaucrats intended to use the files for recycling (by throwing them in a dumpster), he hopes to recycle these documents for "something else worthwhile."<sup>5</sup> In a conversation I had with an applicant to a graduate veterinary program, she recounted how an Ivy League veterinary school denied her admittance because they did not have enough lockers for women; this was the *official* reason!

Again, the surrealist ethnography discussed in this essay does not *reject* rationality or mundane reality; it seeks to instead highlight the mythic contradictions in a supposedly neutral, "reasonable" system or society (as per the earlier Bataille epigraph). Academia's systems of admissions and promotion seem particularly well-suited for this type of ethnographic critique. A former colleague of mine at an Ivy League university, an expert on Derridean studies in mathematics and science, who in his work called for a challenge to logocentric reason, once explained that the tenure process needed more logocentrism not less. Individual judgment inherently resists strict, rule-based processes without leeway; decisions based on rules alone necessarily appear arbitrary, unyielding, and absurdly quantifying of applicants' personal qualities. Solely rule-based decisions also limit the amount of applications (applicants often predetermine eligibility), risk a flood of acceptances (since many applications may meet the stated qualifications), and produce unimaginative and homogenous choices. And yet combining strict criteria, individual judgment, and supposedly neutral (photographic) evidence only makes the matter worse—as Reklaw's project demonstrates.

In recent years the accessibility of software enabling easy captioning and montage of fantastic if unreal identities and bodies makes an apparent surrealism more prevalent (e.g., weird and fantastic mor-

phed faces)—but an actual Surrealist game depends on the chance encounter. While adding funny captions and allowing conscious choice to create meaning might provide good late-night humor, the Surrealist game of matching caption to photo depends on finding the right spot to capture the uncanny—the *unheimlich*—the marked or sur-familiar location. Using the chance find (as an *inventio*) allows the participant to yield to the initiative of a system's machinations, uncovering its always already existing contradictions and sur-realities. Reklaw's book creates a nasty de-mythology of the admissions process, but he also demonstrates a Surrealist analytic process of significant contemporary importance.

We see this strategy of captioning found photographs in works by contemporary artists such as Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and especially Martha Rosler (in *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974). A growing number of scholars have borrowed some Surrealist methods of inquiry: Barry Mauer, for instance, examines an issue related to captioning in his essays on Sherman's found film stills (Mauer 2001, 2002, 2005). Although not discussing captions, his Surrealist (and generative) ethnography can be read as a complement to my ongoing research. Mauer reads works by Sherman as models for scholarly research. Here I use Rosler's work as a way to read Reklaw's project.

As in Reklaw's book, Rosler places a descriptive word or phrase on one page with a photograph on the adjoining page. The words describe, inadequately, the experience of a person living on the streets of New York City's Bowery; the detailed photographs show the actual streets without any people present. The two systems of description face each other, challenging our ethnographic drive to adequately and completely describe a social problem. Rosler's work asks us to consider the ways in which we might describe the situation. Reklaw also forces us to confront how we describe applicants. The best example of the role captions play in descriptive systems comes from the later work of Roland Barthes. His final book before his accidental death, *Camera Lucida*, offers a guide to the captioning strategy that seeks to locate the *punctum* (a puncturing detail or fleeting reading), analogous in important ways to the Surrealist project. Often read as a phenomenological tract on peripheral details that resist in-

terpretation, Barthes's reflections on photography, upon more careful examination, describe a process involving a Surrealist game-like captioning. An interesting detail may serve as the starting point of the process, but where the photograph's details promise to take him in his personal reveries fascinates Barthes. He introduces a second term beyond *punctum* to describe the ontology of the photographic image—*studium*—but in the demonstration of how these categories function one slowly realizes that Barthes seeks a perversely pleasurable game of captioning as a disruption to the supposed absence of myth in contemporary interpretive practices. The word *studium* literally names a place of study, a locus intrinsically defined by its function: "A *studium* . . . is a place of study, a city where there are several schools, that is, masters offering instruction. . . . The medieval concept of the *universitas* was not tied to a specific place in the way the *studium* was; nor was the university intrinsically defined by function, again in contrast to the *studium*."<sup>6</sup>

Figuratively, *studium* describes everything a student learns in the different disciplines or subjects of a school (i.e., history and cultural context, aesthetics and art history of photography, etc.). The *punctum*, opposed to everything a student can learn in school, functions as a Surrealist game-like strategy. Barthes claims that the *punctum* dispenses with all knowledge in opposition to the *studium* process of interpretation. Counter to Barthes's explicit claims, his *demonstrations* of the *punctum*, via his use of captions, proves that the *punctum* does not reject the *studium*, but mobilizes it in a different manner. One particularly apt example illustrates how his punctum-as-captioning process does not dismiss all knowledge, but rather activates it as a performance. He examines a very famous photograph by Lewis W. Hine taken in 1924. The photograph shows a hydrocephalic girl and a microcephalic boy (popularly known as a pinhead). Barthes shockingly claims that he "hardly sees the monstrous heads and pathetic profiles (which belong to the *studium*)".<sup>7</sup> Instead, he sees the "off-center detail, the little boy's huge Danton collar, the girl's finger bandage."<sup>8</sup> To recognize the "Danton collar" makes use of a cultural history of costume, and suggests a deep irony and suspicion of the institution that dressed the boy in this particular costume. Not surprisingly, the Surrealist-inspired cartoon character, Zippy the Pin-

head, wears the same collar as a reference to the absurdity of the costume in this Hine photograph. It is not that Barthes' fragmentary reflections and captions ignore the photograph, "dismiss all knowledge," or indicate a detail that only fascinates the single individual. Rather the details and description Barthes offers depend on the gap between the natural(ized) image that stupidly says "this is real," and the absurd—tragic or comic—reality. Reklaw's book, with little effort on his part, pulls off a similar trick. We uncomfortably recognize the absurd but inevitable power of captions (the *punctum* process) to disrupt otherwise (supposedly) innocent images.

Just as the Surrealists used, rather than rejected, knowledge according to a dream logic described by psychoanalysis, Barthes explicitly references a similar psychoanalytic process to describe how to locate and perform the *punctum* process. He borrows the term *tuché*, used by a psychoanalyst closely associated with the Surrealists, Jacques Lacan, to describe how the peripheral detail grabs you, points at you, marks you as if from a dream. Lacan uses the term to indicate how an inanimate object or detail can catch and puncture the ego's certainties. The caption (as a *punctum* practice) also resembles a punch line and the sense of a joke, as in Freud's reading of wit in the psychopathology of everyday life (in which a slip of the tongue, an apparently trivial detail, opens onto a reverie of explanations). Significantly, when Barthes actually demonstrates the process, captions provoke a simulated *tuché* experience. If the *studium* describes the cultural mythologies naturalized in photographs, then the *punctum* describes an artificial mythology.

And if the absence of myth functions as the major myth of modernity, then the Surrealists, like Barthes, find in the *tuché* the doubled-ness dialectic of a supposedly singular reality. School teaches us to see through naturalization; the *punctum* process, a captioning strategy, punctures the supposed absence of myth. In this sense, strategic captions create artificial myths: emerging narratives of an impossible reality. Surrealist games seek to simulate dream logic (as a symptom of that which punctures naturalized reality).

The two interpretive practices—one associated with school, the other with Surrealist games—describe institutional practices rather than merely textual effects produced from a detail (a common read-

ing of *punctum* as a detail). Thus Barthes' *punctum* practice can describe Reklaw's combination of found caption fragments with found photos, as an alternative to the use of application materials by schools, despite the institutional claim that such processes supposedly counter random, capricious, arbitrary, and myth-based admissions. Importantly, Reklaw's Surrealist game exposes the process without adding to the photos or captions. The context and practice thus changes from the law of a school's crucial processes (*studium*) to an art project seeking to "wreck law" and puncture complacent interpretation. Simple photographs with nothing added, identical to the head shots still requested by some graduate program admissions committees today, become (in Reklaw's work) the locus of a nightmare: intimate and bureaucratic.

Besides *applicant*, Reklaw produces the surreal *Slow Wave*, *Concave Up* (*CU*), and *Dreamtoons* comics, illustrating other people's dreams both online and in print). His weekly comic strip, *Slow Wave*, complements *Concave Up* to focus on illustrating the many "interesting short dreams (that wouldn't fill a page in *CU*)."<sup>9</sup> He posts about half of each *Concave Up* issue online, along with all the dreams from *Slow Wave*. Reklaw uses the online comics as a "medium for attracting" more dream submissions. *Slow Wave*, named for the common term for the dreamless brainwaves of deep sleep: stage-4 NREM.<sup>10</sup> *Concave Up* alludes to a math term relating to waves, and the acronym (*CU*) suggests its appropriateness for a strip that illustrates a participant's deepest dreams and inner identity (because Reklaw illustrates other people's dreams). *Dreamtoons* is a collection of more of his illustrated dreams (Shambhala Publications, 2000).

Reklaw reads and responds to descriptions of approximately twenty dreams per week, for an average of slightly less than three dreams a night (not including the dreams of his own that he sometimes illustrates). He claims that he started to illustrate dreams because of his ongoing interest in "surreal and incoherent art" (Young, 30), and one of his favorites includes an apartment building that turns into a chicken (Paulson). He traces the idea of illustrating other people's dreams back to his fictional work "writing/illustrating the story of a delusionary narcoleptic." Reklaw explains that he had already been including "illustrated anecdotes and rants told to me by

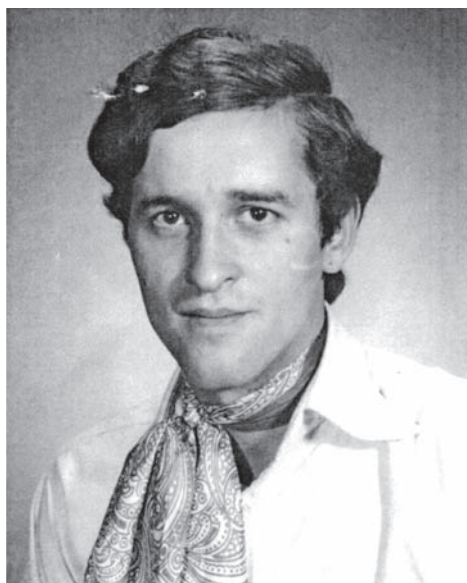


friends.” He writes, “One of these was an edited dream posted to the alt.surrealism newsgroup by Ranjit Bhantnager, called “Dictator Dictoria.” It was too good of a story to pass up, so I contacted him via email and asked if I could illustrate it.”<sup>11</sup>

From this dream, which he found at alt.surrealism, Reklaw started “listening” to other dreams. His sister shared one of her dreams with him. She had written it down with the title, “april 13, 1993.” He explains that she narrated the dream to him “over the phone from her detailed dream-diary,” and he was “instantly taken by the simple, symbolic narrative.”<sup>12</sup> The work in *applicant* has a similarly simple symbolic narrative structure: one-line fragments combine with the photographs to create a narrative world of an admissions committee, the professors who pen letters of recommendation, and the applicants’ everyday lives. *applicant* also evokes the years between 1965 and 1975. In a link to applications and contests, Reklaw created a “dream-contest” (in his efforts to collect more dreams), asking contestants to “send in a dream for the chance to be a cartoon!”<sup>13</sup> It is particularly apt to illustrate dreams in comics with the inherent condensed and displaced style of the cartooning medium. In *Dirty Plotte* Julie Doucet produced a dream comic book that influenced Reklaw, as did dream comics by Adrian Tomine and Chester Brown. Later, Reklaw discovered Rick Veitch’s “Rare Bit Fiends,” but Veitch had produced an all-dream comic “about a year before” Reklaw.

Reklaw, who holds a double major in art and computer science from the University of California, Santa Cruz, claims to have had two interests—“artificial intelligence and acrylic painting”—while he “studied (in classes and independently) pop art, cognitive science, the tarot, psychology (Freud, Jung, Piaget, Myers-Briggs), and lots of math.”<sup>14</sup>

The process of illustrating dreams also includes producing covers that appear to Reklaw in a hypnagogic state. Significantly, the relatively realistic cartoon style (in both the covers and in the rest of the comics) makes the odd juxtapositions and dream logic seem like a documentation of a parallel reality. In this deadpan documentation approach, Reklaw’s *applicant* also stresses the logic involved in decision making, rather than merely indulging a completely invented fantasy.



not facile with  
arithmetic

24. Jesse Reklaw. "Not facile with arithmetic," photo image and text reproduced in the book *applicant*, by Jesse Reklaw, Microcosm Publishing, 2006. Images courtesy of Jesse Reklaw and Microcosm Publishing.

What do we make of the caption "not facile with arithmetic"?<sup>15</sup> Well, nothing except that it completely changes the meaning of the photograph. It does not create a new anchor (as in "this is a picture of an applicant who apparently never did well in arithmetic"). The meaning changes only after the viewer scours the photograph for clues to this odd perception. First, the confidential referee's use of the word "arithmetic" instead of "mathematics" (or another word more in line with an undergraduate biology major) seems odd. Then I notice the paisley scarf tied around the applicant's neck, the serious, uncomfortable stare, and the shaggy haircut. Why did the applicant choose this look for his photograph? Is it evidence of his difficulties in "arithmetic" or a sign of a professor's masked resistance to changes in fashion in the apparently neutral comment about arithmetic abilities? The caption sets the *punctum* process in motion. I cannot help but notice the trivial detail, the scarf, and try to connect it (or disconnect it) from the caption. Are the two related? Did the scarf keep the applicant from becoming a biologist? The photograph mutely gazes back.



No brooding malaise  
or bitter rebellion  
in this man.



I can imagine that  
he could be wearing on  
constant close exposure.

25. Jesse Reklaw. "No brooding malaise of bitter rebellion in this man," photo image and text reproduced in the book *applicant*, by Jesse Reklaw, Microcosm Publishing, 2006. Images courtesy of Jesse Reklaw and Microcosm Publishing.

26. Jesse Reklaw. "I can imagine that he could be wearing . . ." photo image and text reproduced in the book *applicant*, by Jesse Reklaw, Microcosm Publishing, 2006. Images courtesy of Jesse Reklaw and Microcosm Publishing.

The professor writing the reference for this applicant seems to resent student activism. But inevitably and uncomfortably the caption makes me also wonder about the apparent "brooding malaise" on the face of this man, as I search for even the hint of bitterness. Maybe there is no actual malaise, brooding or otherwise, in the person staring back, but the caption sets off a series of associations about the possible narratives involved—the *backstory*. The caption does not offer a rational, scholarly determination; it does not reject all knowledge of culture (as in an alternative, avant-garde artwork), aesthetics, or academia, but it mobilizes this knowledge about the impossibility of an adequate, fair, and accurate description system.

Some of the captions and photographs uncannily resemble Barthes' example of a *punctum* in the photo of the little boy standing by his school desk where Barthes' caption simply and suggestively exclaims, "Ernest, what a novel!"<sup>16</sup>

It is too painful to read some of these captions; they make me

cringe and they wear at my judgment; how does one make a decision about admissions, as I am sure many of my readers do on a regular basis, when the decisions may eventually appear dated, arbitrary, and absurd with time and social change? What do I think of the applicant who, the caption explains, is “wearing on constant close exposure”?<sup>17</sup> Accept, reject, or ignore the comment? The admissions process requires that letter of recommendation precisely determine how a student interacts in a classroom setting, so why does frankly describing an annoying student amuse and bother outsiders (in this case the readers of *applicant*)? Should those who “wear” on professors have a place in graduate school?

Oddly the woman with the caption “not as physically attractive as some”<sup>18</sup> [*sic*] is, for this reader, more attractive than most of the others Reklaw included in *applicant*, especially the men. Caught by my own voyeurism, I cannot help but wonder why the apparently lecherous (most likely male) professor worries about the applicant’s attractiveness as a criterion for admission into a biology program. It makes one cringe. I also wonder about the spelling error on a crucial word in the reference: perhaps the reference thought nothing of it or is it symptomatic of precisely the opposite? Why does physical attractiveness matter to the reference? Perhaps it still matters in evaluative processes and procedures, but admitting that attractiveness might matter (for better or probably worse) would create an un-resolvable contradiction. Unfortunately consciousness of the references’ failings and (inappropriate) desires and ideals does not make the system any fairer. Yet up against all this cultural baggage the applicant must be aware of that which exists all around her, especially in the academic discipline of biology, her stare looking bravely forward. It does not look any particular way (bravely, timidly, attractively). She offers a blank stare, but one cannot help but connect this stare (according to the Kuleshov effect—the apocryphal study demonstrating how viewers connect completely unrelated film scenes making a meaningful narrative from unrelated fragments), surreally, to the reference’s caption. The captions in *applicant* create a situation in which a peripheral detail punctures the reader’s complacency even if one wants to resist thinking about this possibility. That equation of attending to what usually remains unconscious forms the basis for a Surrealist

ethnography. Reklaw unwittingly found the raw materials (treasures) to apprehend the application process and used those materials in a game-like process. Following that lead, one might attempt a surrealist ethnography and archaeology of all the other evaluative processes of academia from blind peer review to teaching evaluations.

In a larger theoretical context, many scholars have challenged the primacy of rationalist problem solving with reference to the absurd solutions to “problems” like “the Jewish question” in Nazi Germany, and immigration and “border control” in contemporary U.S. politics. All of these issues are more profound and pressing than academic politics. Perhaps the riots among Chinese students upset by the correct and rational inclusion of their college’s name on their diploma (a less prestigious college associated with a very prestigious and highly selective university) gets closest to the admissions issues Reklaw highlights. The rational solution to a problem (what name to put on a diploma) might be grossly unfair, un-just, and even a petty fraud (the students were repeatedly promised that the diploma would not indicate their college’s name, only the name of the prestigious university). The similarity between all these cases and Reklaw’s surrealist ethnography lies in *applicant’s* ability to reframe the problem, not offer an inadequate description or facile solution. Effaced versions of Surrealist games already exist in academia, politics, and contemporary culture. To make explicit use of those games to reveal the surreality can serve as a model for a new type of social studies and activism. To pretend that the Surrealists were a quaint movement in the history of art betrays this vision. Reklaw’s work suggests an alternative, what Greg Ulmer calls a “poetics of obligation” that allows associative logic to puncture our complacency and suggest “becomings” and connections (135).<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

1. Breton, “Le Cadavre Exquis,” 5–7, 9–11.
2. Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism.”
3. Reklaw, *applicant*.
4. Reklaw, *applicant*.
5. Reklaw, *applicant*.

6. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.
7. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.
8. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.
9. Reklaw, *Slow Wave*.
10. Reklaw, *Slow Wave*.
11. Reklaw, *Slow Wave*.
12. Reklaw, *Slow Wave*.
13. Reklaw, *Slow Wave*.
14. Hicks, "Dreamline."
15. Reklaw, *applicant*.
16. Reklaw, *applicant*.
17. Reklaw, *applicant*.
18. Reklaw, *applicant*.
19. To appreciate how the Deleuzean notion of a becoming might function in a surreal social activist mode (or what Ulmer calls a "poetics of obligation"), see, for example, Ulmer, *Electronic Monuments*.

# Dead Men Don't Wear Pixels

The Online Exquisite Corpse and  
Process-based Institutional Critique

DAVIS SCHNEIDERMAN AND  
TOM DENLINGER

## 10

### 1. Teach them while they learn: process and de-realization

This Web-based Exquisite Corpse project is a multitudinous affair, composed at its height with seven instructors, six instructional technologists, and over forty-five students per semester from six affiliated liberal arts colleges—Lake Forest College, Kenyon College, DePauw University, Monmouth College, Oberlin College, Colorado College—as well as almost \$60,000 from an umbrella institution, the Midwest Instructional Technology Center (MITC).

The process of collaboration on this scale is neither simple nor completely streamlined, but as participant (student) commentary from the Corpse demonstrates time and again, a certain engagement with the online world alters the aesthetic interface, a world all too familiar for students who have cut their teeth on music and movie downloads, chatting, and currently ubiquitous social-networking portals such as MySpace and YouTube. Locating the project on the Web serves two purposes, one practical, one theoretical. The realpolitik of collaboration over distance hinges on networking. It would be impossible to link the community of participants without the mechanisms of the Web.<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, and more intriguingly, the familiarity of Web interfacing provides a shared structural environment for the participants, a medium from which they feel familiar enough to perhaps, when given the opportunity, affect radical depar-

tures from conventional creative action. As Elza Adamowicz notes in *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, “it is often the very banality of images which triggers the desire for surrealist appropriations, disrupting the surface of quotidian reality to reveal the desires and violence, the fears and anxiety underlying the everyday.”<sup>2</sup> Adamowicz further notes (in this discussion of commercially inspired surreal *détournement*) that the process of cutting and pasting can transform the “cliché” into a force of “evocative potential” (40). Put another way, the Corpse deals with the quotidian as a matter of necessity, for its electronic substance becomes, for many student participants, the substance of their reality. Our students live either on the Web, in networks such as Second Life, or certainly with the Web in the same way that our parents lived with their favorite radio dramas and Ovaltine’s “Secret Decoder Rings.” In other words, students often start out perhaps too familiar with their medium. André Breton notes in the early days of the Surrealist program, “We are subject to a sort of mental mimicry that forbids us to go deeply into anything and makes us consider with hostility what has been dearest to us.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet the goal is certainly not to map a type of Breton’s “hostility” for technology onto the student participants or their creations. Different courses at different colleges use different media, and a single Corpse may be composed of text, image, and moving-image technologies. Students working in various media often respond more abstractly to the materials they are given, not just because the materials become fragmented (subject to a process we call “de-realization”), but also because the change in media compels corresponding shifts in creative response and suggests unexpected solutions. Students are encouraged by this difference, gleefully translating the de-realized fragments of one medium into what they consider to be fully realized artworks in another.

For instance, in one example from fall 2004, Chris Bock interprets a fragment of Lindsey Roland’s painting into a textual narrative that *rewrites* the painting, as Rima Kuprys uses the partial sentences and phrases that she receives from Bock to construct an image-text collage that adds yet a third idea to the interpretive mix, and so the last participant, Josh Higgason, constructs a video from still photos



that builds a moving-image concept from a small section of Kupryś's collage.<sup>4</sup>

To some extent a pragmatic mastery of the technological components, or at least a familiarity with the basics of everyday computer usage, becomes a necessity for the above-described participatory encounters. Just as the Surrealists were, by and large, artists with skills in their various media, our students must produce art through a particular application frame (visual, textual), and then engage with the computer as the method of transfer. Even though we do not view the two processes as necessarily distinct (even if the students sometimes do), the usage of the familiar Internet-based technology is far from innocent. While not every member of the Corpse working group (the affiliated faculty and technological staff) have agreed on this principle, one continuing principle of our revised game has been to exploit the transfer medium to the *detriment* of standard student expectation, and thus the standard norms of art making promoted by the rational world. This process, again, we call "de-realization."

Yet before we arrive at an understanding of de-realization in terms of the computer usage *against* the domain of the rational, let us discuss the interface's positive functions. On the Corpse server ("housed" at Lake Forest College), students from all participating colleges are randomly assigned into groups of four or five, a "magic square" formulation, called a "Crypt." These "Crypts" are organized for minimal juxtaposition of students in the same course, meaning that with four different courses at four different schools, a "Crypt" of five students should only contain two randomly selected students from the same randomly selected course.

The members of each "Crypt" will generally produce five separate Corpses through a series of submission periods (one or two weeks in length, each). Again, the computer eliminates juxtaposition, so that Student A will produce the first piece, or "Limb" of Corpse 1 during submission point #1, and at submission point #2, Student A will have produced the second "Limb" of the second Corpse, and so on. At each submission point, Student A should be neither preceding nor following a student whom she has been paired with during the previous submission point. Thus, anonymously and across cam-

puses, each student maximizes collaborators in a pattern of minimal familiarity. At the close of all submission points (generally after four or eight weeks, depending on the submission interval), each “Crypt” will contain four or five Corpses made by four or five students, each containing four “Limbs.” The sum of all “Crypts” from a particular set is called a “Cemetery.”

Craig Saper, one of this collection’s contributors, notes in a discussion about alternative readings of film that one possibility of a meander-based de-centering approach (adapted from Roland Barthes’ idea of the *punctum*) is to free the tangential, in a sort of Situationist wandering or *dérive*, so that “the use of peripheral details calls into question what it means to read, so shifting the ground of a student’s wandering attention from media illiteracy to political activity.”<sup>5</sup>

Within this project, accordingly, we impose this tangential engagement through the de-realization mechanism, a computer-generated process meant to mimic the fold or crease of the classic Exquisite Corpse, while simultaneously accounting the changes in method (anonymity, distance) imposed by our contemporary update. When student A uploads a three-hundred-word composition, student B is only able to access a *portion* of this composition, chosen randomly, by a thirty-word “slider” that places itself over the top of any portion of the “original” text. Thus, in one example, the three-hundred-word composition becomes, when de-realized: “a road in a small town and meaningless scars like decorative lace would ascend even the most joyous beasts into a state of contemplative commiseration.”<sup>6</sup> A similar method is used for still images and collage-based material, except that the slider can also map *vertically* onto the images. For moving images, the computer samples a series of four stills from a particular film, and the slider is then randomly placed over the x or y axis. Following this the de-realized stills are reanimated in random order. So a slider strip randomly placed on a particularly sparse image or collage might produce a snapshot of empty space, and a video might yield only floating bits of color and texture in its de-realized avatar. As the “Cemetery” proceeds during the semester, the students may become familiar with the possibilities of de-realization, but there is no anticipating the viewable content of the mechanism.

And yet familiarity with the de-realization program perpetuates an odd desire toward mastery for some students, who wish, particularly in the text-based pieces, to “beat” the system—and so produce text of such “high” quality, that the slider, placed randomly, will validate her or his writing ability for the next Corpse participant. One participating student, Kim Holdsworth, makes the following comment: “Its [*sic*] harder for me to do this sometimes because I want the derealized piece to be able to reflect my whole story. Which means that every sentence has to have some meaning and power behind it, as well as sound good.”<sup>7</sup>

Decades after Gertrude Stein’s linguistic deconstructions, it is important to note the pervasive focus on the sentence in this typical comment, what Kass Fleisher recently called, in a parenthetical remark on an online post about the avant-garde, the “source of prose’s market power.”<sup>8</sup> First, the de-realization slider does not necessarily begin and end with the start or terminus of a complete sentence (although students often seem unaware of this programmed sentence death). Second, and despite the above (for many of the Corpse’s prose-writing students), the increasing challenge becomes one to exert the same standout singularity (manifest in “professional polish”) by producing quality text unable to be “ruined” by de-realization. The idea that such perfection is even possible has been reinforced by years of merit-based primary and secondary education—a meritocracy that imagines success as a Hollywood movie, and promotes a sense of cultural homogeneity that Georges Bataille so wisely linked to possession of product (the owner, “in modern society, is the function of the products”).<sup>9</sup> Similarly painters, photographers, and other visual-arts students try to devise images or artwork that have no “dead space,” that generate contrast and visual interest in *every* single portion of the picture plane. In the words of one student visual artist, Allison Klein: “Last time I decided to layer up the images so that no matter which strip was selected, it would be rich with information.”<sup>10</sup>

As with the writers, the participating visual artists want their “Limb” to “communicate” to the next student. They desire to imprint ego on every section of the work so that their artistic identity will somehow, despite de-realization, be recognized and reflected

back from the work of their anonymous collaborators. The prevailing commodity-art system barely recognizes visual art as a worthy student endeavor (a practice best left to “professionals”), and it is also largely incapable of framing student art making as an oppositional practice. As such, student feeling and perception concerning the act of visualization is hard-won and, understandably, jealously guarded—but nevertheless naïve. Most students have not had the opportunity to even begin to participate in a meritocracy surrounding the visual arts, but their efforts are nonetheless reinforced by prevailing myths concerning the “singular” creative persona capable of deep feeling and incisive personal intuition. Emerging from high school, they are unprepared for a collective process constructed in deliberate opposition to the Romantic myth of the “artist.”

That many students see their writing, collage, or video production as the (future) work of “genius” (or feel inferiority next to this possibility), speaks to the desire for their work to be recognized as such—a dream constantly deferred by the anonymity of the Corpse mechanism, and the de-realization procedures that affect the next “Limb.” This latter facet ensures that even at the close of the semester-long “Cemetery,” when participant identities are freely revealed on the Web gallery, the student cannot claim even direct inspirational ownership over the other participants’ “Limbs.”

For instance, in a spring 2006 Corpse,<sup>11</sup> the participants manage to extract similar narrative threads from the successive, singular fragments, but use them to weave completely different fabrics into the resulting crazy quilt: Nicholas Winkelblech expands in pictorial detail a narrative possibility, the textual mention of a flirtatious pinch and response sampled from Steven Fletcher’s text, with a multi-unit collage of photographic fragments lifted from the Internet; Malea Wilson then interprets, textually, within a separate universe of afternoon snacking and lovemaking, this fragmentary collage, which Marisa Zupan-Ciccone hijacks into a comic realm by depicting the sexual organs of a chocolate rabbit in a color photograph.

This unexpectedly delightful product results from the deliberate drain on autonomy of the rule-based Corpse procedures (when to submit, what media to use, etc.), and yet with the de-realized impediment toward manipulating the final “product,” students often find

the project frustrating for its sheer difference from their expected models of art making and collaboration. The system may not necessarily create deliberate space for either lethargy or cantankerousness (there are deadlines and forums for comment), but the railing of students, creatively, across these vectors proves to be a valuable critique of mainstream art production in its own right, particularly when collective involvement with the process generates action. One notable insurgency occurred in the fall of 2005, when students from Dan Raffin's Colorado College image-based course took it upon themselves to phone student participants from another college to confront what the former group perceived as the latter's unenthusiastic participation.

The unexpected juxtapositions of the complete Corpses in the following examples demonstrate any number of interpretative and critical positions, ranging to the "success" of a Corpse, as commonly defined by students to be the connection between pieces, to the "failure" of the pieces lacking such connection. What proves significant is the growing comfort level that students attain for the unexpected juxtapositions that characterize the Surrealist moment. Whereas a Kurt Schwitters line such as "Lukewarm milk fight *Thine* soul's triangle"<sup>12</sup> might often sound like gibberish to these budding "geniuses" in the first weeks of a Corpse-related course, the closing of a Cemetery celebrates connections of the same evocative stripe.

Here is where the Corpse works its subtle, critique-oriented magic—success redefines itself, through the frustration and failure of student planning, as the connection between "Limbs." Yet these connections have broken in many cases so far from the standard, realist model of prose and image making that the students, subject to repeated and often-intrusive de-realizations, find solace in the most nuanced linkage between their works. Renée Riese Hubert notes (in her study *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, & Partnership*) that with partners at differing stages of their aesthetic life, "collaboration could provide little more than stimulation and encouragement,"<sup>13</sup> and yet the Exquisite Corpse project provides not only these positive attributes, but also a sort of negative derangement of the senses (not quite systematic as per Rimbaud) that folds and creases many

of the debilitating prejudices of contemporary artists. At the same time this Corpse update produces art that exceeds its individual parts through a computerized hijacking of the aesthetic program.

II. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter.

Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

However assimilated our society may be to the predominance of media collage and/or inculcated systems of “chance” encounter, there remains great resistance to *any* pedagogical act of creative improvisation; such resistance stems from a seemingly unkillable belief that the “artist/author” is the core and center from which holy intuition flows. So how can students, inured to this perspective of “genius,” access a surreal space *through* mechanisms of chance, in effect directly courting the demons of irrationality, and still make peace with the predominant social paradigm of the Romantic artist?

In other words, how, in a complex project such as this, to undermine impulses toward conventional notions of unity and rational organization and still bring home the creative bacon? Perhaps, as Bataille insists and we believe, “bringing it home” is the problem itself, in that “[t]he opium of the people in the present world is not so much religion as it is accepted boredom.”<sup>14</sup> We take this boredom to be manifest in most standard creative exchange—with student artists requiring some recompense for their creative efforts; they yearn to see their creative reactions to their instructors’ suggestions put up in lights—at least at first. Accordingly, our Corpse game, our update—conducted solely online—sacrifices neither the shiny nor flashy, but twists this expectation into untoward contortions.

In a fall 2004 Corpse, Josh Higgason’s video, a fragmentary-yet-revealing, thirty-second portrait of family life, sibling dysfunction, and teenage body-image angst becomes chopped by the software “fold” into smaller, much-less-unified fragments. Rima Kuprys, the receiving student for this “Limb,” incorporates the fragments into an abstract collage using suburban surfaces—lamps, windows, mirrors, plaids, and grass. In their respective commentaries, Higgason laments the loss of his idea as well as his “original intent” to the machine of the Corpse process, but Kuprys marvels at the variety of artwork that this same machine generates.<sup>15</sup>

For our students, learning to draw on very little direct instruction about what to produce, and at the same time to trust in the dictum of a seemingly remote electronic collective (the “place” of this collaboration), is both easy (as the electronic playground becomes the *de facto* condition of everyday experience), yet also extremely difficult (when used as a mechanism for making art). The latter innovation requires the students to allow their aesthetic bits to be chiseled, forcefully, from their self-affirming ego-rock, and set into constellation with other student bits, which then, in new star patterns, reinterpret and re-signify the supposedly “genius” impulses of all participants. In short, the Exquisite Corpse, updated in the way we describe above, pragmatically, short circuits the creative impulse for self-aggrandizement. Such separation from the point of autonomous production becomes the crux of this revised Corpse practice. The “fold” of the de-realization process, as we have demonstrated in the previous section, is the catalyst that effects this separation and its attendant realizations. Yet it is also an agent that brings students into the cross-disciplinary, collaborative moment.

Our Corpse project offers flickering assemblages, attempting with its mixtures to avoid the comparative “boredom” of a single medium. Significantly, not one of our many participating students has blinked when hit with the combination of forms that they must grapple with and interpret, whether or not they have any experience outside their particular aesthetic neighborhood.

To some degree the project still exploits, on the computer screen, James Joyce’s famous “ineluctable modality of the visible,” where, as Lynn Hejinian notes, “in order to think we call into service the actual eye or the inner eye—and most frequently both.”<sup>16</sup> Because our students are children of the Web, and accept its forms as sometimes uncritically as they accept its collusions and more sinister implications, this visual focus allows us to systematically deconstruct the apparent believability and referentiality of the visible.

Appropriately it is in the collision of media that the collaboration takes rickety flight. At the symbolic level, paintings smear text, which erases portions of video, while collaged elements threaten to rearrange, as Ovid describes, all forms. It’s a virtual rock-paper-scissors game, where one image can trump or more likely change the next,

yet even so, as with the Surrealist game those many years ago, some ghost of a collective mind begins to take shape. How is it possible?

Tenuous connections form between visual ideas; one student's tangential splash of color takes invasive root, while another's misappropriation of imagery undermines previous interpretations, and each limb is infected with an unruly, viral clash of media. Still, some provocative emergence appears. In a spring 2005 Corpse, a variety of related conceptions about femaleness are somehow communicated, despite the de-realization process, and expressed in collages by participants Molly Arment, Kaitlin Skilken, and Corinne Wagner with their images, respectively, of dancing feminine skeletons with dragon-toe shoes, efflorescent blue thighs, and red-and-white bodies celebrating the feminine.<sup>17</sup>

Notably such fragmented interpretation is inseparable from the social critique embedded in the sinew of electronic, collaborative, mixed-media practice. As Richard Candida Smith notes in his essay "Exquisite Corpse: The Sense of the Past in Oral Histories with California Artists," assemblage artists connected to the art world's institutional gatekeepers have generally eschewed an explicitly critical social perspective. "Absence of social function or statement became, for a period of time, an absolute virtue." Yet Smith finds that the institutional rejection of political art actually fostered the opposite position: "Though assemblage artwork often had purely formal excellence, only now being adequately acknowledged, its biting social comment was inseparable from the way the pieces were viewed."<sup>18</sup>

In our update, a similar (albeit prescribed) rejection of establishment mores (what makes student art acceptable or successful—"genius," "originality," etc.), facilitates similar social critique—simply through the sophistication of the process. This online Exquisite Corpse combines social function—*through its production mode*—with the stated goal of offering *no directly applicable* social relevance in content. For connection-minded participants who may already reject ego-based art, such a move even thwarts their more laudable, yet often mundane desire for "social art." In this latter case the project ends up achieving a perhaps more sublime version of social critique through the anonymous fabrication of a collaborative body of work in an environment meant to separate art making from ego-intentionality and from utilitarian purpose. The result becomes the critique,



and, as with the Surrealists, the critique becomes somewhat unconscious. Except that in our update, there is no easy recourse toward dream logic or super-real experience as a more “true” arbiter. The connection to the world, we might say, is headless.

Mary Ann Caws similarly rejects the ethical for the cause of surreal practice in her essay “Exquisite Essentials,” appearing in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, a collection in honor of The Drawing Center’s 1993 Exquisite Corpse exhibit: “The poetic here is a matter of collective interpretation. Freedom, as construed in this game and all it entails, is essential. The moral does not enter into the poetic.”<sup>19</sup>

In a very real sense, as professors and directors of this Corpse update, we are the arbitrary taskmasters of the students’ varying degrees of involvement, dismay, enthusiasm, and inspiration, all channeled through the performance demands of our project. In this sense this Corpse update certainly reproduces standard pedagogical models. But the students are also exposed to the decentering of their own authorial intent, a new type of “autonomy” (as in “alone”) emerging from anonymous response, and collaborative production mechanisms that give rise to unexpected creative responses. The final product offers only part “ownership” (through participation, more than product) of an unwieldy, collectively produced artwork that appears to possess no specific interpretive agenda.

How far we’ve come from the encouragement of young “genius”! How removed from the pay-to-play logic of the undergraduate degree! Students interact with each other, playing a game mandated by our curriculum, yes, but this interaction functions in opposition to the practices of a curricular meritocracy. Here desire is pressed through a machine environment that serves as neither metaphor nor trope for success as a capitalist subject. Our Corpse offer a process akin to students’ own daily interactions with the electronic substance of their milieu, and from there, de-realizes the goals of those interactions. The results are neither perfect nor predictable, and in that failure, we slouch toward success.

*N.B. This essay was produced with the same Exquisite Corpse-like constraint as the material it describes. Schneiderman and Denlinger gathered materials related to the Corpse over the past months, and without*

have read many in studied detail, set to work on this composition. Each wrote at a separate computer, periodically switching seats and overwriting, amending, and editing each other's work, while Schneiderman's student assistant, Ben Lundquist, moved randomly through the collected source materials. Noting odd, enticing, or theoretically relevant phrases, Lundquist would place each text on the desk between Schneiderman and Denlinger, who in turn would randomly select source material and quotations that Lundquist had noted. Then, at random drop points, the authors would integrate the quotations or idea into the text. The majority of quotations and sources used in this essay were determined in this partially random manner.

## Notes

The Web site for this project is <http://corpse.lakeforest.edu/samples.html>.

1. The first iteration of this project, worked only through the authors' two courses at Lake Forest College in the fall of 2001, used printed, hard-copy text and photos, exchanged by the instructors through an alphabet-based system. Student "A" in Denlinger's Advanced Photography course would exchange with student "A" in Schneiderman's creative-writing course. Yet the intense proximity of the school's population, then approximately 1,300, created a fishbowl environment that necessitated the crude Web interface created in the spring of 2002.

2. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, 40.
3. Hofmann, "Mary Reynolds," 142.
4. *Fall 2004, Cemetery One, Crypt Four, Corpse Five*.
5. Saper, *Artificial Mythologies*, 20.
6. *Fall 2004, Cemetery One, Crypt Eight, Corpse Four*.
7. *Spring 2006 Cemetery, Crypt Thirty, Corpse Four*.
8. Fleisher, "Resisting the Sentence."
9. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure," 138.
10. *Fall 2004, Cemetery One, Crypt Three, Corpse Five*.
11. *Spring 2006 Cemetery, Crypt Thirty-One, Corpse One*.
12. Schwitters, "Quadrangle," 367.
13. Hubert, *Magnifying Mirrors*, 311.
14. Bataille, "Popular Front," 167.
15. *Fall 2004, Cemetery One, Crypt Four, Corpse Four*.
16. Hejinian, "The Quest for Knowledge," 185.
17. *Spring 2005, Cemetery One, Crypt 19, Corpse One*.
18. Smith, "Exquisite Corpse," 36.
19. Caws, "Exquisite Essentials," 37.



Recomposing the Body

four



# Exquisite Theater

KIMBERLY JANNARONE

## 11

The collective is a body, too. **Walter Benjamin**

The very notion of “surrealist theater” is oxymoronic: the originators of Surrealism—the circle of artists who called themselves Surrealists and worked with André Breton<sup>1</sup>—denounced the theater as an artistic form and even excommunicated several group members based in part on their involvement with dramatic performance.<sup>2</sup> Theater, the Surrealists maintained after limited experimentation with the form themselves, is a commercial institution that requires unacceptable artistic and political compromises.<sup>3</sup> Considering this stance, and the fact that we have almost no dramatic works written by orthodox Surrealists, the concept of surrealist theater poses categorical problems. Outside of a few exercises in automatic writing,<sup>4</sup> it simply did not exist in Breton’s eyes. In this paper, I propose a method for speaking of surrealist theater that acknowledges its fraught historical definition, providing a way to meaningfully locate surrealist principles at work in theatrical productions. By speaking of surrealist theater in methodological terms, we can see how Breton’s ideas were in fact intrinsically linked to theatrical innovations that were occurring all around him. Two theatrical projects exemplify how “surrealist” can be profitably applied as a conceptual and formal category for staged performance. Both originated with art-

ists who operated outside the Surrealist orthodoxy and whose works were, at separate times, condemned by the movement: Jean Cocteau and Antonin Artaud.<sup>5</sup> *Parade*, by Cocteau, and Artaud's work in the Théâtre Alfred Jarry (Alfred Jarry Theater), exemplify what surrealist theater could be, by employing a creative methodology that was to become formalized by the Surrealists as one of their principal games: the Exquisite Corpse.

The Exquisite Corpse, and hence the concept of surrealist theater, can be read in terms of what I will call collective individuality: independently functioning parts create a new whole. The Surrealists created the Exquisite Corpse around 1925, as they were moving to the left politically and thinking about collective action and de-individualization. The game shows the lingering traces of individuality in their move toward collective creation; in fact, as we will see, its construction actually highlights those traces. The game is a simple structure applied to writing (adjective/noun/verb/adjective/noun) as well as to drawing (head, torso, legs), a premise that is executed by individual artists in ignorance of the others' contributions. It creates creatures with fantastically improbable yet syntactically coherent forms.<sup>6</sup>

Two sets of paradoxes constitute the Exquisite Corpse: the collective comprises individuals who don't communicate, and rules govern chance.<sup>7</sup> These paradoxes reveal how the Surrealists applied Rimbaud's dictum that the poet must create a "boundless . . . and systematized *disorganization* (*immense et raisonné dérèglement*) of *all the senses*"<sup>8</sup> in pursuit of their desire to create art that transcended the rational—the rational always residing, for them, in the individual. The individual participating in the Exquisite Corpse composes an element of the final product, but chance rules its organization and relationship to other parts of the composition. A work results that could not have been conceived by an individual consciousness; the game designs a sentence or image greater than the sum of its parts.

The Exquisite Corpse provides a structure. As Elza Adamowicz argues: "The common denominator to all Surrealist games is that they articulate a syntactic or compositional rule, and a semantic or iconic transgression."<sup>9</sup> The Exquisite Corpse is a system, a logical construction, because it establishes a set of rules. Its parameters allow chance to enter and chance's organized results to constitute the final prod-

uct. It is a skeleton on which limbs sprout unconsciously of others. Even if the players know each other, they do not know what will be created at any given session; thus, while everyone has agreed to the rules, the rules prevent the participants sharing any other kind of foreknowledge.

In many ways, the Exquisite Corpse resembles collage, in which discrete elements are pulled together into new contexts. Both processes create a “hybrid body,” or, as Adamowicz describes it, “an anatomical frame and isolated limbs.”<sup>10</sup> In both collage and the Exquisite Corpse, discrete elements remain discrete. Their constituent elements “both retain their individuality and are transformed by their new context.”<sup>11</sup> However, in contrast to collage, which recontextualizes pre-existing elements, the Exquisite Corpse arranges *new* component parts. Thus recontextualization happens not on the level of work, but of artist or even genre. A collage combines previously disconnected images into a new whole. Works by, for example, Max Ernst, may use a two-dimensional stage space to frame the collage, creating an “artificial englobing space” like that of the body in the Exquisite Corpse, “an open anatomy filled by random limbs.”<sup>12</sup> But in an Exquisite Corpse, the body comprises images created for this work alone. Thus what is recontextualized is not an existing work, but a drawing style itself, and the body’s shape derives from the new elements.

The Exquisite Corpse stresses the individuality of different artists while at the same time bringing them together. The insistence on the integrity of the individual is more pronounced in the drawings than in the sentences, since the heterogeneity of the elements is more legible in visual art than in text—and, as we will see, even more so in live performance. In the figures, characteristic styles of the contributing artists are often unmistakable, such as those of André Masson, Valentine Hugo, or Yves Tanguy. Yet the final product transforms these creations into a hybrid body.

Individual works transformed by their new contexts: in this regard, the Exquisite Corpse differs significantly from traditional collaborations as well as from creative methods that rely on a single artist’s unifying vision. The images were “not thinkable by only one brain,” as Simone Collinet phrased it; they were “born by the unwill-



ing, unconscious, and unexpected amalgam of three or four heterogeneous minds.”<sup>13</sup> This is precisely what excited the Surrealists about the Exquisite Corpse: “to see the rise of unforeseen creatures and yet to have created them.”<sup>14</sup> The individual participant both created and didn’t create the result; by a radical recontextualization, the corpse subsumes any artistic intentions behind the individual contributions into the logic of the new creature.

Exquisite Corpses emphasize the heterogeneity of their constituent parts. The Surrealist game heightened the extreme individualism that went into each part to precisely the degree that the contributions were not averaged out or softened by discussion or cooperation. The uncompromising insistence of each piece strengthened the originality of the whole. In addition to providing access to unthinkable, astonishing images, the Exquisite Corpse allowed the Surrealists to structure a way for “poetry to be made by all.”<sup>15</sup> As Breton wrote and others echoed: “What actually exalted us in these productions was the certitude that—for what it might be worth—they had that mark of what cannot be generated by only one brain.”<sup>16</sup>

The process generates monstrous results. Bizarre body parts rest on an ordinary skeleton. Whether hideous or beautiful, the new body in any case surprises and thwarts expectations.<sup>17</sup> It is the strangeness contained within the promise of recognition that startles. Even after regular participants grew familiar with the syntax and each other’s styles, the monstrosity of the pieces continued to fascinate, as evidenced by the Surrealists’ inexhaustible fondness for the game, playing it for years on end without changing the basic structure in any significant way.

This process re-situates artistic control of a work. In the Exquisite Corpse, a premise, not a person, wields control. The most important artist in the process, then, is the one who devises the premise. Instead of an author or an artist, we can think of “instigators” of a piece. The rule that governs the unfolding determines the outcome: how much chance is allowed, what does the skeleton look like, how much input does each contributor have? Each of these returns to the premise, no matter the skill level of any given writer or artist. In the sentence game, the syntax matters; in drawing, the choice of a physical body; in both, the number of the contributors.

The Exquisite Corpse, then, is a definite design, but a design of parameters. It forges a space to combine deliberately disparate elements. Insofar as it provides a set of rules, it is a game; by the same standard, it can be seen as the premise for a theatrical event: it is a kind of collaboration. The separateness of the contributors makes its products the works of a collective individuality, embodying the Surrealist ideal that an individual can create with a unique voice, while unconsciously collaborating with others.<sup>18</sup>

The Exquisite Corpse had broader artistic implications than the Surrealists intended. The surprising connections they exalted first in words and then, even more enthusiastically, in drawings, take on yet another level of complexity when unfolding in live performance. Whereas Breton envisioned it as primarily a way to create sentences and images, the game—a framework that invites participation from varied sources, that integrates discrete elements—naturally turns toward the theater. This very method was employed *avant la lettre* with great success in 1917 by a man whom the Surrealists scorned, Jean Cocteau. Indeed, the very term “surrealism” appeared seven years before the official formation of the Surrealist movement and eight before the Exquisite Corpse per se, to describe Cocteau’s piece, *Parade*.<sup>19</sup>

### Graceful Grotesque

*Parade* was a monster: different genres as well as cultures came together at the Théâtre du Châtelet to cries of horror from the (invited) spectators. It was a ballet and it wasn’t a ballet; it was an artwork by Picasso and it was a vaudeville show; it was an orchestral piece and it was a ragtime ditty. The audience came from both the Right Bank and Left Bank, and the performance drew from high and low culture. Those expecting to enjoy an exotic and ethereal performance by a trend-setting ballet company instead encountered something fragmented and disturbing. We can describe the process that led to this hybrid body as an early Exquisite Corpse.

*Parade* premiered in 1917 and was performed by Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes (Russian Ballet). The music was by Erik Satie, the choreography by Léonide Massine, and the curtain, décor, and costumes by Pablo Picasso. The show created a wartime riot, and it

finally allowed Cocteau to fulfill Diaghilev's testy challenge of 1912: "Étonne-moi!" ("Astonish me!"). It would never earn him the respect of the Surrealists, although they would have had good reason to acknowledge this as an example of Surrealist methods enacted in the performing arts.<sup>20</sup> Apollinaire's program notes for this production indicate the extent of the kinship: "This union," he wrote, "has given rise in *Parade* to kind of super-realism (sur-réalisme.)"<sup>21</sup> Cocteau, then, brought the concept of surrealism into being by assembling *Parade*—and its first appearance was on the stage.

Cocteau functioned as instigator: he established the premise and the syntactical rules of the piece. For the premise, he copied out the definition of "parade" from the *Dictionnaire Larousse* on the cover of his notebook and distributed it to the other artists. This definition—"a burlesque scene played outside a sideshow booth to entice spectators inside"—served as the skeleton of the piece.<sup>22</sup> From this, he determined the piece's constituent characters in the form of three performers who would enact the parade—American Girl, Chinese Conjuror, and Acrobat.<sup>23</sup> The plot consisted of one event: bystanders mistake the parade for an actual performance and thus never pay to enter the real show. That was it. (Cocteau even scrawled across the contributing artists' notebooks, "Beware of ideas," discouraging intellectual developments in favor of trusting in unconscious creative urges.<sup>24</sup>) Cocteau defined the piece's nature by choosing the genre and artists: it would be a Russian ballet, it would have music by Satie, design by Picasso, and fairground movement executed by Massine. Within this seemingly simple foundation laid all the ingredients and paradoxes that would create a monster; further, the artists' processes unfolded as a collective individuality—what would later be called an Exquisite Corpse.

The premise of the piece determined its heterogeneous nature. Deborah Rothschild demonstrates that *Parade* combined high art with popular forms, making it a hybrid not just of artistic genres, but also of class. No single artistic innovation (such as Cubism, to which the public was just acclimating itself in painting when Picasso transposed it into theatrical form) sparked the riots that greeted the premiere of *Parade*; instead unexpected combinations, such as the invasion of elite art (the ballet) by the lowbrow (the traveling

circus), ignited the fires. Audiences familiar with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes expected sophisticated experimentation, not a sideshow booth.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the piece recontextualized both ballet and music hall by subverting the elite authority of one and elevating the status of the other. This fundamental cross of categories helps us unravel the monstrosity or fragmented unity of *Parade*.

Right and left, high and low: the premise of *Parade* embedded these crossings directly into the piece. Cocteau interpreted his work as a joining together of artistic trends in Paris. "[I] understood that there existed in Paris an artistic right and an artistic left, which were ignorant or disdainful of each other for no valid reason and which it was perfectly possible to bring together. It was a question of converting Diaghilev to modern painting, and to convert the modern painters, especially Picasso, to the sumptuous, decorative aesthetic of the ballet; of coaxing the Cubists out of their isolation, persuading them to abandon their hermetic Montmartre folklore."<sup>26</sup> Each artist transposed something of his previous works into new terrain. Picasso brought his love of itinerant entertainers into contact with the sophisticated world of the ballet. The curtain for *Parade* depicts a group of players preparing for a show. Some of these figures, such as the Harlequin, the white horse, and the trained monkey, figure repeatedly in Picasso's paintings.<sup>27</sup> But here they are recontextualized in two ways. One, the curtain is by far the largest painting in Picasso's oeuvre: measuring ten by seventeen meters, it towers above the others, demanding attention not just as a piece of visual art but as a portal to another kind of work—the live performance about to unfold behind it.<sup>28</sup> Two, those itinerant players gave way, once the curtain was drawn, to the lithe and elegant dancers of the Ballets Russes, their classical training and highly aestheticized bodies working in stark contrast to the rough-hewn popular performers depicted on the curtain. The curtain—warmly received by the audience at first—promised a journey through familiar terrain (its Cubism-light aesthetic already assimilable by the public),<sup>29</sup> but it betrayed that promise when these characters came to life, crudely transposed onto the bodies of ballerinas.

Massine's choreography doubled this particular hybridity. Attempting his first choreographic work, he found himself, a star of

the Ballets Russes, teaching his company the moves of the music hall—acrobatic stunts, pantomime, magic tricks, ragtime numbers, and sequences taken directly from a popular movie series.<sup>30</sup> This incongruous mixture of styles—music hall and ballet—affronted many audience members. They rejected the ballerinas' execution of these moves, since the Russian dancers could not efface their exquisite grace to suit the stunts and dances. Massine grafted steps grounded in slapstick and exuberance onto the delicately refined dancers, leading many audience members to wish for a wholeness of one (vaudevillians performing vaudeville moves) or the other (ballerinas dancing a ballet). As one audience member commented: "There are dozens of music-hall performers who can do this sort of thing better, because they are more to the impudent manner born."<sup>31</sup> The spectacle of the Ballets Russes performing slapstick was, for some, more than inartistic: it was grotesque.

The grafting of genres occurred on all levels of the performance of *Parade*. Picasso created Cubist sculptures for the Managers' costumes, encasing dancers in ten-foot-tall constructions of cardboard, canvas, metal, and cloth. The choreography responded accordingly. The ballerinas playing the Managers marched and stamped around the stage with stiff and ponderous movements.<sup>32</sup> The Acrobats' performance included both traditional ballet and gymnastic feats. They performed trapeze stunts and tightrope walking in pantomime, then came together for a graceful pas de deux. Scoring all this, Satie's music—normally understated—gave way at times to not only popular music, but also to the sounds of typewriters clicking.

This last example provides strong evidence of the profound discomfort *Parade's* genre confusion engendered. Diaghilev refused to consent to Cocteau's suggestion for more nonmusical sounds, including spoken texts and megaphone effects (as well as sounds of airplanes, trains, and Morse code) on the grounds that "the spoken word was entirely out of place in a ballet."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the experimental impresario himself—who had in fact catalyzed the production by commanding Cocteau years earlier to "astonish" him—could not accept all the levels of transgression the piece demanded.

The audience's reactions furnish many more proofs of this kind of outrage, from the uproar that greeted Picasso's dancing horse<sup>34</sup>

to the “real bedlam” that erupted at the American Girl’s one-step.<sup>35</sup> The piece promised a familiar kind of performance—an elegant ballet—and instead delivered an esteemed ballet company at work in the service of a circus act.<sup>36</sup> The incongruities operated on all levels: the music hall invaded the ballet, proletarian entertainments confronted elite audiences, Left Bank bohemians met Right Bank artists, Grand Guignol (in Picasso’s curtain) entered the realm of poetry, pop culture framed antiquity, jazz and ragtime found their way into an orchestral score, and silent film and circus moves informed Ballets Russes choreography. What is really striking about these dissonances is the way the isolated elements were preserved in their original form: they were not watered down so that they would be more palatable to the audience, nor were they adapted in any significant way—they were grafted. Their stark transposition recalls us to the Exquisite Corpse and the foundation of collective individuality on which it operates.

Surrealists prized works that traded in heterogeneity and *décalage*, which is the incongruity between things that manifests itself in a temporal, physical, or psychological gap. One way works achieve this is by preserving the discrete character of each item in a work. (This is obvious in collage, as we saw above.) We can easily see this heterogeneity and *décalage* in *Parade*. By examining the separate elements of the production, we understand the way it relates to the Surrealist game in both process and product; it is clearly “an anatomical frame [with] isolated limbs.”<sup>37</sup>

In Exquisite Corpse drawings, the hand of a distinctive artist is often unmistakable, as we discussed above. The same is true of *Parade*. The artists, although each worked against something familiar in their own repertoire, produced immediately recognizable contributions to the piece. Picasso’s curtain employed stock characters from a range of his previous works in a style familiar to his audience. His designs for the Managers—although outrageous in their capacity as costumes—were quintessential works of Cubist figuration, with the distinctive simultaneous vantage points and collapsed perspective of that period. Likewise, Satie’s score, although disjointed and coarse in parts, still employed the fundamental lilting simplicity of his other works. Massine’s dance as the Chinese conjurer exhibited his comic

talents, upon which he had made his name in ballet. Organizing it all, Cocteau's playful premise demonstrated his characteristic style: a light façade over a foundation of anxiety. For while the characters of the dancers and acrobats entertain and charm, their audience never comprehends the parade's intention, and ultimately the performers are left discouraged, unsuccessful, exhausted, collapsing on each other, with the little American Girl even in tears. The incomprehension of the fictional observers doubled the incomprehension and antagonism of the real audience and the reviewers that erupted in response to this piece.<sup>38</sup> For *Parade's* discrete elements did not combine in any recognizably harmonic manner, and this resolute disunity provoked active resistance from the audience.

The distinctiveness of the artists' work and the piece's signal heterogeneity arose, in large part, from the artists working in isolation from one another without any overriding directorial vision. Cocteau did not advertise himself in the traditionally controlling role of "author" or "director"; instead, he established the rules of the game by creating the premise and choosing the artists. Because he relinquished the creative authority he might have had in a more traditional production, the uniqueness of the individual artists' contributions was more pronounced. This unusual position in the work was so radical that it enabled him to be subject to one of the most famous snubs of the era: Apollinaire, in his program note for the event, neglects to mention Cocteau's role in the production at all.<sup>39</sup> While Cocteau actually relinquished this control only gradually, as the artists turned more and more inward in their work, the role of instigator proved to be a productive role from him. It produced radically different results—both in style and in the amount of recognition it garnered him—than those of his later work as film director for such films as *Orphée* and *La Belle et la Bête*, in which one can easily distinguish a characteristic aesthetic in all aspects of the works.

Francis Steegmuller notes in his biography of Cocteau that Cocteau brought Satie, Picasso, and Massine together before he knew what the precise nature of the *Parade* performance would be.<sup>40</sup> When we extend this observation—he *never* knew what the precise nature of the performance would be, even as it was happening—we find the Exquisite Corpse. An enforced ignorance of the whole reigned

over the project, as the artists rarely worked in the same geographical space over the course of the collaboration. Cocteau was on the war front when Picasso and Satie were in Paris; Massine entered the project late and worked almost not at all with Satie; Satie stayed behind in France while the rest of the artists went to Italy. These separations meant that, aside from an exchange of letters between Paris, Rome, and a military ambulance unit on the front, direct collaboration did not occur until shortly before the performance—almost a year after the project started.

The artists developed their individual contributions in an artistic game of blind-man's-bluff. This worked in their favor: as disagreements arose, each artist locked himself up and pursued his own vision. For example, Satie wrote to Cocteau in early 1916: "I am at work. Let me do it my own way. I warn you, you won't see the thing until *October*. Not a note before that. I tell you so under oath."<sup>41</sup> Picasso designed for twelve hours a day in his room in Italy while Satie composed in Paris. Cocteau's own notice on *Parade* on the day of the first performance astutely articulates the value of this kind of work: "the contribution of each [of us] is in close union with the contributions of the others *without impinging* on them."<sup>42</sup>

This strange process resulted in the prototypical performance of a kind of collective individuality the Surrealists would later seek through their games and artistic production in the 1920s. The isolated creations of distinct artists came together in *Parade*, the first performance of "sur-réalisme" in the theater. Apollinaire's coinage in the program notes aptly establishes the link between this production and the movement that was to adopt and adapt the name Surrealism seven years later. In spite of Breton's aversion to theatrical performance,<sup>43</sup> Cocteau's premise for *Parade* is the Exquisite Corpse in practice, and in a more expansive incarnation. Not bound to one art form or to two dimensions, *Parade* achieved a synergy of different artistic actions that played themselves out in time and space on the stage.

Cocteau named a collection of his shorter plays *Théâtre de Poche*. He included *Parade* as the first of the "pocket plays" in the edition. In his introduction, he calls the texts that follow "pre-texts." The very short outline for *Parade*, in other words, served as a springboard for



performance, neither a complete entity nor a scripted event. This “pre-text,” which brought together the varied talents of four prominent artists in 1917, revealed how the Exquisite Corpse might unfold in a live, multidimensional manifestation. It also anticipated an experimental use of the scenario developed by another artist whose theatrical work was castigated by the Surrealists, Antonin Artaud.

### Creative Vision and Artistic Division

The Surrealists exiled Artaud in 1926 (he joined the movement in late 1924), the year he founded his first theatrical endeavor, the Alfred Jarry Theater.<sup>44</sup> His short-lived collaboration with the Surrealists found its roots in their shared interest in bringing the “hidden” world into view and establishing a kind of creative expression that flourished in the absence of individual reason. But Artaud insisted on using the theater in this project, which the Surrealists would not accept, leading them to protest and riot at several of his performances.<sup>45</sup> Yet Artaud’s theatrical endeavors during this period harken back both to the prior synergistic experience of *Parade* and to the synthetic model of the Exquisite Corpse. Along with Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron, Artaud founded the Alfred Jarry Theater in 1926 and entered into the most fruitful theatrical experience of his life—due in large part to the space for his actors and designers created by a theatrical analogue of the Surrealist game.<sup>46</sup> In a body of work that theorized the primacy of the director in manifestly dictatorial terms, Artaud’s directorial approach found its only truly collaborative incarnation in Jarry Theater productions such as *Ventre brûlé, ou la mère folle* (Burnt belly, or the mad mother). In the late nineteen twenties, his approach to dramatic texts, like Cocteau’s work, centered on an innovative use of pre-texts, or, as we will define them, scenarios.

Scenarios and production plans—not plays—comprise most of Artaud’s theatrical writings. There is a good reason for this: he viewed theater in terms of performance, of contributions to the work originating in response to a basic premise. His use of the scenario, like the skeleton of the Exquisite Corpse, eliminates a single authority in the development of the piece and creates a necessarily collaborative space.

Artaud produced *Ventre brûlé* for the inaugural performance of the Alfred Jarry Theater on June 1, 1927.<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Crémieux described it as a “short hallucination without or almost without text.”<sup>48</sup> There is no text left (to us) of this “play” or “scenario.” In fact, a neat rule applies to all of Artaud’s scenarios written during this period: if a scenario was staged, no text of it remains, and vice versa: if we have a text, it was certainly not staged. The scenarios Artaud wrote were bound for performance: the minute they were staged, they evaporated into irrelevance, as the live performance of them and the collaborative efforts of the other artists transformed the pre-text into a work.

Our knowledge of this piece is fragmentary, but a reconstruction of the performance based on reviews and interviews reveals that *Ventre brûlé* comprised several characters—such as King, Queen, and some satirical figures, such as the Corne d’Abondance, who either died upon entering the stage, fell victim to a lethal jet of violet light, or hurled nonsensical curses at each other. Stage pieces included a rocking chair, masks, and “swords in silver-painted cardboard.”<sup>49</sup> No clear plot emerged, and what speech there was resembled not dialogue but rallying cries, such as “Gare à la foudre!” (“Beware of the lightning!”), yelled by the character called the Mystère d’Hollywood.<sup>50</sup> Sounds included rhythmic punctuation such as the “rollings of drums behind a curtain” that accompanied the fatal jets of light.<sup>51</sup> The music incorporated a funeral march “partly grotesque, partly poignant,” a percussive score, sound effects, and perhaps also a Charleston.<sup>52</sup>

*Ventre brûlé* was held together not by a script but by a framework, less by Artaud as playwright than Artaud as instigator. Maxime Jacob, who composed the music for the piece, wrote that he’d “never had a text between his hands”; if indeed Artaud had written anything, it was certainly minimal.<sup>53</sup> And yet reviews and memories of the performance suggest that the lights, sounds, music, movements of the actors, and the scattered speech coalesced into a strangely unified “hallucination.” Actors report that Artaud encouraged their creativity, giving them great freedom within his basic premise. Raymond Rouleau, who acted in *Ventre brûlé*, among other Jarry Theater productions, wrote that, as a director, Artaud “provide[d] little

specific help” in their actual choices, “but enormous inspiration.”<sup>54</sup> Tania Balachova, who also acted in the Jarry Theater productions, remembered that Artaud “had the amazing ability of stimulating their [the actors’] imaginations and fantasies for their utilization in the service of the play.”<sup>55</sup> Jacob recalled that his own musical rhythms “seemed to me to illustrate well the torments of the soul of the author.”<sup>56</sup> The artists may not have seen each other’s contributions until the performance or have had more than one rehearsal, but *Ventre brûlé* created a unified impression because of the rules established by Artaud’s premise.

The practical application of the scenario—the collaborative effort to develop the work on stage—brought Artaud’s theatrical powers to their heights during this period, in part by limiting the amount of direct control he had over a production. Establishing the rules and exerting a largely indirect influence on the developments of each artist proved to be the crucial elements of Artaud’s successful direction. Actors in the Jarry Theater report that Artaud gave them great freedom to develop their roles—he would establish the premise, the tone, and some sounds or rhythms, which would spur their creativity without dictating it. Due to the enormous space given to the actors and composers, their creative energies flourished in ways that Artaud engineered but did not limit. Regarding Artaud’s direction, Rouleau wrote: “He made suggestions to his actors but never imposed movements or line readings upon them.”<sup>57</sup>

This stands in stark contrast to Artaud’s theorization of the role of director in later writings. In *The Theater and Its Double* (1938), the director developed, in Artaud’s mind, into an all-powerful figure who “sets in motion the MANIFESTED.”<sup>58</sup> The director became a snake charmer, a hypnotist, a figure, in sum, who exercised complete control over every aspect of the performance. With this in mind, his freedom with actors in the Jarry Theater serves as contrast and complication to his more well-known later writings.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Artaud proposed at one point during the Jarry Theater to create a “manifesto-play” (“*la pièce-manifeste*”) that, in its collaborative nature, was unlike any other project he attempted to produce. The piece would be “impersonal but subjective,” “written in collaboration, where each will abandon his narrowly personal point of view.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus we find that Artaud's totalizing vision of the director was in fact kept in check and transformed by the practice of live, even if "unconscious," collaboration.

Another part of Artaud's effectiveness as a director during this period also draws from a surrealist spirit. As players of Surrealist games let go of preconceptions of what form a sentence or impression might take, Artaud encouraged his collaborators to do the same. The role of free association, of establishing methods to bypass conscious thought, proved essential to his direction. Rouleau wrote: "His direction was a kind of introspection; he seemed to listen attentively to the promptings of his subconscious."<sup>61</sup> He then translated this method into an acting approach. As Balachova remembers, he asked for "an extraordinarily free fantasizing, like a dream," in rehearsals.<sup>62</sup> Having chosen the elements for his production, Artaud then let the actors develop their contributions as Surrealist artists playing the Exquisite Corpse might. Balachova points to the irony of this: "Strangely enough, despite the fact that Artaud had quarreled with the surrealists and had separated himself from them, he was using a surrealist approach, based on magic, dreams, and cultism."<sup>63</sup> As reviews testifying to the "huge suggestive power" of Artaud's staging demonstrate, productions of the Jarry Theater reflected this surrealist embrace of mystery and magic, resulting in worlds in which "everything assumes a meaning, a secret, a soul."<sup>64</sup> In a word, his approach called forth *le merveilleux*.

What Artaud's career in the Jarry Theater proves is that the Surrealists' objections to the theater did not take into account the ways that performance could release surrealist discoveries in the realms of unconscious collaboration. Instead of exploiting the Exquisite Corpse to transform theatrical production, the Surrealists remained dramatically bound to a traditional author/text approach. One of the only products of official surrealist dramatic experimentation, *S'il vous plaît* (If you please), by Breton and Philippe Soupault, came from the application of surrealist writing techniques to playwriting: Soupault wrote one part and Breton the other, both employing automatic writing. But the resultant script functions entirely in the realm of scripted drama to be staged by a director, with no innovation in the relationship of script and stage. Breton and Soupault

did not explore expanding the frame of Surrealist collaboration and creativity to include live performance. When Artaud established an Exquisite Corpse syntax in a theatrical rehearsal, he demonstrated the range of possibilities both for encouraging multiple manifestations of what the Surrealists called *le merveilleux*, and for creating a space in which theater could unfold as a collective individuality.

The flourishing of actors' and Artaud's talents in the Jarry Theater points to the usefulness of the Surrealist game as a framework for live performance. The space created by the Exquisite Corpse and the tangible space of the Jarry Theater stage are analogous: a premise is given and the artists develop their contributions in near isolation. The result is something that, while bearing the mark of its deviser, represents something that could never have been created by one mind. The originality of the piece rests both on the extreme individualism of the artists as well as the promise of the premise.

### Corpse Performance

The fullest application of the Exquisite Corpse occurred in a form the Surrealists denounced, initially developed by two men whose experiments in performance they rejected. And yet as a methodology of creation the Surrealist game finds particularly fertile ground in performance. The irony of the Surrealist resistance is especially pronounced today, when contemporary theatrical work races to incorporate new and emerging artistic media and continues the long search for efficacious collaborative performance methods.

Two outcomes of the Exquisite Corpse in performance hold particular significance for contemporary theater practice. One: Cocteau's work demonstrates the power of this method to productively cross artistic genres. When brought into live performance, the Exquisite Corpse disrupts monolithic categories—ballet, drama, sculpture, etc.—in a unique combination of artistic isolation and integration. Two: Artaud's work demonstrates the effect of relinquishing control and the theatrical success of entrusting an individual vision to a series of other artists. The Exquisite Corpse works to subvert both the primacy of a genre and the dominance of an individual artist.

The success of the Exquisite Corpse model for performance rests on the effacement of the author or director, a figure that normally

exercises great artistic control. The projects discussed above represent departures for both Cocteau and Artaud in this regard. Cocteau's films provide strong evidence of a singular artistic driving force, and Artaud's later writings theorize the omnipotence of the director. This fact makes *Parade* and *Ventre brûlé* exemplary instances of the possibilities of surrealist theater. The model of collective individuality in the Exquisite Corpse opens up the visions of isolated and potentially dictatorial artists to include the idiosyncratic contributions of others in a kind of detached ensemble.

The Exquisite Corpse serves as a useful model for analyzing a diverse range of performances, many directly inspired by Surrealist ideas. The John Cage/Merce Cunningham collaborations of the nineteen sixties epitomize this. Each artist conceived his share of the performance in enforced ignorance of what the other was doing: Cage composed a score while Cunningham choreographed a dance, the dancers rehearsed in silence, and the two parts united only in performance, often on opening night itself.<sup>65</sup> Like the narrative or physical structure of the Exquisite Corpse, a Cage/Cunningham collaboration rested on devised anatomical rules. Cunningham's "independent choreography" and Cage's music shared an agreed-upon time structure and came together at certain key points. Between these key points, used to provide the piece with some structure (like the mandate for a head, torso, and legs in an Exquisite Corpse drawing), the artists pursued independent paths—so much so that, even though they worked this way for fifty years, we can easily speak of individual performances as well as a recognizable Cage or Cunningham style.

Their collaborations emphasize the greater-than-usual trust in forces beyond reason and individual intent underlying such performance processes. Both artists relied on spontaneous and arbitrary elements in their work on two levels: first, on the methods each employed in their creative production, and, second, on the eventual result of combining their creations. Cunningham's choreography used chance processes to determine allowable ranges of movement and which pieces of choreography to use. Cage employed chance in his performances themselves—such as the famous *4'33*, which consisted of only a series of time limits. As the Surrealists discovered, chance

can be used to impose limitations as well as to create a kind of freedom unattainable by entirely rational, individual creation.

The Cage/Cunningham work and its inheritors, such as much of the work at the Judson Dance Theater in the nineteen sixties, demonstrate that the Exquisite Corpse model is clearly bound for performance. One of the consequences of employing this method in performance—and perhaps why it found such welcome reception in dance—is its striking effect on the body. The “Corpse” is itself, as we have seen, a skeleton, an anatomical structure, a monster. As such, the discussion of it in these terms has not been metaphorical: the Exquisite Corpse changes the way we conceive of a body by emphasizing its discrete elements, by questioning standard notions of each element (head, torso, legs), while at the same time producing whole, functioning units. It creates a seemingly impossible corporeal object whose very unity makes us rethink assumptions about the body itself. Cunningham’s dancers and Diaghilev’s ballerinas in Cubist costumes open up a new view of the performer: by becoming part of an Exquisite Corpse performance, the performers estrange us from their bodies even while acting within recognizable anatomical rules.

What the Exquisite Corpse provides that has not been articulated in the same way by other performance theory and practices is a way to articulate the disruption of a category or vision that inhabits a recognizable form while integrating distinct individual creations. The principle of collective individuality naturally raises questions about community and collective, isolation and collaboration, chance and limitations. As the Surrealist game moves from two- to three-dimensional spaces, possible consequences of its unique system of estranged involvement manifest themselves in social and political fields—even greater irony, then, that the Surrealists did not exploit its possibilities in live performance, as they were seeking a way to make Surrealism relevant within the French Communist Party. For one example of this relevance, Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren has argued that the Exquisite Corpse in performance helps us understand the functioning of Augusto Boal’s political theater. She describes Boal’s work in terms of the Surrealist game as demonstrating “a methodology for cutting across cultural spaces and linking disparate realities, histories, and

subject positions.”<sup>66</sup> Hybridity does not equal collaboration, but it raises essential questions if we are to engage the concepts of diversity, community, and intercultural exchange, especially if we try to enact them through live performance. A corpse that, in all its Frankensteinian make-up, manages to be “exquisite,” shows us that collaboration need not entail taking the average of each part; nor does the integrity of one’s vision necessarily suffer from relinquishing—to others, to chance, to a set of well-honed rules—a claim to dictate the logic of the whole.

## Notes

1. Throughout the essay, I will use “Surrealism” to refer to the official group and “surrealism” or “surrealist” to refer to a more general notion of related artistic principles articulated both pre- and post-movement.

2. The dramatic language of excommunication is theirs. While the group cited other factors, including their commitment to the French Communist Party, theatrical activity figured significantly in the expulsions of Artaud and Roger Vitrac. See Breton, *What is Surrealism*, 68, and Brandon, *Surreal Lives*, 243–45, 263, 265.

3. Breton “mistrusted the theatre as bourgeois and profit-oriented,” Bradley, *Surrealism*, 69. See the incident over the Alfred Jarry Theater’s production of *A Dream Play* in *Oeuvres Complètes d’Antonin Artaud II*, 282–85 for a striking example of the Surrealists’ determination to denounce any theatrical venture tied to government or profit.

4. Breton and Soupault’s *S’il vous plaît* is the best-known example, discussed below.

5. Cocteau was never a member of the movement, although his indisputably surrealist-like works evoked Breton’s hatred, fueled by an inadmissible respect. Artaud was expelled by the Surrealists in a 1927 pamphlet, “Au Grand Jour,” to which he responded with the 1927 “A la grand nuit, ou la Bluff Surréaliste” (1927). See these and related material in *Oeuvres Complètes I*, 59–74.

6. Breton, “The Exquisite Corpse,” in *Surrealism*, ed. Patrick Waldberg, 93–95. Concise overviews of the founding and development of the game by Breton, Masson, Duhamel, Tzara, and others are collected in Breton, *Le cadavre exquis, son exaltation*, ed. Arturo Schwarz.

7. Elza Adamowicz discusses rule making in Surrealist games in *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*; she focuses particularly on the Exquisite Corpse on pages 55–57.

8. Translated by Paul Schmidt in Rimbaud, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 102.



9. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 56.
10. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 185.
11. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 77.
12. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 83. She discusses the use of theatrical framing devices in collage at length in 58–62.
13. Simone Collinet in Breton, *Le cadavre exquis* (ed. Schwarz), 30. Collinet, née Kahn, later Breton, was André Breton's first wife and a member of the group when the Corpse game began.
14. Collinet in Breton, *Le cadavre exquis* (ed. Schwarz), 31.
15. "What mattered was *the coming of the astonishing image* . . . . Ultimately, the realization of Lautréamont's prediction: 'poetry will be made by all.'" André Masson in Breton, *Le cadavre exquis* (ed. Schwarz), 28.
16. Breton, *Le cadavre exquis* (ed. Schwarz), 8.
17. It surprises and thwarts expectations but not always pleasantly. Collinet writes of their drawings: "The wastebasket played a large part. Let us not forget it." Breton, *Le cadavre exquis* (ed. Schwarz), 30.
18. It may be that this ideal was especially pronounced during the Surrealists' 1920s turn toward leftist politics, as they sought a way to function efficiently and collectively.
19. Apollinaire, "Parade," in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 513.
20. Instead of acknowledging it, it was always a thorn in their side: "Failing properly to engage with the theatre, the Surrealists found themselves mocked by it." Bradley, *Surrealism*, 67.
21. Apollinaire, translated in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 513.
22. Translated in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 146.
23. Later Picasso added two Managers and a dancing horse.
24. Translated in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 162.
25. Those audience members who were used to following the Ballets Russes found that "*Parade's* entire scenario and its characters were not sufficiently transformed from their proletarian sources to allow Diaghilev's audience to feel comfortable." Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 32.
26. Cocteau, translated in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 138–39.
27. See Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 227–38, for an exploration of images on the curtain that appear in Picasso's other works.
28. A thorough examination of the curtain can be found in Rothschild's chapter "The 'Parade' Curtain"; Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 209–38.
29. Rothschild refers to it as "mellow Cubism;" Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 204.
30. Namely, "The Perils of Pauline." See Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 95 and 124, for detailed information on how this serial formed the basis of the American Girl character.
31. Quoted in Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 95.

32. In this they resembled the experiments of the Italian Futurists more than classical ballet. See Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 90–91, for more detail on their dances.

33. This is how Massine characterized Diaghilev's resistance. Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 133.

34. "When Picasso's horse made its entrance, I feared that the hall would collapse." Cocteau, translated in Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 33.

35. Francis Poulenc, translated in Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 32.

36. This combination made it difficult to know where to perform *Parade*: much to Diaghilev's annoyance, they were sometimes billed alongside ventriloquists and magic acts. See Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 40, for one such poster.

37. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 185.

38. Fistfights, boos, and acerbic reviews resulting in lawsuits ensued; Breton also claimed that women rushed at them with hatpins and clamored for them to be sent to the front. Various versions of the protests are described in Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 186–87 and Rothschild, *Picasso's "Parade,"* 6–35.

39. Apollinaire mentioned Cocteau merely to note that Cocteau had called the piece a "realistic ballet" (Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 513–14).

40. Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 145.

41. Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 154. Even if Cocteau had wanted to hold the position of conductor, in which he oversaw all the elements of the piece, it would have been impossible with the artists involved and the circumstances.

42. Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 183–84.

43. Breton was apparently also averse to Cocteau himself: the Surrealists nourished an implacable dislike for Cocteau and his works, one that may have had to do with Cocteau's aesthetic, his cult of celebrity, his homosexuality, his apolitical stances, or even the fact that his productions and methodologies must have evidently borne such a pronounced similarity to theirs.

44. They also were joining the French Communist Party at this moment, trying to bring collective action into the political realm, and Artaud was always adamantly opposed to material politics. The Surrealists and Artaud attempted reconciliation in the following years, but they never again worked together toward a common aesthetic ideal.

45. J. H. Matthews discusses the Jarry Theater in connection with Surrealism in "Antonin Artaud and the Théâtre Alfred Jarry," *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism*, 133–54.

46. For an overview and examination of the Jarry Theater productions and their reception, see Jannarone, "The Theater Before Its Double" and Crombez, "Artaud, the Parodist?"

47. Information about this performance can be found in *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 280–81, and in Jannarone, "The Theatre before Its Double," 249–53. More

material can be found in the Théâtre Alfred Jarry box, RT 3800, Department des Arts du Spectacle, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. This box has a collection of reviews, performance documents, and photographs of the productions.

48. “Une brève hallucination sans texte ou presque.” Benjamin Crémieux, in *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 51; n.p., n.d. [*La Gazette du Franc*, 1927]. See a reconstruction of *Ventre brûlé* (based on interviews) in *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 280–81.

49. “[S]abres en carton argenté.” Marcel Sauvage, *Comoedia*, June 3, 1927. Review in Théâtre Alfred Jarry box, RT 3800, Department des Arts du Spectacle, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

50. *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 280.

51. “roulements du tambour derrière un rideau,” *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 281.

52. “mi-grotesque, mi-poignant,” as described by the composer for the piece, Maxime Jacob. *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 281.

53. Jacob recalls: “je n’ai jamais eu de texte entre les mains,” *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 280.

54. Raymond Rouleau, interviewed in Goodman, *From Script to Stage*, 149.

55. Tania Balachova, interviewed in Goodman, *From Script to Stage*, 150.

56. “me paraissaient devoir bien illustrer les tourments de l’âme de l’auteur,” Jacob cited in *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 281.

57. Rouleau, *From Script to Stage*, 147.

58. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 60.

59. This also starkly contrasts *The Cenci*, which Artaud directed in 1935, and in which—as playwright, director, lead actor, and designer—he attempted to control every aspect of the production.

60. “écrite en collaboration, où chacun abandonnera son point de vue étroitement personnel” (my translation). Described in “Théâtre Alfred Jarry: Saison 1928,” *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 28–29.

61. Quoted in Goodman, *From Script to Stage*, 147.

62. Quoted in Goodman, *From Script to Stage*, 150.

63. Quoted in Goodman, *From Script to Stage*, 150.

64. “L’univers que parvient ainsi à évoquer M. Artaud est un univers où tout prend un sens, un mystère, une âme.” Benjamin Crémieux, *La Gazette du Franc*, August 11, 1928, cited in *Oeuvres Complètes II*, 277; my emphasis. Cited here in translation in Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works II*, 215.

65. See Merce Cunningham, “A Collaborative Process.” Arnold Aronson has a short overview of the collaborative process at Black Mountain in his book *American Avant-Garde Theatre*, 37–40.

66. Kochhar-Lindgren, “Towards a Communal Body of Art,” 218.

## Howling

The Exquisite Corpse, Butoh, and the  
Disarticulation of Trauma

KANTA KOCHHAR-LINDGREN

# 12

I once became a wicker trunk, which became a bellows that drove each and every one of my organs outside, then played. **Tatsumi Hijikata**

The vocal adventure which is enacted at the beginning of existence reactualizes this relation to the abyss: an abyss of originary emptiness which is, at one and the same time, the place of the scream's emission and a fracture as the scream becomes visible. **Monique Schneider**

Howling, even when it is vocally silent, marks the extreme sounding of the tearing body in response to pain, trauma, or its memory, however distantly that memory might be folded. A nuanced multiplicity, the howl travels along a (non)sonic network between the muteness of horror and the raging howl of laughter, between the exigencies of daily living and the experience of trauma and the drive to transmute such expression—often long delayed—into artistic practices. The Surrealist Exquisite Corpse drawings, lines on folded paper, and Butoh performance, a dance form that emerges from the nuclear holocaust in Japan, are artistic figurations of this howling.

The artistic genealogy of these figures includes, among others, Mary Shelley's monster, Lautréamont's Maldoror, Dadaist sound poetry, Antonin Artaud's screams in his "To Have Done with the Judgment of God," Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," and Amiri Bara-

ka's "scream." All of these artistic efforts are situated at the edge of meaning and challenge conventional modes of representation, as well as our expectations about corporeal order. Though these figures do mark diverse histories, they recalibrate the possibilities for invoking and redressing the epistemological failures of cultural and political horror and the daily ruptures in social meaning. Additionally they share the effort to configure a body that folds and unfolds at the synesthetic interstices of image, sound, motion, and touch.

Howling rendered through the bodies of the drawings or through the bodies of the Butoh performers marks a breakdown in the body as it is known, as well as an effort to reconstitute it. The Exquisite Corpse charts disembodied expression; Butoh refracts the embodied expression of the horrific, yet it too acts as a site for the transmutation of pain, the splitting apart of the recognizable into fragments. Both are aesthetic systems of the deflection of and the recovery from trauma.

In order to more fully understand the ways in which these practices rework perception, we must consider briefly a way of knowing that is framed through disability studies. Such a perspective critiques the binary construction of the senses as normal and abnormal. Lenard Davis, a deaf studies theorist, has argued that "[t]he mouth is hypostatized as the font of poetic language, oratory, and conversation, while the hand is made special as the locus for writing, scholarship, the essay. But these are only assumptions; just as much as that the ear is the receptive site of music, of speech, of language—while the eye is the receiver of artistic, of written knowledge. These assumptions remind us of the extent to which an economy of the body is involved in our own metaphors about language and knowledge."<sup>1</sup> I am concerned with what it means to hear through the third ear of the moving body, both sounding and unsounding. What happens if we start to line the ear up with different parts of the body? What if the whole body becomes an ear?<sup>2</sup> How then will the howl, whether in a game of chance or of a performance between life and death, be taken up or turned away from?

How the artistic manifestations of "howlings" are played and re-played impacts the legibility of the phenomena within and across cultures. The birth of American Sign Language (ASL) poetry, for ex-

ample, has been attributed to a performance Allen Ginsberg gave in the early 1980s of “Howl” to a group of students in Boulder, Colorado. He invited an audience member to stand up and do his own version of “Howl.” Clayton Valli, a now well-known ASL poet, responded by performing “Howl” in ASL. Here the questions of hearing and seeing the “howl” are vexed by the visual, spatial, and kinesthetic rendition of a howling poem.<sup>3</sup>

In the visual version of the Exquisite Corpse, blank sheets of paper are shuffled across the table, handed over to each game participant, and folded two (or, in some cases, three) times over to create three (or four) panels. The paper crackle intermittently breaks the silence, overtaking the group as each person bends forward, brow furrowed in concentration; pencils scratch across the papered surface; bodies shift, contort, condense, and expand. A palpable energy mounts as each participant spontaneously draws the respective body sections. Surprise, randomness, and chance rule this process—but these results are never abstractions, or disembodied referents. These visual squiggles become charged within an erotics of possibility, the yet to be named—a visual and spatial panoply rippling below the edge of awareness.

The unfolding of the Surrealist Corpse, the fantastic body constructed in and by the amorphous field of communal energies, often produces howls of laughter. As participants we wish to believe that we are masters of congruity, but what surprises, delights, and at other times horrifies us are the incongruities, the strange. Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us that “[t]he people’s laughter which characterized all forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked to the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes.”<sup>4</sup>

In either case we straddle the boundaries between pain and pleasure as we howl with laughter, glee, pleasure, or pain—and we recognize that which has been out of view, in abeyance, has returned to shake us. In these moments when the folding and concealing is unfolded, the howling of laughter couples with the appearance of the newly formed Exquisite Corpse figure. Through this act of non-verbal, bodily howling we become part of the Exquisite Corpse—for the edge between the visual forms as they unfold and where we sit laughing blur and shift. This sliding, reordering of the figuration of

multiple bodies orients us toward new registers of aesthetics and implicates us in the very histories we attempt to slough off in the free flow of the game.

In this process, the Corpse model must necessarily meander between the living and the dead, between personal and communal histories.<sup>5</sup> A prototypical Exquisite Corpse example rendered by André Breton, Max Marise, Jeanette Tanguy, Benjamin Péret, Yves Tanguy, and Jacques Prévert in 1927 situates, in place of the human form as it has been idealized, an upright umbrella on top of a chest that is suspended over two piles of pots stacked one into each other that rest on a set of ghostly legs. While the visual formation echoes the order of the human body, it also sets off resonances with the objects themselves as well as a host of partial memories. In such an image the human body loses its recognizable form as living; as a reconstructed body between body and object, it hovers between the living and the dead as a kind of drawn cyborg.

Analogous to the practice of the Exquisite Corpse, Butoh, a performance form that first emerged in 1959, has provided a site for the embodied practices in a communal context of cultural protest and revolt, particularly in relation to Western cultural domination and its insistence on the tools of rationality and capital. As an approach to dance that draws on what Shannon Riley Rose has called “embodied perceptual practices,” Butoh strives to empty the body of expected and recognizable cultural coding in order to let a new body or bodies emerge. Tatsumi Hijikata, one of the founders of Butoh or “Ankoku Butō,” explains in the *Dance of Utter Darkness* that “butoh is a corpse trying desperately to keep standing.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently the body manifests through fragmentation and transgression as it dissolves into the “natural.”

Stripped to its most elemental—and this elemental is also invoked, although in a radically different manner, at the moment of unfolding the Exquisite Corpse—Butoh provides a container for performers to encounter personal and cultural ghosts. Tatsumi writes, “I would like to make the dead gestures in me die one more time and make the dead themselves dead again. I would like to have a person who has already died die over and over inside my body. I may not know death but it knows me. I often say that I have a sister living in-

side my body.”<sup>77</sup> This metaphysic articulates a dance style that marks many bodies in the one, marks the traces and vestiges of living and dying as the intense counterpoints of a simultaneous disappearance and reappearance of the body.

Butoh also comes to us in bits and pieces, though now it is the living body that enacts the drama. In a well-known work, Kazuo Ohno, one of the two founders of Butoh, performs “Admiring La Argentina.” Already in his seventies when he took to the stage with this performance, he dresses as La Argentina—part man and part woman—and we see the translation of the beauty and ecstasy of this famous dancer from the dead into the living as Ohno recreates his memories of her, bringing her back to life again. The Exquisite Corpse helps us keep pace with folding and unfolding beings at the sight line where inner and outer dissolve, one into another, and Butoh marks the perceptual appearing and disappearing of the body in motion.

The Exquisite Corpse and Butoh both emerged as artistic responses to historical, political, and cultural trauma of the First and Second World Wars. For both artistic moments the body has served as a site for confronting its materiality, its fragmentation, and its re-suturing into a new formation. Ruth Leys writes: “Traumatic memory is *incarnated memory* . . . it can only be experienced in the mode of a repetition or acting out in the present, not in the mode of conscious recollection.”<sup>78</sup> Many of the early Exquisite Corpse images contain references to gas masks and prosthetic substitutions.<sup>79</sup> Butoh often contains references to the diseased, disabled, or the grotesque body in the twilight of calamity. Each performance of re-membering trauma is provisional, and it attempts to reenact the fragmented and grotesque body in the liminal space between consciousness, the unconscious, and the social collective. The mobile, perceptual, and constant folding and unfolding of bodies and body parts expresses the body at the edge of breakdown and reconfiguration.

These two artistic approaches meet in important ways in the motif of howling. The howl marks the fissures and contours of trauma, and in some cases, moves it toward healing. Howling is a sign that exceeds itself, a sound or unsounding sound that cannot fully be dis-



tinguished in and of itself, and that therefore occurs at the edge of intelligibility. The howling we hear from the two-dimensional drawing of the Exquisite Corpse is strangely full of sound. Butoh likewise invokes a cry of horror in the silently moving Butoh performer.

This howling exceeds its figuration as drawing or as dance, and it requires a space of hearing that engages the whole body. In doing so, we find ourselves in the midst of what almost fails to answer us and what requires that we also break down and fold ourselves into the shifting figurations of meaning in order to respond to the howl.

In *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, Elza Adamowicz investigates the Exquisite Corpse and its convergence with the monstrous and the about to be refigured. The pastiche of bodies, body parts, and seemingly random objects become conjoined in a newly wrought figure of excess that sounds from beyond the edges of the familiar through the process of visual re-figuration. The new body in this “howling of monsters” might be explained as “[c]ollage [that] preserves on its surface the visible traces of the violence done to the former units, like scars left by the grafting of part-bodies . . . an embryonic monster in the phase of gestation, the process of the body being reconfigured, the Self de-territorialized. Hence, the aesthetics of the shout . . . the monster is thus the collage figure *par excellence*.”<sup>10</sup>

The monsters proliferate at the synesthetic edge of simultaneous sight and sounding, emerging at the threshold of recognizable meaning. When we play the game, we *almost* recognize our communally created figure; it *almost* becomes palpable to us, but it does not become readable except through another artistic text. The monster—part human, part animal, part paper and pen—is the grotesque figure that unmoors us from the normal. We encounter the strange through the simultaneous eruption of “disembodied expression—a type of feral matter” transferred into a “figuration” that we, ourselves, have created, that we ourselves are.

This experience provides a counter-narrative to the notion of an ideal body as constructed by the rise of eighteenth-century thought in both aesthetics and science, an approach that derives some of its power through its efforts to render the body contained, recognizable, manipulatable, and strangely immaterial. Gilles Deleuze and

Felix Guattari, considering the forces of contemporary rationalism as a drive to render the body clean and manageable, argue that “[i]t is these assemblages, these despotic or authoritarian formations that give the new semiotic system the means of its imperialism, in other words, the means both to crush the other semiotics and protect itself against any threat from outside. A concerted effort is made to do away with the body and corporeal coordinates through which the multidimensional or polyvocal semiotics operated.”<sup>11</sup> The material encounter with the Exquisite Corpse thrusts us before or beyond the control of the rational where multiple semiotics are released and put back into play.

This practice has a literal history to which we must attend. The surrealists returned from the horrors of World War I—the first war that relied heavily on the use of motorized technological warfare—as traumatized survivors faced with the dissolution of the body in extremis. Amy Lyford has noted that “the poets Louis Aragon and Breton enlisted as physicians-in-training during World War I at the Parisian military hospital of Val-de Grâce.”<sup>12</sup> Given the pattern of creating displays of the surgical repairs and respective body parts, the museum made manifest “France’s reconstruction in bodily terms.”<sup>13</sup> Lyford notes that the Surrealists “imagined dismemberment as a means of critiquing official rhetoric about postwar construction.”<sup>14</sup> As one response to this trauma, the Surrealists developed aesthetic and collaborative techniques that fostered a re-suturing of social and aesthetic order.

One Surrealist approach for accessing a realm that would allow them to find new images is through applying some of the practices of psychoanalysis such as automatic thinking and free association. The Surrealists revalued and transubstantiated their exploration of these concepts through the use of Surrealist games. This process of exploration revolved around encountering the irrational, the broken, the fragmented. Michael Stone-Richards notes “how keenly the Surrealists sensed that the psychopathology of cognitive failure (the aphasias, the psychoses, as well as the psychoneuroses) could provide models for alternative patterns of attention and communication. Indeed, any adequate appreciation of Surrealist automatism must begin with just this sense of the new possibilities offered by al-

ternative forms of attention, promising access to different perspectives of experience and world-projection.”<sup>15</sup>

The figure of the Exquisite Corpse, then, acts a device to mark the traumas of early twentieth-century Europe, to revise bodies and social configurations, and to explore what Stone-Richard calls “alternative forms of attention.”<sup>16</sup>

In the pastiche of bodily re-figuration, there is a soundless cry that erupts along the seams, the folding into and out of *meaning*, which is not the same as *sensibility*. It emerges in the midst of the articulated disarticulation of the body, meaning, and orientation, in this place that simultaneously embraces the ruptures of the past and the eruptions of the future. Schneider writes on the tensions between the act of screaming and the emptiness one faces at the moment of trauma. Part of the issue at hand is whether, in fact, sound will arrive at its destination. This question is particularly amplified at moments of the Exquisite Corpse where the scream is embedded, in a kind of massive displacement, into the drawing. The (non)sounding of the Corpse requires its making in order to arrive, but can never assure that arrival, much less via any sort of consistent interpretive response.

In Butoh this attentiveness to the emergent body at the threshold between the living and dead marks the body as off kilter, out of line, and not to be located as a regularized body in space. In such a liminal state, Butoh offers a way of “passing through” that radically revises both body and communality. Butoh not only marks the meditative spirit of Buddhism, but also the spaces of terror and the unnameable silences that haunt contemporary Japan. The city of Yokohama has been described, for example, as “a man-made desert, ugly, desolate and hazy in the dust that rose from the crushed brick and mortar,”<sup>17</sup> and art critic Toro Yoshiaki addresses the impact of postwar Japan on some of the anti-art (*han-geijutsu*) artists of the Neo-Dada Organizers. He writes: “The blasted city had been their playground; their first toys had been bottles melted into distortion from fire bombs, pieces of roof beams found in the ashes. Now their shows were full of these junk flowers.”<sup>18</sup>

Butoh, like the Exquisite Corpse, emerged out of historical

trauma, in which both meaning *and* the concept of body as a unified whole became irrevocably shattered. Now unmoored from a teleological history, disarticulated from single narratives, these art techniques enabled participants to transform their visceral experiences to create new dimensions of personal, communal, and cultural meaning. While there is often a recognizable signature to the style, Butoh most significantly provides the space for the emergence of the transformative potential of the body.

Along these cultural fault lines Butoh draws from Dada, Surrealism, German expressive dance, and Japanese classical and popular theater forms. Its choreography is often hybrid in its stylistic references, drawing from modern expressionistic dance, popular dance, and more esoteric forms such as eurhythmy. It brings together a concern for “corporeal aesthetics amid folk roots.”<sup>19</sup> Butoh transforms and recasts the space of individual dance in a collective space. Dancer Akira Kasai notes that “[i]f your senses do not change, the dance does not change.”<sup>20</sup> The Butoh body traverses the “negative spaces” and amplifies the dream body; it accumulates through the collective interactions of rhythms of silence and gesture. In order to attain this communal body, it must be propelled into the spaces at the edge of social construction, a process of aesthetic regeneration that began with the work of Tatsumi Hijikata.

On May 24, 1959, Tatsumi Hijikata premiered *Kinjiko*, or *Forbidden Colors*, inspired by a novel by Yukio Mishima and Jean Genet’s *Our Lady of the Flowers*. The performance revolved around a dance between “two males, a young boy and an older man, [in which] the climax came when a live chicken was strangled to death over the boy’s prone body.”<sup>21</sup> In this exploration of animal body next to the human body—where one merges into the other as a simulation of the sexual act—homoeroticism, violence, and transgression are linked. Genet’s images become part of the means of stepping to the edge of society, as Hijikata creates works that lead to the emergence of a new performative body. This work, along with others by the Japanese avant-garde, provided both social protest and action “against the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty”<sup>22</sup> set to be signed in 1960. The mainstream response to *Forbidden Colors* was “immediate eviction from the Japan Dance Society and instant notoriety.”<sup>23</sup>

Though Hijikata was a man who used the body to express the cultural and primal tensions of his times, he drew heavily from a variety of readings, including the Surrealists. This folding of French culture into Japanese art—which followed the French folding into itself of Japanese art in the nineteenth century—led to some of Hijikata’s most intense work. In 1965 Antonin Artaud’s *The Theater and Its Double*—a theatrical treatise that argues for the primacy of the body on stage—was translated into Japanese, and the work became one of Hijikata’s major influences.<sup>24</sup> Kurihara notes: “With spasmodic movements, Hijikata, borne on a palanquin, entered the stage from the audience. A long kimono covers his naked body. In his hand he holds a golden phallus . . . the entrance was reminiscent of Artaud’s ‘From Heliogabalus, or the Anarchist Crowned.’”<sup>25</sup>

In 1984 Hijikata created a work that combined a recording of Artaud’s “To Have Done” with Min Tanaka’s dancing. In 1986 Hijikata planned a piece “Experiment with Artaud” (with philosopher Uno Kuniichi). In 2002 student and collaborator Tanaka created “Infant Body Out of Joint.” When performed, the event preceded by a lecture by *Uno Corps-gene ou temps catastrophe-Autour Min Tanaka, de Tatsumi Hijikata et Antonin Artaud*.

Michael Hornblow explains Artaud’s intentions. “Artaud’s pronouncement at the end of “To Have Done with the Judgment of God” called for a new kind of body, one in which the pain of life would ‘BURST OUT’” (Artaud, 1992: 324), to recreate both theater and society with the force of exorcism. The echo of Artaud’s scream in 1948 has been heard ever since, his influence setting the stage for avant-garde performance practice and theory to the present day.”<sup>26</sup> Artaud’s theatrical manifestoes oscillate between the challenge of transgression, which always in some way posits itself in contradistinction to the preestablished order, and that of the possibility of emptying out. In excavating the human body to its most extreme state of emptiness, there is an assumption that the body can survive, if only as the host, or maybe even only the vibrating membrane, for a howling voice.

The scream that underscores the radio piece “To Have Done with the Judgment of God” both pushes the possibility of emptying to its outermost limit, that of the scream, and it also reverberates with its

dense materiality. Despite the hope of what Artaud calls the “body without organs,” the vocal cords remain intact. In Artaud’s work he dreams of an operation on an “autopsy table” in which all the organs of his body are removed: “When you will have made [man] a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.”<sup>27</sup>

For Artaud the body as we usually experience it is the site of culturally constructed boundaries that limit the experience of freedom. Only by emptying out the body, the body marked by society, can the dream of the new unfold. Artaud’s “body without organs” and Hijikata’s “corpse that tries desperately to keep standing” share the desire to find a different body, for both retain a reference to the body, and this other space cannot yet be articulated except by etching out what it is through what it is not.

That emptying registers in the howling of the emptied body. This type of attention to a deep, inner pulse returns the dancer or the paper folder to organic and instinctual movement instead of the kind of habitual movement patterns in which we usually engage. This attention also activates what Sondra Fraleigh refers to as the “natural body” and subdues the “cultural body.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently attention is paid to the perceptual dimensions of the moving body—the feeling and articulation of myriad, minute sensory fluctuations. Deleuze writes: “Microperceptions or representatives of the world are those little folds that unravel in every direction, folds in folds, over folds, following folds” (86). These sensory fluctuations escape theorization and abstraction.

The cultural crossovers from Artaud to Hijikata mark a particular folding and unfolding of cultural exchange and borrowing. In Hijikata’s use of Artaud we hear the echoes of Artaud’s scream, transmuted into Hijikata’s notion of “I once became a wicker trunk, which became a bellows.” But this is no simple resurrection of the “howling monsters” whose return can never be predicted. It is no accident that Hijikata has been described as Maldoror, the central figure in Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror*. The narrator is born deaf and remains deaf until he encounters a terrible scene of “an anthropophagic creature sitting on a throne of shit and gold, cloaked in filthy pestilent hospital sheets.”<sup>29</sup> The narrator, finding himself,

thus proclaims: “At least my heaving bosom being unable to expel life-giving air speedily enough, my lips opened and I cried out . . . a cry so heart rending that I myself heard it! The obstacle in my ears snapped abruptly, the eardrum cracked between the shock of the noisy air expelled from within me so violently, and a new phenomenon took place within that organ condemned by nature. I heard a sound! A fifth sense was born in me!”<sup>30</sup>

This sighting/sounding is the monstrous figuration that precedes the birth of the Exquisite Corpse and presents the conundrum of how to hear that the howling of the narrator folded into the pages of the novel. The return of hearing is a fantasy, a wished-for return to the singular self, a self that can find itself by hearing that sound it produces in an act of audio-autonomy. Hearing and deafness meet each other in an unresolved, unresolvable tension.

Douglas Kahn notes, “Maldoror’s convulsing body—the scream that was the irrepressible voice of the body remained with Maldoror. Horror had precipitated the scream, but the scream did not return to the scene of the horror; it vanished before being heard by others, before becoming manifest in the social.”<sup>31</sup> The figural howling of the Exquisite Corpse, as well as of the Butoh dancer, answer Maldoror and even at times *become* Maldoror.

But we, in order to understand the implications of such monstrous figurations, must lean a bit closer into the “space of feeling deafness,” the space where the howling becomes tactile, pulsing, escaping the body that cannot hear, and missing the bodies that cannot hear. There is, after all, nothing, yet we nonetheless somehow encounter the howling that makes these forms, and it is in that process that we too become part of the artistic process—simultaneously, if temporarily, an Exquisite Corpse or part of the Butoh performance. Hijiakata proclaims this for Butoh, but it is also rich with resonances for the evolution of the Exquisite Corpse from the Parisian military hospital of Val-de-Grâce: “Only when, despite having a normal, healthy body, you come to wish that you were disabled or had been born disabled, do you take your first step in *butoh*. A person who dances Butoh has just such a fervent desire, like a child’s longing to be crippled.”<sup>32</sup>

As we live into the pain, trauma, and loss of contemporary liv-

ing, we are all, finally, limping along as Exquisite Corpses that have taken to the streets. We make the multiply shifting terrain in which we howl visible, yet never arrive at the other shores of hearing the monsters with complete understanding, for they, like us, are full of feral matter and fully, impossibly folded and figured.

## Notes

Hijikata, "Wind Daruma," 75.

Schneider, "Le cri e l'avènement d'un espace courbe," 112.

1. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 103.

2. For more on my work regarding the third ear, please see Kochhar-Lindgren, *Hearing Difference*.

3. It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the complex genealogy of the howl through visual, performative, and textual versions as well as the varieties of crossover forms in disability and deaf art. Nevertheless a preliminary investigation of the questions raised by Elaine Scarry and Peter Stastny about the powerless of visual image and text to capture the scream is offered here.

4. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 20.

5. I work out some of the links between the Exquisite Corpse and theater in Kochhar-Lindgren, "Towards a Communal Body of Art."

6. Iwana, *The Intensity of Nothingness*, 7.

7. Hijikata, "Wind Daruma," 77.

8. Leys, "Death Masks," 45.

9. McShane, "Revising Methods of Narrative Analysis," 2.

10. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 194–95.

11. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 180–81.

12. Lyford, "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment," 45.

13. Lyford, "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment," 46.

14. Lyford, "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment," 68.

15. Stone-Richards, "Encirclements," 127.

16. Stone-Richards, "Encirclements," 127.

17. Duus, *Modern Japan*, 254.

18. Yoshiaki, cited in Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 157.

19. Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness*, 3.

20. Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness*, 233.

21. Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 1.

22. Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 1.

23. Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 1.

24. Antonin Artaud, initially allied with the Surrealists, had an uneasy relationship with them and was expelled in 1926 for his interest in theater. Nev-



ertheless much of Artaud's work attempts to articulate what he considers a more accurate understanding of Surrealism and its potential. In 1926, Artaud rejected the Surrealist attempt to merge art and politics. As Constance Spreen has noted, by the early 1930s Artaud's theory for the theater was also being resisted by members of *L'action française*, led by Benjamin Cremieux, a group who were proponents of a total nationalism in which national identity revolved around the instantiation of what was considered purely French. Jacques Co-peau, considered by many as the "most" French, most Cartesian theater director, supported a classicism "which stood for order, clarity, and primacy of reason" (Spreen, 74). What was considered as non-French was described as plague or contagion, and it needed to be kept out of the French social, cultural political. For Artaud—like Hugo Ball in his anti-Germanic performances—contagion was considered an essential and positive sign of the impact of a theater. This theater could be arrived at through a poetry of the senses, not through a recuperation of Cartesian order. In Artaud's version, with its emphasis on non-literary theater, the emphasis "shifted from one based on written plays to spectacle—there were no more masterpieces. Theater was to be returned to the masses" (Spreen 86–87). Like the plague, the theater is successful if it is able to cross culturally constructed boundaries.

25. Hornblow, "Bursting Bodies of Thought," 20.

26. Hornblow, "Bursting Bodies of Thought," 20.

27. Artaud, *Antonin Artaud*, 571.

28. Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness*, 23.

29. Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*, 5.

30. Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*, 56.

31. Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*, 57.

32. Hijikata, "Wind Daruma," 56.

## “You Make Such an Exquisite Corpse”

Surrealist Collaboration and the Transcendence  
of Gender in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

DON DINGLEDINE

# 13

“Don’t you know me? I’m the new Berlin Wall. Try and tear me down!” With this bold declaration of identity and direct challenge to the audience, Hedwig, “the internationally ignored song stylist barely standing before you,” launches into “Tear Me Down,” the opening number of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.<sup>1</sup> An unlikely off-Broadway hit in 1998 and, even more unlikely, an acclaimed film three years later, John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask’s rock musical offers a radical critique of gender binaries.<sup>2</sup> The result of a botched sex-change operation, Hedwig’s “angry inch” places the singer ambiguously between male and female. Hedwig’s backup singer and lover Yitzhak explains how the Berlin Wall symbolizes this in-between identity: “Ladies and Gentleman, / Hedwig is like that wall, / standing before you in the divide / between East and West, / Slavery and Freedom, / Man and Woman, / Top and Bottom.”<sup>3</sup> As radical as it might seem at first glance, such an identity is fraught with paradox: as “the new Berlin Wall,” Hedwig finds personal refuge from the tyranny of life on either side; this same wall, however, perpetuates the very binaries Hedwig seeks to escape. By the end of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Hedwig will claim a more surreal and ultimately more liberating identity: “a tornado body / With a hand grenade head / And the legs are two lovers entwined.”<sup>4</sup> Hedwig becomes an Exquisite Corpse.

To fully appreciate the implications of Hedwig's body, we must examine it through the Surrealist parlor game, the Exquisite Corpse, and the related Surrealist technique of collage. "Sweeping . . . old ideals aside, the Exquisite Corpse, with his collective and composite physique, flaunts a relevant contemporary image of the body," curator Ingrid Schaffner suggests in her discussion of *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, an exhibition of Exquisite Corpses mounted by The Drawing Center in 1993.<sup>5</sup> Exquisite Corpse drawings and Surrealist collages enable us to transcend the binaries that violently restrict our definitions of gender identity and sexuality. Such an act of transcendence allows Hedwig to overcome a history of victimization at the hands of others and to be liberated from the grip of anger; it also leads Hedwig away from individualistic, reactionary impulses and toward more constructive communal values. Hedwig's sense of strength *between* binaries as "the new Berlin Wall" proves illusory and destructive, but Surrealism enables Hedwig to achieve the power of wholeness, freedom, and empathy *beyond* binaries as an Exquisite Corpse. As the lyrics of "Wicked Little Town" suggest, Hedwig becomes "something beautiful and new."<sup>6</sup>

Although Hedwig is often described as a drag queen, this label does not do justice to the complexity of Mitchell and Trask's creation. While many theorists champion drag for highlighting the performative nature of gender,<sup>7</sup> Gail Hawkes is among those who insist that "[a] challenge to the hegemony involves more than inventive and challenging dressing up." Calling drag "the gender equivalent of the Black and White Minstrel Show," Hawkes argues that it works "through the mobilisation and subversion of the binary codes, while leaving what they signified (the 'masculine' or 'feminine') intact."<sup>8</sup> "The new gender outlaw is the old gender conformist," Janice Raymond laments in "The Politics of Transgenderism," "only this time we have men conforming to femininity and women conforming to masculinity. Or to be fair to another version of transgender, men and women mixing and matching but not moving beyond both." "The ideal of transgender" is appealing "[o]n a personal level," Raymond acknowledges, because "it allows for a continuum of gendered expression." "On a political level," however, "it never moves off this continuum to an existence in which gender is truly transcended."<sup>9</sup>

André Breton saw the Exquisite Corpse, Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren explains, as a “reactivation of the human form, its return.” “This process is not the *recuperation* of the old form,” Kochhar-Lindgren emphasizes, “but a transformation of the old form into something surprisingly different.”<sup>10</sup> Just as a body in drag poses no real challenge to cultural norms structured around binaries, it also fails to destabilize flesh as the defining marker of gender and sexuality. Drag queens, in fact, magnify genitalia as the locus of identity: always imminent in a drag performance is the return of the penis or “*recuperation* of the old form.” The surgical reassignment of gender also can be seen as reinforcing the binaries of male and female, which remain intact as patients cross from one to the other. The goal of surgery is the familiar “human form,” not something “surprisingly different.” As planned, Hansel Schmidt’s transformation into Hedwig does not challenge existing binaries: a successful operation will turn Hansel from male to female so that she can move from the East to the West, over the Berlin Wall, with an American soldier named Luther Robinson. But the conservative trajectory of this journey goes awry:

My sex-change operation got botched  
 My guardian angel fell asleep on the watch  
 Now all I got is a Barbie Doll-crotch  
 I got an angry inch.

Hedwig loses the culturally inscribed marker of male identity without gaining any signifiers of female identity: “Long story short, / . . . / I was left with a one inch mound of flesh / where my penis used to be / where my vagina never was.”<sup>11</sup> “If genitalia equals destiny (as folks as diverse as the Promise Keepers and the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival seem to believe),” Evelyn McDonnell asks, “does that mean that Hedwig’s nothing? Or is she everything?”<sup>12</sup>

Hedwig has romantic relationships with three men. If Hedwig were a transsexual, then these relationships might be labeled “straight”; if Hedwig were a drag queen, they might be seen as “gay” relationships. Lampooning the media’s fetish for recognizable labels, the film’s Web site anticipated the challenge Hedwig’s angry inch would pose for reviewers determined to squeeze his/her story into

words, not to mention the challenge facing the film's marketers. In the months leading up to the film's release, the Web site featured a cover of *Probe*, a mock tabloid, with photos of Hedwig and these headlines:

Is Hedwig Gay? Band Members Say . . . Maybe! "I've seen her go to the mens [*sic*] bathroom."

and

Hedwig Replies [*sic*]: "Why do you persist with this torment, I mean why don't you go ask CHER if she's a man instead."<sup>13</sup>

In the film, a *Probe* headline exposes Hedwig as a rock star's "Gay Transsexual Lover": "Who is Mystery 'Woman'?" the tabloid caption wonders. When caught with Hedwig, the rock star stammers a convoluted defense: "I never knew that woman before that night. And I never knew she wasn't a woman."<sup>14</sup>

The rock star is Tommy Gnosis, whom Hedwig meets in the Junction City, Kansas, trailer park where Luther abandons her. Hedwig nurtures Tommy's interest in music and gives him his stage name, but Tommy is unable to accept the ambiguity of his mentor's flesh. "Then love the front of me," Hedwig pleads when Tommy whispers "I love you."<sup>15</sup> Tommy betrays Hedwig, steals her songs, and becomes a star. Hedwig shadows Tommy Gnosis on tour, performing her songs and telling her story to diners at a chain of run-down seafood restaurants always within hailing (and hearing) distance of stadiums packed with Tommy's fans. Hedwig's songs and monologues overflow with bitterness and anger overtly directed at Luther and Tommy. It is indeed an *angry* inch. As the meeting of Luther and Hansel (before he becomes Hedwig) makes clear, however, the underlying source of rage in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is the oppressive nature of gender binaries. Hansel is sunbathing, lying nude and face-down in a bomb crater, when Corporal Luther Robinson first spies him. "The new McDonald's has just opened on the other side," Hedwig recalls. "My God, I deserve a break today." "Girl, I sure don't mean to annoy you," Luther's seduction begins: he assumes that the body sparking his desire must be female.<sup>16</sup> Taking a hand-

ful of Gummy Bears from Luther, Hansel is overwhelmed by the bigger, softer, and sweeter American version of the familiar German candy. Capitalism promises something better over the wall, in a land where anything is possible. The trademark Golden Arches towering over the Berlin Wall are mirrored in the curves of Hansel's buttocks as he becomes both consumer and consumed.

Luther's shock when Hansel turns over to reveal his penis prefigures Tommy's confused reaction to Hedwig's "inch." Yet Luther persists: "Damn, Hansel, I can't believe you're not a girl, you're so fine. Why don't you take the whole bag?"<sup>17</sup> The West's rigid norms of gender and sexuality betray its illusions of plenty and endless possibilities: to join Luther, the corporal insists, Hansel must become a woman.<sup>18</sup> Tradition violently constricts Luther's imagination, but, unlike young Tommy, the corporal is intoxicated with a sense of power over others; if Luther cannot bring himself to "love the front" Hansel is born with, then he will buy a new one. The fact that Luther is African American painfully underscores the violence being played out in this scene. Hansel sees the ideal of a multiethnic America reflected in the bag of Gummy Bears Luther offers him: "Panting faces of every imaginable color, creed and non-Aryan origin fogging up the bag like the windows of a Polish bathhouse."<sup>19</sup> Yet the American *reality* views skin through the narrow window of race. Building on Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse's work on the "violence of representation," Dana D. Nelson describes racial representation as "the oppressive reduction of the apparently infinite diversities among humans to an oppositional binary, always hierarchically figured."<sup>20</sup> Just as Hedwig will do when she initially defines herself as "the new Berlin Wall," Luther Robinson perpetuates the same type of violence that oppresses him when he insists that Hansel become a woman in order to escape to the West.

Reality also hits hard when Hedwig lands in the American *Midwest*. Hew new life is not much different from life on the other side of the Berlin wall; this realization becomes even more painful when Luther walks out on Hedwig as she watches the wall being torn down on television. Still, Hedwig clings to a sense of power and control over her own destiny through a newly adopted female identity. Even when she feels "down," "had," and "on the verge of

going mad,” Hedwig declares in “Wig in a Box” that she can “put on some make-up” and “pull the wig down on my head”: “This is the best wig that I’ve found / to be the best you’ve ever seen.” But the song’s upbeat tone cannot be sustained. Regardless of how many personas she tries on, which range from “Miss Midwest Midnight Checkout Queen” to “Miss Farrah Fawcett / from TV,” Hedwig cannot escape the reality expressed in these sobering lines: “Until I wake up / and turn back to myself.” The second time Hedwig sings these lyrics, the music turns unexpectedly aggressive. Hedwig belts out hairstyles—“Shag, bi-level, bob / Dorothy Hamill do / . . . / flip, fro, frizz, flop”—and repeatedly shouts an accusatory “It’s all because of you!”<sup>21</sup> Like Luther and Tommy, Hedwig is not yet capable of thinking beyond traditional gender binaries (or outside the “wig in a box”). Wigs, make-up, and a female persona cannot bring Hedwig happiness, nor can they free her from anger’s grip.

The rage that erupts near the end of “Wig in a Box” defines the entire performance of the song “Angry Inch.” Especially in the film, however, Mitchell brilliantly stages this number so as to suggest Hedwig’s dawning awareness of the trap a binary-driven culture sets for her, which leads her (at least until “Exquisite Corpse”) to replicate the violence behind her oppression at the hands of others. Although a few audience members respond enthusiastically to “Angry Inch,” others throw food, one yells “faggot!” and a brawl ensues. Hedwig’s band—The Angry Inch—plays on with mounting intensity, but Hedwig slows down, stops singing, studies both band and audience with a look of detachment, and leaps from the stage. Hedwig’s dive lifts her high into the air. The film’s realism halts as Hedwig floats in slow motion over the violence below, arms outstretched like a superhero’s. This moment of transcendence lifts Hedwig above the patron’s homophobic rage and, equally important, above the rage of Hedwig’s own song. Hedwig’s body and the viewer’s response to it are temporarily transformed, for, as Colin McGinn suggests in *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*, a body filmed in slow motion is “no longer shackled to its own bulk and density.” “And don’t we, at least in some moods,” he asks, “yearn for release from materiality . . . ?” Hedwig’s desire as she floats over the earth in slow motion becomes the viewer’s desire: “We want to overcome the

alienation we naturally feel from our own bodies, which can seem so remote from our inner selves. We seek ‘annulment of the flesh.’”<sup>22</sup>

The anger of “Angry Inch” is understandable, and its performance is cathartic. But the song’s threat of violence—“I got an inch and I’m set to attack”—is as real and dangerous as the violence that erupts from the audience.<sup>23</sup> “All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against,” Gloria Anzaldúa warns.<sup>24</sup> When Hedwig celebrates her inch in response to its denigration by others, she allows their preoccupations to define her and, like them, only succeeds in slashing a transcendent human identity down to a “one inch mound of flesh.”<sup>25</sup> Reclaiming the epithet “faggot” would leave Hedwig in a similarly confined space and facing the dilemma Ken Plummer identifies for queer theory: it “is an attempt to get beyond the gendered and sexed practices of the social world, yet it constantly harks back to the very categories it seeks to undo: male, female, gay, straight, bisexual.” Instead, he continues, the goal should be to create “a world of multiple gendered fluidities—a world at home in a postmodern cacophony of multiplicity, pastiche and pluralities that marks the death of the meta-narratives of gender which have dominated the modern world.”<sup>26</sup> This is the world Hedwig seeks when she takes to the air in the transcendent daydream that cuts short her performance of “Angry Inch.” She finds it—and so might we—in “Exquisite Corpse,” the musical climax of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

The emergence of a newly empowered self is not immediate. “Exquisite Corpse” is prefaced by “Hedwig’s Lament,” a brief song in which Hedwig, accompanied only by a piano, surveys her life thus far. “I was born on the other side / of a town ripped in two,” her lament begins, repeating verbatim the first lines of the show’s opening number, “Tear Me Down.”<sup>27</sup> Anticipating the transformation to come, calm detachment replaces the assertiveness of “Tear Me Down.” Reinforcing this tonal shift, the threat of confrontation found in the earlier song’s subsequent lines—“I made it over the great divide / Now I’m coming for you”<sup>28</sup>—gives way in “Hedwig’s Lament” to quiet resignation: “And no matter how hard I’ve tried / I end up black and blue.” The remaining lyrics document Hedwig’s violent, Frankenstein-like genesis:



I rose from off of the doctor's slab  
I lost a piece of my heart  
Now everyone gets to take a stab  
They cut me up into parts

I gave a piece to my mother  
I gave a piece to my man  
I gave a piece to a rock star  
He took the good stuff and ran.<sup>29</sup>

Hedwig stretches out the word “ran” as the tempo builds and “Exquisite Corpse” begins. The opening lines strike a note of despair and finality: “Oh God / I’m all sewn up.”<sup>30</sup>

“Exquisite Corpse” is another guitar-heavy song, the most intense yet. Strobe lights accentuate Hedwig’s jerky, angular, seizure-like movements, and in the film we see the audience’s stunned and disturbed reaction to the apparent chaos before them. Everything, especially Hedwig, appears to break down. But if we understand the performance of this song as the unfolding of an Exquisite Corpse, we recognize Hedwig’s discovery, as painful as it is necessary, of a self finally liberated from oppressive binaries; we bear witness to Hedwig’s embrace of an identity beyond anger and reaction, which can tear down but cannot create anew. The lyrics of “Exquisite Corpse” make this contrast in perspectives explicit. First Hedwig mentions automatism, a central technique of Surrealism. Seeking “to dissolve the control of reason and taste,” automatism “charted the irrational, unstoppable flow of words and images that channels through thought without conscious reflection.”<sup>31</sup> Once the mind is unmoored by the “automatist’s undoing,” as Hedwig describes it, “The whole world starts unscrewing / As time collapses and space warps.” What one sees in the resulting “chaos and confusion,” Hedwig goes on to emphasize, is a matter of perspective: “You see decay and ruin / I tell you ‘No, no, no, no / You make such an exquisite corpse.’”<sup>32</sup> Having defined herself (and us, the ambiguous second “you” implies) as an Exquisite Corpse, Hedwig repeats the opening lines of “Exquisite Corpse,” now transformed: the despair of “Oh God” disappears; and passive victim—“I’m all sewn up”—becomes active agent: “I’ve got it all sewn up.”<sup>33</sup>

"Exquisite Corpse" climaxes with Hedwig ripping off her dress, smashing her fake breasts, and tossing aside her signature blonde wig. "Outside's a paper shroud / And all the rest's illusion," the Exquisite Corpse sings.<sup>34</sup> The repudiation of drag achieves what Breton sought in Exquisite Corpse drawings: "total negation of the ridiculous activity of imitation of physical characteristics."<sup>35</sup> On a more poignant level, it is a visible manifestation of the automatist's triumphant "undoing": in order for artistic creation "to be really automatic," Breton argued, "the mind has to succeed in placing itself in a condition of detachment from the solicitations of the outside world as well as from his own individual practical or sentimental preoccupations."<sup>36</sup> By rejecting the illusion of wholeness through female impersonation, in other words, Hedwig is liberated from gender binaries as well as from everything society (and Hedwig's mind as shaped by that society) attaches to "male" and "female" identities. "[T]o be free, one must give up a little part of oneself," Hansel's mother advises her son while he ponders the conditions of Luther's proposal.<sup>37</sup> In a sense, Hansel *is* liberated by the sex-change operation, but only because it is botched—and only when he recognizes his fractured body as an Exquisite Corpse.

The point, of course, is not that genitalia must be mutilated or sacrificed in order for such liberation to take place. Hedwig sings in "Exquisite Corpse" of a "[s]car map across my body": "And you can trace the lines / Through Misery's design / That map across my body."<sup>38</sup> Neither misery nor map originates with the botched surgery, for Hedwig's angry inch renders visible the violence already perpetuated by binary codes of gender and sexuality on even the most seemingly pristine bodies. "Collage preserves on its surface the visible traces of the violence done to former units," writes Elza Adamowicz, "like scars left by the grafting of part-bodies."<sup>39</sup> Like the lines of a collage and the folds of an Exquisite Corpse drawing, Hedwig's scars play an integral role in revealing the meaning of his/her body, which is described in "Exquisite Corpse" as "A collage / All sewn up." When we trace the "random pattern with a needle and thread" on Hedwig's body, we start to question the illusion of seamless gender identities (as Hedwig does when performing "Wig in a Box"), and we begin to doubt the sanity of defining ourselves by a single

piece of flesh (as Hedwig does when performing “Angry Inch”). “As a speculative act—one that therefore, theoretically, risks loss while it aspires to gain—surrealist collage,” according to J. H. Matthews, “aims at surpassing the significative value conventionally assigned to the materials it utilizes.”<sup>40</sup> If we return to the advice Hansel receives from his mother with this aesthetic principle in mind, we realize that what Hedwig gives up in order to be free is not his penis. Nor is it the vagina he never gains. Rather it is the burden of meaning inflicted on such body parts by ideologies of gender. “This isn’t just gender bend,” Evelyn McDonnell proclaims of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “it’s gender end.”

In response to Breton’s claim that “the effect of exquisite corpse drawings was ‘to bring anthropomorphism to its climax,’” Hal Foster wonders, “Is this to imply that the human form is somehow achieved only if it becomes disarranged . . . ?”<sup>41</sup> Once we distinguish between Hedwig’s botched sex-change and the violence it signifies, we can indeed argue that one of the most enduringly salient aspects of Exquisite Corpses is how they undermine systems of classification or arrangement that police and regulate bodies, by *rearranging* them. One such classification system—teratology—is worth examining in detail, for its approach to the body parallels the method for creating Exquisite Corpse drawings. French anatomist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire founded the science of teratology in the nineteenth century, according to Anne Fausto-Sterling, “for the study and classification of unusual births.” He “divided the body into ‘sex segments,’ three on the left and three on the right.” Saint-Hilaire’s corporeal mapping, Fausto-Sterling explains, insisted that a male body must be “wholly male” in “all six segments” and a female body wholly female in all six. “But when a mixture of male and female appeared in any of the six zones, a hermaphrodite resulted.” Although Saint-Hilaire “subdivided hermaphrodites into different types,” biologists would eventually maintain a binary distinction between “true” hermaphrodites and “false” ones. Intersexual or “ambiguous bodies” rarely fit the criteria established for “true” hermaphrodites.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the conceptual similarity between teratology’s division of the human body into “sex segments” and the Exquisite Corpse’s folding of the body into sections, therefore, the aim or outcome of each

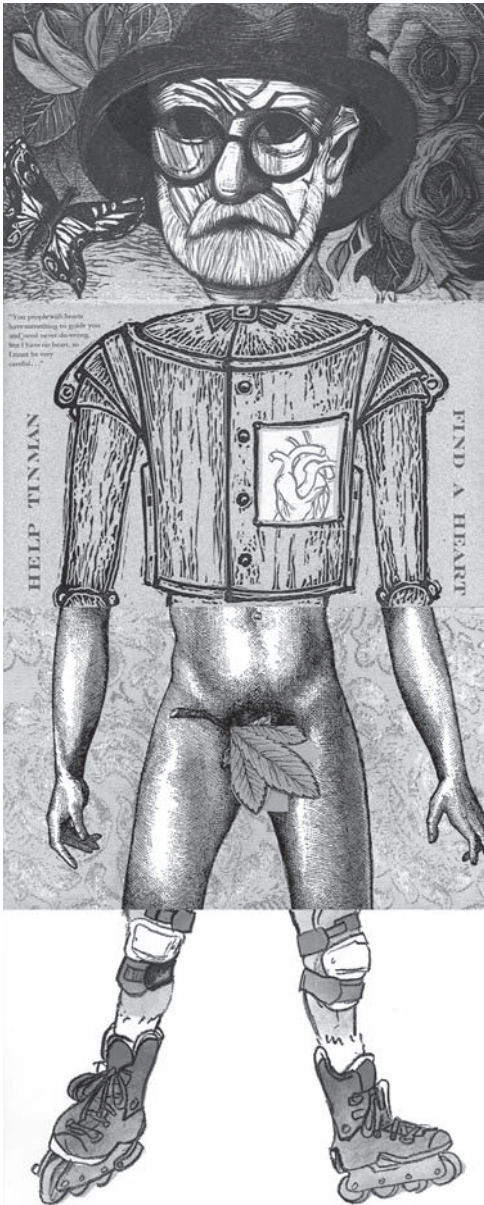
could not be more divergent. “By the middle of the twentieth century,” Fausto-Sterling explains, “medical technology had ‘advanced’ to a point where it could make bodies that had once been objects of awe and astonishment disappear from view.”<sup>43</sup> Breton saw Surrealism, in contrast, as a way of “opening certain doors that rationalist thought flattered itself it had condemned for good and all.”<sup>44</sup> Implicit here is the idea that certain doors once were open but have since been barred shut, thereby obscuring possibilities that once were in open view. Just such a process led to what Fausto-Sterling deems the “hermaphrodite vanishing act.”<sup>45</sup> Breton himself suggests as much in “Of Surrealism in Its Living Works” when, as Inez Hedges observes, he advocates “the ‘necessity of reconstituting the *primordial androgyne* of whom all the traditions speak.’” “For Breton, who sought to reconcile the ‘female’ with the ‘male’ view of the world, the androgyne was the personification of an ideal.”<sup>46</sup> As tempting as it might be to claim Hedwig as the embodiment of Breton’s ideal, however, we must not overlook a critical distinction. The androgyne *blends* genders, which implies that gender is “something that pre-exists, waiting to be blended.”<sup>47</sup> Hedwig, in contrast, *transcends* gender, opening a door that leads to a time before gender.<sup>48</sup>

Although Hedwig’s Exquisite Corpse ultimately surpasses Breton’s ideal of the “primordial androgyne,” both figures illustrate the same liberating impulse of Surrealism. “The surrealist poetic sense transcends reason’s impression of opposition and inconsistency,” writes one critic; it “neutralizes dichotomies,” writes another.<sup>49</sup> Again, the contrast between Exquisite Corpse drawings and teratology is instructive, for Saint-Hilaire’s system became a way for science to maintain rigid binaries for the classification of bodies (male and female, “true” and “false” hermaphrodites). As a systematic way of visualizing corporeal coherence, Fausto-Sterling explains, “sex segments” gave scientists “the authority to declare that certain bodies were abnormal and in need of correction,” thereby legitimating the use of painful surgeries to force the appearance of coherence.<sup>50</sup> In Exquisite Corpse drawings, on the other hand, “the basic rules governing the articulation of the body are followed (head + shoulders + arms . . . ), while the standard lexicon of the body is partly replaced by random elements which flout the rules of anatomical co-

herence.”<sup>51</sup> Science divides the body to limit variations. Surrealism divides the body to multiply its possible manifestations.

Still, the surface similarity between “sex segments” and the folded sections of an Exquisite Corpse highlights a potential irony of the Surrealist parlor game: the player responsible for the lower torso or trunk decides if the figure will possess genitals, and, if so, what they will look like. Made to focus their attention on this particular region of the body, artists often create exaggerated genitalia, especially phalluses. With inspired wit, the work of one contributor to *A Printer’s Exquisite Corpse*, an artists’ book published by the Silver Buckle Press, acknowledges this pressure and satirizes its often unavoidable results. Thirty-four artists, each assigned one of four body segments, contributed five-by-eight-inch prints; a divided box houses the collected prints, which readers can arrange as they please, revealing corpse after corpse.<sup>52</sup> Charged with producing a lower-torso segment, Mary Jo Pauly submitted a classical male figure, his genitalia covered by a fig leaf. When unfolded the leaf reveals the following passage from Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*: “The triumphant halloo of thirty buckskin lungs was heard, as—much nearer to the ship than the place of the imaginary jet, less than a mile ahead—Moby Dick bodily burst into view! For not by any calm or indolent spoutings did the White Whale now reveal his vicinity; but by the far more wondrous phenomenon of breaching.”

It is difficult to imagine a viewer who can resist the urge to unfold the fig leaf to see what hides beneath. But when we peer under an Exquisite Corpse’s fig leaf only to catch others, the crew of the *Pequod*, in the act of looking, and especially when our gazes sweep over the surrounding segments, not just this one, in order to comprehend the body before us, we realize that Melville’s epic and Surrealist art share a profound concern with perspective. “The whale is a test of the imagination,” Joyce Sparer Adler observes.<sup>53</sup> Like Melville’s leviathan, only smaller, Hedwig’s angry inch also tests the imagination: “You see decay and ruin / I tell you ‘No, no, no, no / You make such an exquisite corpse.’” Unable to love the whole person because of the inch, Tommy’s imagination fails him and Hedwig both. The same is true of Luther’s imagination when, able to comprehend only heterosexual love, he demands the removal of Han-



27. Jim Lee, Bonnie  
 O'Connell, Mary Jo Pauly,  
 and Pam Smith from *A Print-  
 er's Exquisite Corpse*. Silver  
 Buckle Press, uw-Madison  
 Libraries. 1992. Madison,  
 Wisconsin.

sel's inches. In sharp contrast to both Luther and Tommy, Melville's Ishmael delights in taking an expansive, inclusive view of life and whale—again, the only way to comprehend an Exquisite Corpse.<sup>54</sup> Melville hoped that by sweeping readers along as Ishmael's capacious mind unfolds, his novel would achieve the effect Schaffner wishes for anyone who views Exquisite Corpses: "may we be ravished by the pleasure of looking at so many ways of seeing."<sup>55</sup> "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look," Pip sings while Melville's sailors see very different things in the gold doubloon Ahab nails to the masthead as a reward for the first one to spy the White Whale.<sup>56</sup>

How one looks at the world—and how one sees the self and others in that world—has real consequences. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab's monomania, his unwavering obsession with killing one whale and his inability to see it as anything other than a malevolent creature, leads him and his followers to their destruction. Only Ishmael survives when the *Pequod* splinters and sinks, which suggests that his all-encompassing perspective can bring humanity a wisdom as life-saving as it is life-affirming. In *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, such wisdom comes to Hedwig, and simultaneously to Tommy, with the performance of "Exquisite Corpse." Hedwig collapses at the end of the performance, but "GNOSIS" is projected above the stage as soon as we hear the opening chords of a new song. After dedicating it to Hedwig, Tommy sings "Wicked Little Town":

Forgive me,  
For I did not know.  
'Cause I was just a boy  
And you were so much more

Than any god could ever plan,  
More than a woman or a man.  
And now I understand  
How much I took from you.<sup>57</sup>

Tommy's imagination no longer fails him as Hedwig stands upright before his eyes like an unfolded Exquisite Corpse. The juxtaposition of the songs "Exquisite Corpse" and "Wicked Little Town" suggests



that the artistic practices of Surrealism can enable us to transcend oppressive societal norms by revealing alternative ways of seeing.

Showing Tommy Gnosis alone on stage singing “Wicked Little Town,” with no one but Hedwig in the audience, the film version of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* makes visible what the play can only imply.<sup>58</sup> Suddenly Tommy is no longer positioned above Hedwig on a stage; standing on the same level, they are separated by a vast stretch of darkness. As Tommy continues to sing, the distance between them shrinks until they are close enough to touch. Neither reaches out physically to the other, however. This is not the reunion of two lovers but something more profound: social ideals embodied by Exquisite Corpses and Surrealist collages transform the relationship between Hedwig and Tommy in the final scenes of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. We hear “Wicked Little Town” even after Tommy stops singing. Until this point, recall, Tommy Gnosis has struggled to suppress his connection with Hedwig by claiming her songs as his own creations; Hedwig, meanwhile, was fighting to reclaim what was rightfully hers. Earlier in the film, Tommy listens as Hedwig sings a version of “Wicked Little Town” with much different lyrics. The fact that Tommy now sings the same song with new lyrics—lyrics for Hedwig and based on Tommy’s relationship with her—suggests that the song’s genesis is collaborative. In fact, it becomes difficult to distinguish exactly whose voice it is that fills the space surrounding Tommy and Hedwig as they stand face to face, staring into each other’s eyes while neither mouths a word.

Hedwig’s earlier version of “Wicked Little Town” is filled with blame and anger; in it, she presents herself as the victim of human betrayal and cruel fate. Following “Exquisite Corpse,” Tommy Gnosis sings of beauty, renewal, and transcendence: “when everything starts breaking down, / You take the pieces off the ground / And show this wicked town / something beautiful and new.”<sup>59</sup> The final, collaborative version of “Wicked Little Town” expresses faith in individuals as well as in communities, which, its new lyrics suggest, have the power to transcend wicked histories and traditions. The song’s focus on community is relevant, for the Exquisite Corpse puts communal ideals into action. Hedwig, like any Exquisite Corpse, emphatically insists that no one individual, no single player in the





28. Tommy (Michael Pitt) and Hedwig (John Cameron Mitchell). *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. New Line Cinema/Photofest. © New Line Cinema.

Surrealist parlor game, has the power or the right to define his/her body. Mary Ann Caws's observation about the segments making up an Exquisite Corpse—"individually, they cannot be"—applies to players too. The game thereby fosters a higher, more constructive impulse than individualism: "group desire for the body entire."<sup>60</sup>

Schaffner observes that the body, "inscribed with sexual and cultural codes that catalogue human difference as opposed to universal experience," has become "postmodernism's most prevalent subject and site."<sup>61</sup> The mutilation of Hedwig's body symbolizes, I have suggested, the violent ways in which human bodies are perpetually grouped and categorized. The "pieces" Hedwig reassembles in order to transform "this wicked town" are not just the fragments of Hedwig's own body but the fractured remains of the town itself. Avoiding the pitfalls of therapeutic navel-gazing, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* directs our attention to the health of communal bodies. "I was born on the other side / of a town ripped in two," Hedwig sings in "Tear Me Down" and "Hedwig's Lament," and it is easy to see in a divided Berlin any number of towns and cities throughout America and across the globe, all fractured by walls of race, class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>62</sup> When Hedwig strips during the performance of "Exqui-

site Corpse,” she tears down the identity she crafts for herself after the botched sex change—“the new Berlin Wall.” This identity, Hedwig realizes, only perpetuates the violence that fills her with rage and that leads to her desperate search for a stable identity.

The fear of losing one’s identity is so powerful that it often leads individuals to embrace notions of difference created by walls and binaries (without the Berlin Wall, Yitzhak asserts in “Tear Me Down,” “we don’t know who we are anymore”).<sup>63</sup> Hedwig’s story suggests that although such reactions, and identity politics in general, might seem empowering at first, they ultimately compromise the health of the “body entire.” Exquisite Corpses, in contrast, have the power not only to close gaps between individuals but also to reveal connections between them. A central element of the Exquisite Corpse, Kochhar-Lindgren emphasizes, is “the technique of linking,” a process that makes Surrealism “a methodology for cutting across cultural spaces and linking disparate realities, histories, and subject positions.”<sup>64</sup> Re-assembled as an Exquisite Corpse, Hedwig’s body serves as a model for rebuilding communities fractured by systems of thought that divide rather than connect individuals. Describing the “extrasensory communication” that takes place between individuals when they play the Exquisite Corpse, Surrealist Michel Carrouges writes: “There are, invisible in the air around us, many threads which bind one destiny to another.”<sup>65</sup> The “random pattern with a needle and thread” crisscrossing Hedwig’s body, then, traces out a transformative vision of overlapping fates and communal responsibility. Seen in this light, Hedwig’s “scar map” becomes a thing of beauty.

Hedwig’s interaction with Yitzhak during “Midnight Radio,” the final musical number of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, puts ideals into action, demonstrating what players of the Surrealist parlor game collectively stand to gain from following its rules. Yitzhak’s one desire has been to strike out on his own—in drag, as a woman. Secure in her power as “the new Berlin Wall,” however, Hedwig has essentially enslaved her backup singer and lover, as if her own identity as a woman requires her to keep Yitzhak on “the other side” as a man. When Hedwig motions to him at the start of “Midnight Radio,” Yitzhak assumes Hedwig is commanding him to restore to her head the wig she tore off during “Exquisite Corpse.” Instead, Hedwig gives

the wig to Yitzhak while she sings: “Breathe Feel Love / Give Free.”<sup>66</sup> Having transcended gender binaries as an Exquisite Corpse to become “more than a woman or a man,” Hedwig no longer defines the self at the expense of the other. When Yitzhak puts on the wig, the transformative potential of the Exquisite Corpse is realized once more, and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* again manages to transcend the political limitations of cross-dressing. Yitzhak’s transformation is real, not dress-up: he has been played, it is revealed in this moment, by Miriam Shor in drag. When Shor floats, arms outstretched, over the audience on a sea of upraised hands in the film, this image recalls Hedwig’s earlier rise above the violent crowd while performing “Angry Inch.” This time, however, transcendence is not just a dream, and Yitzhak has neither the desire nor the need to escape, for every individual in the crowd collaborates in lifting her up. “Know in your soul,” Hedwig’s song continues, “Like your blood knows the way / From your heart to your brain / Know that you’re whole.”<sup>67</sup> To become a fully functioning communal body, each piece of an Exquisite Corpse must work with those surrounding it. No single section can dominate, and only together can each element come alive in a way impossible on its own. Life-giving blood must flow freely from “a tornado body” to “a hand grenade head” and back again. Former divisions between individual segments, as well as between individual players, must become as faint as traces left on paper when it is unfolded. “Invisible threads” must bind the fragments together so intimately and with such purpose that nothing separates them. Not even an inch.

## Notes

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open-mindedness with which you met the challenge of reading Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* for the first time.

1. Mitchell and Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 14, 19. The Overlook Press edition of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is my source for all quotations from the play's text and lyrics.

2. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* was first performed at the Westbeth Theatre Center on February 27, 1997; it began its off-Broadway run at the Jane Street Theatre on February 14, 1998. John Cameron Mitchell wrote the book; Stephen Trask wrote the music and lyrics. John Cameron Mitchell performed the role of Hedwig in the original stage version as well as in the film, which he also directed.

3. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "Tear Me Down," 15.

4. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "Exquisite Corpse," 71.

5. Schaffner, "In Advance of 'The Return of the *Cadavre Exquis*,'" 20.

6. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "Wicked Little Town (reprise)," 74.

7. See especially Garber, *Vested Interests*, and Judith Butler, "Decking Out."

8. Hawkes, "Dressing-Up."

9. Raymond, "The Politics of Transgenderism," 222–23.

10. Kochhar-Lindgren, "Towards a Communal Body of Art," 220, italics in original.

11. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "The Angry Inch," 43, 45.

12. McDonnell, "The Angry Inch Monologues." "One of Hedwig's twists," McDonnell writes, "is that Mitchell's still not exactly doing drag: Hedwig isn't a woman, she's some Frankensteinian being." Like McDonnell, I rely on the feminine pronoun if referring to Hedwig when, before her transformation in "Exquisite Corpse," she claims a female persona.

13. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (<http://hedwigmovie.com/flash.html>).

14. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (DVD).

15. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 67.

16. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 36.

17. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 38.

18. Before he met Luther, it is important to emphasize, Hansel never contemplated becoming a woman, neither in drag nor through surgery.

19. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 38.

20. Armstrong and Tennenhouse, *The Violence of Representation*; Nelson, *The Word in Black and White*, xii.

21. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "Wig in a Box," 47–49, 52.

22. McGinn, *The Power of Movies*, 77.

23. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "The Angry Inch," 45.

24. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100. "A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed," Anzaldúa continues; "locked in mortal

combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence.”

25. Evelyn McDonnell satirizes this option in the title of her brief but insightful analysis of the play, “The Angry Inch Monologues,” a reference, of course, to Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues*.

26. Plummer, “Genders in Question,” xvi.

27. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Hedwig’s Lament,” 70.

28. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Tear Me Down,” 14.

29. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Hedwig’s Lament,” 70.

30. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Exquisite Corpse,” 70.

31. Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 47; Schaffner, “In Advance of ‘The Return of the *Cadavre Exquis*,’” 15.

32. Inexplicably these lines are not included in the film version of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

33. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Exquisite Corpse,” 71–72.

34. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Exquisite Corpse,” 71.

35. Breton, “Le Cadavre Exquis,” 95.

36. Breton, quoted in Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 49.

37. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 43.

38. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Exquisite Corpse,” 70.

39. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 194.

40. Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 116.

41. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 274–75.

42. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 36–37.

43. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 37.

44. Quoted in Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 256.

45. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 37.

46. Hedges, *Languages of Revolt*, 5, italics in original.

47. Plummer, “Genders in Question,” xv. In his seminal essay on the hermaphrodite figure, A. J. L. Busst argues that hermaphrodite and androgyne are “exactly synonymous” terms, and defines “their broadest possible meaning” as “a person who unites certain of the *essential* characteristics of both sexes” (Busst, “The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century,” 1, emphasis added).

48. In both the stage and film versions, Hedwig’s performance of “The Origin of Love,” a song inspired by Plato’s *Symposium*, is accompanied by a series of striking images drawn by Emily Hubley. These images depict the “three sexes” that existed before each was split in two: one combined two men, one combined two women, and one combined a man and a woman. This final image in particular calls to mind Exquisite Corpse drawings Frida Kahlo produced with Lucienne Bloch circa 1932; one depicts Diego Rivera as a hybrid of male and female bodies, and one pictures Kahlo similarly blended. The idea of

a gendered “other half” is rejected after the song “Exquisite Corpse”: “there’s no mystical design, / No cosmic lover preassigned,” Tommy Gnosis sings in “Wicked Little Town (reprise),” Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Wicked Little Town (reprise),” 74.

49. Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 274; Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 80.

50. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 36.

51. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 80.

52. The Silver Buckle Press published *Exquisite Horse*, a clever variation on this concept, in 1997. As breathtaking as the original *Corpse*, *Exquisite Horse* contains leaves that make up the front and rear halves of horses.

53. Adler, *War in Melville’s Imagination*, 64.

54. Ishmael’s relationship with Queequeg provides a telling contrast to Tommy’s and Luther’s relationships with Hedwig: Ishmael at first fears Queequeg, whom he sees as a Pagan savage, but the two men soon marry and have a baby (symbolically, at least).

55. Schaffner, “In Advance of ‘The Return of the *Cadavre Exquis*,’” in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, 22.

56. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 475.

57. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Wicked Little Town (reprise),” 73–74.

58. Audiences never see Tommy in the stage version of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. In this scene, we hear Tommy dedicate “Wicked Little Town” to Hedwig just before Hedwig symbolically becomes Tommy and sings the song.

59. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Wicked Little Town (reprise),” 74.

60. Caws, *The Surrealist Look*, 239; Caws, “Exquisite Essentials,” 39.

61. Schaffner, “In Advance of ‘The Return of the *Cadavre Exquis*,’” in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, 19.

62. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Tear Me Down,” “Hedwig’s Lament,” 14, 70.

63. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Tear Me Down,” 15.

64. Kochhar-Lindgren, “Towards a Communal Body of Art,” 218.

65. Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, 215. Melville describes “invisible threads” connecting individuals throughout *Moby-Dick*, most explicitly in “The Monkey-rope” and “A Squeeze of the Hand.”

66. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Midnight Radio,” 75.

67. Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, “Midnight Radio,” 75.



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