

## Towards a definition of surrealist collage

Miró's *papiers collés* and Arp's *papiers déchirés*; Ernst's *collages-découpages* and Hugnet's *poèmes-découpages*; the anatomical chart and the advertising slogan, the Romantic print alongside the sales catalogue, the telephone directory and the poem; Dalí's disguised collages, false collages, stone collages; the lugubrious game, the definitions game, the hypothesis game; surrealist journals and exhibitions, walks, letters and advertisements; Breton's collage texts on Ernst or Ernst's texts on Ernst; Magritte's mental collages or Ernst's painted collages; Eluard's photocollages and Valentin's photomontages; monsters, masks and machines; bachelor machines, hundred-headless women, disarticulated dolls; the meeting of a cardinal and a monumental nude, or corpses and a sewing machine on a battlefield; Loplop, Perturbation, Germinal and other exquisite corpses ... Such variety seems to defy definition. As a practice, surrealist collage encompasses a wide range of activities, from encounters with defunct objects at the flea market to the transcription of the multiple voices of the unconscious, the fragmentary images of the dream and all modes of production which stage the clash of disparate elements. As a pragmatic act, collage englobes various complementary or conflictual functions – critical, poetic and political – which cohabit throughout the 1920s and 30s. As a technique, collage is a material mode of cutting and pasting distant elements – or indeed a simulation of that process. As a subversive act, it is an instrument of *détournement* of pre-formed messages, 'une machine à bouleverser le monde'.<sup>35</sup> And as a creative act, it involves the transformation of these messages.

The collage principle has been considered by some critics as the fundamental structural model of the twentieth century, not only in the field of aesthetics but more generally in social, scientific and philosophical thought. The surrealists' concerted exploitation of the accidental, the aleatory and the

chance encounter, makes collage an essential agent in the grand epic of the rout of rationalism following the 1914–18 war. New concepts of space were elaborated in non-Euclidean geometry, while quantum physics explored the nonsequitur, and the irrational and the fractured subject were charted in Freudian psychoanalysis. In art-historical terms, the collage principle has been read as the principal *actant* in the history of modern art, from Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, through cubist *papiers collés*, dada photomontage and surrealist collage, to the combine-paintings of American postwar artists and the strategies of appropriation, recycling and generalized cannibalization which characterize the art of the last twenty years. In the literary domain, the increased fragmentation of the modern text can be traced from Rimbaud and Joyce to Burroughs and Butor. Finally, collage, or its cognates assemblage and montage, privileging such concepts as heterogeneity, play, transgression and marginality, has been considered as the paradigm of the (post-)modernist aesthetic.

Excerpt from: *The Surrealist Collage in Text and Image - Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*. By Elza Adamowicz

<http://books.google.nl/books?id=Ey83mkRxsW4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=surrealist+exquisite+corpse&hl=en&sa=X&ei=cxi3Uab7KqTa4ATvnoHQCg&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA>

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## A Note on the Exquisite Corpse

The Surrealists cultivated the *cadavre exquis* for the same reason that they cultivated automatic writing and recording dreams: here were three ways of minimizing the intervention of consciousness in literary creation. Breton defines Surrealism as: "Automatisme psychique pur . . . Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale." (André Breton, *Les manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris, 1946; p. 45.) Automatism thus becomes a guarantee of the purity of the revelation, while active participation of the writer in the text can only distort the latter's truth. The Surrealists see themselves as "modestes appareils enregistreurs", as passive transmitters. Under ideal conditions, all elements of individual and conscious intervention would be neutralized; the text would not be written, but would write itself; and the author, this distractor who stamps on a poem Baudelaire's mark instead of Racine's, no longer exists. A thousand variegated Egos have capitulated before the uniform, objective, impersonal Id (and indeed, when we read in succession a certain number of automatic Surrealist texts, we are struck, once the effect of surprise has worn off, by the dullness which this monotony creates). The automatic text is thus alien not only to the reader, but to the very person from whose pen it has flown. "A vous qui écrivez, ces éléments sont aussi étrangers qu'à tout autre . . ." It may almost be said to be autonomous.

In short, what the gadget-minded Surrealists have invented is a practically self-sufficient machine to produce literature, all literature, in fact, if we do not smash it up in time. And most of us feel the same uneasiness toward it as toward any other mechanism grown beyond the limits of its usefulness to man. We find writing a way of mastering, or at least coming to terms with, the universe, and expect from it an effect in some way cathartic or illuminating. We fully agree with the Surrealists on the belief that literature frees man, but we are forced to note that their defense of automatic writing as the greatest means of liberation is based on a strange confusion. They thought that, having freed the work, they had also freed the author and the reader. But is this freedom?

Excerpt from: *A Note on the Exquisite Corpse*. By Pierre Schneider

Source: *Yale French Studies*, No. 2, *Modern Poets: Surrealists, Baudelaire*, Perse, Laforgue (1948), pp. 85-92

Published: Yale University Press