

# Intersections of Play and Perception: Experimental Cinema and the Exquisite Corpse

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the effects of the Exquisite Corpse movement on experimental movies, especially participatory and tactile movies. In analyzing how the director utilizes the collective creation and contingency elements of the Exquisite Corpse, it reveals how the audience can become story co-creators. It also analyzes how modern digital platforms and sensing technologies provide technical support for this interaction. This study endeavors to fill the gap in understanding the impact of Exquisite Corpse on film narration and audience participation through case studies, narrative analysis, and audience participation studies, and provide theoretical insights and practical significance for film production.

**Keywords:** exquisite corpse, experimental movies, digital platforms, audience participation, collective creation

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## 1. Origins and Evolution of the Exquisite Corpse Aesthetic

The genesis of the Exquisite Corpse, deeply analyzed by scholars such as Breton, traces back to 1925, marking the inception of a movement that would profoundly influence surrealism[1]. By the 1930s, more and more French artists began to experiment with this style of creation, which gradually developed surrealism. However, the Exquisite Corpse is not only limited to the visual arts; its origin and evolution process also involves a wider range of collective creative games. According to Adamowicz, it started as a word solitaire game and gradually developed into a painting game[2]. The rules of the game are very simple. Each player folds the paper, revealing only a small part of their drawing, and then passes it to the next player to draw, and finally spreads out the paper and everyone watches the “monster” drawn. In this collaborative art form, each participant conceals portions of their artwork, only revealing segments to subsequent contributors, thereby cultivating a unique collective creativity. The game is a collective approach to art, in which each participant insists on his or her own style without compromise, which in turn enhances the overall originality, and each participant can find their own place in the game[3]. Furthermore, montage cutting, broken line analysis, and pain and howling while being cut are the main hallmarks of Exquisite Corpse art. Burger highlights that montage cuts introduce stark formal differences[4]. While Deleuze discusses how origami’s folded lines unpredictably alter bodily representations, expanding artistic potential[5]. In addition, McShane, M.C. pointed out its historical background. As the Exquisite Corpse aesthetic movement was influenced by the war, its theme also carries the undertone of people escaping pain and violence[6]. If Exquisite Corpse works are regarded as a corpse, they contain the essence of death. Therefore, they enact the process of the body being reconfigured, the process of the de-territorialization of the self, and the aesthetics of the cry [2]. It is worth noting that the narrative strategy of the Exquisite Corpse aesthetic movement clearly embodies the core characteristics of postmodernism. Drawing from Currie, the fragmented structure of postmodern narratives allows for a reordering of narrative elements, empowering the reader to derive personalized interpretations and meanings[7]. Postmodern narrative logic opens up multiple interpretations of texts, highlighting the concepts of the “author’s death” and “reader’s life”. Similar narrative techniques are found in William S. Burroughs’s ‘Naked Lunch’ [8], Alfred Chester’s ‘The Exquisite Corpse’ [9], and Kathy Acker’s ‘Empire of the Senseless’ [1], among other literary works.

## 2. Audience Engagement and Participatory Art in Film

According to Kaitavuori’s concept, we can conclude that the success of Exquisite Corpse in the field of experimental imaging depends on the absence of directorial power[10]. Transferring the right of authorship and abandoning the layout of the so-called field author, one instead lies in wait for observation. This collective mode of individuality in Exquisite Corpse opens up the artist’s vision to include each person’s particular contribution in a transcendent ensemble [11]. The experimental film *Mystery Object at Noon* by Apichatpong Weerasethakul exemplifies the Exquisite Corpse methodology, corroborating prior assertions about the potential for collaborative creativity within this cinematic approach. Director Apichatpong Weerasethakul initiated the project by engaging Thai rural communities in a story solitaire game, subsequently weaving these collaboratively crafted narratives into the cohesive structure of the film. The highlight of the subjectivity of community

members' participation in this film is completely based on the director's change of attitude towards marginal groups, which is manifested in paying more respect to the willingness of the subjects[12]. However, the study by Manuel and Vigar found that with the open media context of the development of the Internet, digital technology has been seen to empower citizens. It will also inject new blood into the Exquisite Corpse's participation in the field of art[13].

### 3. Haptic Cinema: Tactile Media (Expanded Cinema) and Interactive Narratives

Haptic cinema, as a new paradigm of film cognition, contributes to the historical development of expanded cinema and interactive film practice. In haptic cinema, the viewer's body does not actually touch the image, but relies on Haptic Visuality to touch the image. Therefore, haptic cinema touches an embodied form, or "body interface" [14]. According to Fan, haptic media revolutionizes the sensory experience by converting visual images from being merely perceived to becoming physically palpable[15]. For example, Nam June Paik's pioneering work "TV Bra For Living Sculpture" connects the body with technology literally. In this piece, his collaborator Charlotte Moorman wore a bra while playing the cello, and the cups of the bra were composed of two small television sets. In McLuhan Caged (1967), Nam June Paik produced a tape of Marshall McLuhan and manipulated the images to the point of distortion by moving magnets across the cathode ray tube. This action prefigures the viewer's interaction with moving images beyond the turning of a television knob to change channels or moving the antennae to produce clearer pictures [16]. The Exquisite Corpse's utilization of tactile media promises to redefine experimental cinema by fostering a dynamic interaction between the audience and the multimedia elements, thereby deepening the viewer's engagement through a novel narrative interplay. We apply this tangential engagement through an interactive digital media tabletop to engage with the audience, designed to mimic the classic exquisite folds or creases of a live corpse, and the organization of images is shifted from temporal montage to spatial montage[17].

### 4. Unexplored Avenues: The Exquisite Corpse's Impact on Modern Film

Despite a growing interest in surrealist methodologies within contemporary media studies, there remains a significant gap in the research on the influence of the Exquisite Corpse on modern experimental film practice. While the historical role of the Exquisite Corpse as a surrealist game is well documented, its potential as a framework for interactive and participatory cinema has yet to be systematically examined. Specifically, the Exquisite Corpse holds underexplored value as a potential model for interactive film, particularly in the context of "participatory film" history, where audience members are no longer passive viewers but active contributors to narrative construction. With the advancement of sensing technologies, audiences can now achieve physical interaction with audiovisual information — such as gesture-based navigation or touch-responsive imagery — yet current academic research has not adequately addressed how the Exquisite Corpse might inform these emerging forms. Haptic cinema, which emphasizes tactile and bodily engagement with filmic content, remains particularly understudied in its physical and sensory dimensions. In this regard, I argue that the Exquisite Corpse offers an important and rich perspective for rethinking film narrative as a collective, contingent, and embodied experience. Addressing this gap could not only bridge surrealist heritage with digital interactivity but also open new directions for experimental film production and audience studies.

### 5. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the influence of the Exquisite Corpse movement on experimental film, focusing on how directors employ the game mechanics of the Exquisite Corpse to engage subjects and alter narrative structures. This approach not only fosters innovation in expanded cinema—encouraging artists to project images beyond traditional cinema settings—but also cultivates novel interactions between the audience and the film. The first sub-purpose explores the integration of collective creation and the element of chance from Exquisite Corpse into experimental films, transforming the audience from mere viewers into co-creators of the narrative. The second sub-purpose examines, within the realm of social participatory art, how these game mechanics enhance audience interaction through directors' delegation of creative control, thereby deepening engagement, sparking creativity, and fostering social critique. Finally, the third sub-purpose considers the Exquisite Corpse as an evolving form of haptic cinema, analyzing how modern digital platforms and sensory technologies support this interactive experience and outlining potential future innovations and practices in the field.

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