EXQUISITE CORPSE
VIDEO PROJECT vol. 1

COORDINATED BY KIKA NICOLELA
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Exquisite Corpse Video Project (ECVP) is a unique video collaboration among artists from all over the world, inspired by the Surrealist creation method, the “Exquisite Corpse”. Using the semi-blind, sequential method of the surrealists’ game, ECVP participants create video art in response to the final ten seconds of the previous member’s work. Each member is asked to incorporate these seconds into their piece, creating transitions as they please, until everyone’s vision is threaded together into an instigating final “corpse”. Rather than providing a unitary linear narrative, each participant maintains his/her own style, permeated by the diverse cultural backgrounds. Each individual artist interrogates, via different means, a number of genres, tendencies and strategies. Since 2008, this inspiring process of exchange among artists from around the world illuminates the possibilities of a dynamic collective creation via participatory platforms and new communication technology.

The ECVP was initiated in 2008 by the Brazilian artist Kika Nicolela and it has had 5 volumes released. The Volume 1 was divided in 9 different videos.

The project has been already shown in galleries, museums, cinemas and alternative spaces of Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK and US. Some of the main spaces that have exhibited the ECVP include the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, Central Gallery in São Paulo, Open Contemporary Art Center in Taiwan, Galerie Carla Magna in Paris, Visual Arts Network in Cape Town, Artists Television Access in San Francisco and Videoformes Festival in Clermont-Ferrand.
PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Volume 1

Corpse #1
Marty McCutcheon (USA) | Ambuja Magaji (India) | Kika Nicolela (Brazil) | Zachary Sandler (USA) | Simone Stoll (Germany) | John Pirard (Belgium) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Anders Weberg (Sweden)

Corpse#2
Michael Chang (Denmark) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Marty McCutcheon (USA) | Alison Williams (South Africa) | Stina Pehrsdotter (Sweden) | Kika Nicolela (Brazil) | Per E Riksson (Sweden)

Corpse#3
John Pirard (Belgium) | Kika Nicolela (Brazil) | Anders Weberg (Sweden) | Joy Whalen (USA) | Marty McCutcheon (USA) | Ulf Kristiansen (Norway) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Simone Stoll (Germany)

Corpse #4
Marty McCutcheon (USA) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Hélène Abram (France) | John Pirard (Belgium) | Brad Wise (USA) | Ronee Hui (England) | Lucas Bambozzi (Brazil) | Kai Lossgott (South Africa) | Kika Nicolela (Brazil)

Corpse#5
Michael Chang (Denmark) | Joshua & Zachary Sandler (USA) | Simone Stoll (Germany) | Stina Pehrsdotter (Sweden) | Alberto Guerreiro (Portugal) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Ambuja Magaji (India) | Dellani Lima (Brazil) | Per E Riksson (Sweden)

Corpse#6
Kika Nicolela (Brazil) | Alicia Felberbaum (England) | Ulf Kristiansen (Norway) | Anders Weberg (Sweden) | Marty McCutcheon (USA) | Jan Kather (USA) | John Pirard (Belgium) | Arthur Tuoto (Brazil) | Nung-Hsin Hu (Taiwan)

Corpse#7
Michael Chang (Denmark) | Jan Kather (USA) | Niclas Hallberg (Sweden) | Renata Padovan (Brazil) | Ulf Kristiansen (Norway) | Tim Pickerill (USA) | Ronee Hui (England) | Romuald Beugnon (France) | Hans Manner-Jakobsen (Denmark) | Kai Lossgott (South Africa)

Corpse#8
Anders Weberg (Sweden) | Joshua & Zachary Sandler (USA) | Kika Nicolela (Brazil) | Nung-Hsin Hu (Taiwan) | Brad Wise (USA) | Stina Pehrsdotter (Sweden) | Christian Leduc (Canada) | Caroline Breton (France) | Jan Hakon Erichsen (Norway) | Pila Rusjan (Slovenia)

Corpse#9
Joy Whalen (USA) | Per E Riksson (Sweden) | Marty McCutcheon (USA) | John Pirard (Belgium) | Alexandra Buhl (Denmark) | Simone Stoll (Germany) | Alicia Felberbaum (England) | Lucas Bambozzi (Brazil) | Pedro Reis (Portugal) | Mads Ljungdahl (Denmark)
CRITICAL ESSAY

DIGITAL BLIND DATE, by Juliana Monachesi (Brazilian art critic and curator)

Boris, my cat, loves to watch TV. A few days ago, he was found elegantly seated in front of computer monitor attentively watching a screensaver slide show. I could deduce from this curious feline compulsion some computable data for a future study, that I have no intention to undertake, on what makes a cat freeze in front of a monitor that displays 2D images and sounds to which we humans can’t really assign high levels of complexity. He seems more interested by simplistic graphic elements, like certain cartoons or vignettes inserted in the programming schedule. Possibly this is more my own conclusion, but to me it appears that animals and "natural environments" also receive special attention from the tiny feline heart that lives in my house.

If you ever tried to entertain a cat, you must know that none, even those susceptible to the seduction of electronic images and sound, spends too much time watching a TV show. Another bit of data, that could suit the study perfectly, but that I don’t intend to undertake any further than this brief account I’m sharing with you at the moment, is this: although dullness could drive you to lose your patience (always so short), in contrast, you discover a cat has a special gift to find a myriad of stimulating aspects in the most boring of rooms. Lingering over a particular aspect feeds a genuine suspicion about what is most attractive: sounds. Not the sounds that a human can hear. Other sounds, other frequencies. Sounds cause Boris’s impatience to fade and captivate him for some extra time in front of the TV. I can’t say what he sees exactly because he stares at one single point.

Lacking the abilities of an "all over" visual feline experience leads me to presume that Boris's wide-angle-little-eyes capture everything at once. It’s not the movement that holds his attention, nor "recognizable" forms, but instead, his interested gaze suggests that the narrative that unfolds in front of him while staring the TV monitor can only be due to the sound sequence. Wide open eyes, little ears in constant movement and some degree of recent memory, for, when it "rains" on the TV, Boris raises his eyes. Given the advanced design of the cats' hearing apparatus, I bet a surround sound system would be for them mere redundancy or a focus of agony.

And what does all this have to do with the Exquisite Corpse Video Project? While watching again the first six experimental collaborative videos in the company of my cats, I noticed that Boris spent more time than usual staring at the TV. The sound of rain took his eyes off the monitor and made him look up, but soon he turned his attention back to the videos, drawn by the sound - or by something in the sound that my ear was not capable of grasping. Boris is an unconditional fan of the Corpses. But the biggest surprise came from his little sister, who never cared about any audiovisual production until today. After the first series of videos, Boris climbed the couch covered by his blanket and took a nap. Then Doris took over his post, making herself comfortable beside me to watch TV, maybe for the first time in her short feline existence (she’s three years and a half) and viewed the second series of Corpses. Colors, spinning objects and synthesized audio were doubtless the elements that most appealed to her inaugural video art appreciation. Hypnotized eyes and little ears mapping the videos' sound space marked her first experience of audio-visual creation.

[For the record, I’m not that keen on the schizophrenic vision that advocates that animals are like human beings; my cats do not have beauty treatments in pet shops, they don’t have a personal trainer nor a stylist, they don’t have clothes nor do they consult with animal therapists; for me, cats are... cats. They’re little creatures, holders of an acute animal sensibility and of an instinctive intelligence that make them aware when someone is sad or when someone is a potential threat – sensing a bad vibe, a cruel heart - nothing beyond the basic. I don’t expect for them to be latent art critics; I didn’t freak out about our joint session watching the Exquisite Corpse Project Video - of which they participated spontaneously and surprisingly of their own free will – or how they could... ]
be capable of comprehending a collaborative videographic experience, but it was fascinating to see Boris and Doris’ interest in the face of such a radically opposing audiovisual product compared to the excerpts of cartoons, movies, series and other television drivel with which Boris has always flirted enigmatically within our home life. Well, call me crazy, but nothing convinces me that all this was mere coincidence.

Speaking of this conspiratorial theory on the non-existence of coincidences, Magnolia [1999 – Paul Thomas Anderson] is one film that feeds this project. There’s also a bit of David Lynch - think of the sequence in which Fred goes through a transmutation at the death penalty corridor and turns himself into his sub-alter-ego Pete in Lost Highway [1997]. Recall the frenetic passage of time at the final sequence of Adaptation [2002 – Spike Jonze], or the iconography of Donnie Darko [2001 – Richard Kelly], that crosses filmic excerpts of the Exquisite Corpse Video Project and even gets a more explicit musical quotation in Corpse#2, without mentioning Butterfly Effect [2004 - Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber] or Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind [2004 - Michel Gondry]. The Corpse videos work in a less didactic way than in a film like Memento [2000 - Christopher Nolan], which presents the audience with a dreamy and tragic possibility of living the linear temporality in a transversal and incongruously reversible form. The visual culture of this collaborative video project does not limit participating artists to the expected film references, but allows them to re-process in very subjective way, like in the citation, taken to the extreme, of an interjected/interposed, iconography from the world of imaginary films like Psycho [1960 - Alfred Hitchcock], The Shining [1980 – Stanley Kubrick], Blade Runner [1982 - Ridley Scott], The Pillow Book [1996 – Peter Greenaway], The Blair Witch Project [1999 - Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez] and so on.

The visual repertory that feeds the shooting and creation of a one minute experimental video, having as starting point the ten seconds from the previous video, goes from Eadweard Muybridge to Ansel Adams, from René Magritte to Duane Michals, passing through references and parodies to road movies, action painting, reality shows, op art, “mockumentaries” and performance art. Another reference that is present in this collaboration of artists coming from all parts of the world is the element of conjuncture; something like a virtual site specificity. Meeting themselves and developing this project in the context of a social network, allowed them more intimacy in their interactions than many of the ones we have with a hint of nostalgia in embarrassing social situations like pathetic college reunions. [What is the purpose of gathering people who spent ten years struggling to keep the most cautioned distance from each other? Guilt? Persistence? Delusion? Even before these artists met virtually as members of the artreview.com Video Art Group, initiated by the Brazilian artist Kika Nicolela, they already had more in common and potentially much more to exchange for the next decade than these people who, having shared the melancholic late adolescence of the college years, schedule a dinner party to depress themselves collaboratively and then, victims of their own treacherous reminiscences, fall in the same trap all over again].

This “virtual site specificity” formalizes itself on the various quotations of the context in which the exchanges happen: ten seconds from the video received are incorporated to the next minute in the form of a video excerpt being watched on the notebook monitor; or the final piece of a soundtrack that barely leaves the previous ten seconds and becomes an audio mantra that makes the character in the next minute of video get bored and run from her office desk to a green outside area, anxious for a change from a virtual world to an organic exchange between her feet and the soil (as real as it can get, a shock made explicit as she leaves the "protection" of the studio for the "inscrutable" of the garden). Films inside films, re-edited excerpts (many times for better) and re-signified repetition of the deliberately mysterious tracks from the previous ten seconds. Is it just me, or are most of the artists more hermetic on the end of their piece than during the private fifty seconds? We witness game strategies organically created, tested, subverted and re-invented during the making of the game. For example, some artists choose to have a glorious entrance; others prefer to make their “entrance” almost unnoticeable. In order to maintain the continuity of the received piece, artists exhibit virtuosity in creating a subtle transition, or conversely, demonstrate another kind of virtuosity by employing a jarring, rebellious splice of incongruity (with or without a cause).
The Exquisite Corpse Video Project starts from a Dadaist method of creation using random and chaotic processes. Each artist responds to ten seconds of video – sent by the previous artist on the line of each video production – with one minute of his own, from which he sends the last 10 seconds to the next artist. The result is a video that runs about 10 minutes. The potency of a video made by 20 hands surpasses the current vogue of the collective practices in the visual arts. It's nice to be reminded that the artists involved in this project each have their own "solo" career, participating in important festivals and exhibitions worldwide. The ECVP experience is more than the emergence of a new "collective"; it distinguishes itself by an attitude of openness toward chance processes and the possibilities of sharing and creating that are offered by the decentralized social networks that are spreading on the world wide web. And it serves as an aesthetic answer to the jumble of audiovisual content uploaded on the same www, showing that there is intelligent life on the You Tube channels.

I've read some critics which I admire a lot, departing from, for example, the image of a child playing around a minimalist artwork to initiate their dense analysis about the visual and sensorial grammatical of this art (non)movement. This is because, when a subject is new, it demands a new vocabulary. And Leo Steinberg already taught us that art, whether it be modern or ancient, constantly requires new criteria of analysis. From the formalism and space arrangement criteria, passing by interchangeable content criteria - according to the time in which an artwork is made, read and re-read - to biographical and other criteria that stand between normalcy and idiosyncrasy, between the generic and the particular, between social context and the singularity, Steinberg stresses the importance of establishing as interpretative starting point the focus on the provocations of a new art in order to investigate its intentions in a disarmed way. "A succession of other criteria and none of them obsolete", writes the noted New Yorker critic in the introduction of a recent re-editing of his famous essay "Other Criteria" (1972).

My "feline appreciation" approach as a doorway to the ECVP is due to this: facing a new artistic provocation, the critic must put her/his criteria aside to better understand the work intentions. Using this line of thought, I recognize not only that the biggest connection among the artists' blindly made fragments relies on the random collage of noises, songs, sounds and soundtracks, a real collision of references and preferences that makes each video an antidote to the audiovisual monotony, but I also conclude that this group reflects the digital culture we are currently immersed in, a culture not fragmented anymore as the post-modern culture, but splintered and precarious when it comes to production of meaning. The Exquisite Corpse Video Project presents us this new world, mimicking its inherent shattering and precariousness, while simultaneously generating new meanings to the contemporary experience.

On the last three videos I watched (Corpse#4, Corpse#5 and Corpse#6), the blind collective creation of meaning is gradually refining itself even more. The nudity of a performer in the streets of Sao Paulo on Kika Nicolela's piece moves to the artist Alicia Felberbaum who photographs a beach with bathers overlapped with images of people indoors. When her fragment ends with a couple hanging out at the seaside, it suggests to Ulf Kristiansen a group of animated characters in a Tarantinian battle with the same seashore landscape as the background; the man beats his dressed-as-a-rabbit opponent and celebrates his triumph by kissing a girl, an innocent kiss that transforms itself in the hands of the artist Anders Weberg, in an ardent kiss that, by free association, leads Marty McCutcheon to follow the collage with a snail; then he inserts himself - a man with a hat in a forest – apparently disturbed by the image of the snail in front of him; and so on. The Corpse#6 shows the collective of artists in great shape and in synch with the ECVP format, what leads us the audience, to anxiously await the new batch of corpses.