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**Exquisite Corpses and
Anagrammatic Bodies:
Deviations of Nature in
DOCUMENTS and
elsewhere**

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[Documents 4, 1929]

The aim of this paper is to suggest new ways of thinking about representations of the body associated with surrealism, and their legacies in contemporary artistic practice. I will contrast surrealist works of the 1920s and 30s (including the collaborative practice of the exquisite corpse) with alternative ways of thinking about the human form suggested in the magazine *Documents*, which was run by Georges Bataille between 1929 and 1930.

I am interested, in particular, in the idea of an architectural or grammatical structure of the body, and in descriptive terms like 'natural/unnatural' in this context. I hope to elaborate a series of oppositions, derived not only from the dialectical nature of Bataille's philosophy of the human form, but the opposition of these ideas to the surrealist game of the exquisite corpse

The origin of this paper is the exhibition *Undercover Surrealism* that I co-curated with Dawn Ades last year at the Hayward Gallery in London and which was based on Georges Bataille and the magazine *Documents*.

Today I want to show many images of things shown in that exhibition.

But I also want to make connections to the on-going relevance of Bataille and surrealism in contemporary practice (raised at the time of the exhibition & by the Centre) by looking at work by the British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman, who identify closely with Bataille's ideas. (Could also include Mike Kelley in this context)

The term anagrammatic body (from the idea of an anagram as the re-arrangement of the letters in a word) comes from another young British artist, Aura Satz, whose work accompanied a recent Hans Bellmer exhibition in London.

Georges Bataille is now famous as a philosopher, and as author of pornographic novel *Story of the Eye*.

In 1929 when *Documents* began, he was a librarian, numismatist at the BNF.

He had a close but tense relationship with the surrealist group.

Fell out with André Breton in 1929 (when some surrealists were expelled).

Bataille attracted several expelled surrealists to the magazine *Documents*.

As we can see from the cover of this copy (no. 4, 1929)

Desnos, Leiris, Vitrac, Limbour etc.

Documents also included other kinds of thinkers:

Griaule (ethnographer), Einstein (art historian), Schaeffner (musicologist) etc.

In this way it brought together 'challenges' to the best avant-garde painting and sculpture of the day by discussing it on a par with: Ethnography, Music, Film, Popular Culture, Photography, Folk Art, Strange Historical material from BnF

A central aspect of *Documents* was the idea of the critical dictionary.

A section initiated by Bataille a bit like an illustrated encyclopaedia.

As he said to give 'the tasks of words, rather than their meanings'.

This in a sense was true of many of the less orthodox articles in the magazine, in which Bataille set out what have become very influential concepts:

Informe / formlessness (subject of a 1996 exhibition)

Base materialism (associated with artists Hirschhorn/Mike Kelley/Paul McCarthy)

Today I'll talk about the body, which involves both of these concepts.

2 [Eli Lotar Abattoir & Chorus Line, *Documents* 6, 1929]

Bataille's theories of the body are manifest in several ways in *Documents*

As were associated ideas elaborated by other surrealist writers in the magazine.

Firstly in visual games - the play of resemblances.

Here we see severed cows legs an abattoir and legs cut off by a curtain.

But more important, perhaps, were the essays and encyclopaedia-entry type texts, often using images, which deal directly with the body: (called, e.g.)

Human Face, Man, Big Toe, Mouth, Deviations of Nature.

I'd like to suggest a series of implications arising from these texts and their illustrations, which are particularly clear if we take them together as a group.

First by discussing Man, Deviations of Nature and Human Face. Which together set out an argument about the aesthetics of the body, suggesting a dialectical relationship between form and deformity or formlessness.

Then by turning to Big Toe, Mouth and the Language of Flowers, to explore the idea of reorienting or re-aligning the body.

Lastly by looking briefly at the essay Primitive Art, which introduces the idea of alteration or spoiling as a creative principle.

Taken together, I will suggest, these texts add up to an important (if not exactly coherent) theory about ways to re-imagine the body: a kind of deliberate deformation or unleashing of the human form which relates in a very interesting way to the surrealist practice of the exquisite corpse through the idea of the anagrammatic re-organisation of parts.

I will suggest that it is possible to trace the legacies of both sets of concepts (and their inter-relation) in works produced at the time (especially by surrealist artists and photographers) and in contemporary art, in this case the work of Jake and Dinos Chapman.

I'll start with a rather long quotation from the entry Man in the 'critical dictionary' section of *Documents* (a text chosen, rather than written, by Bataille):

An eminent English chemist, Dr Charles Henry Maye, set out to establish in a precise manner what man is made of and what is its chemical value. This is the result of his learned researches: "The bodily fat of a normally constituted man would suffice to make seven cakes of toilet soap. Enough iron is found in the organism to make a medium sized nail. And sugar to sweeten a cup of coffee. The phosphorus would provide 2,200 matches. The magnesium would furnish the light needed to take a photograph. In addition, a little potassium and sulphur, but in an unusable quantity...These different raw materials, costed at current prices, represent an approximate sum of 25 francs" (*Journal des Débats*, 13 August, 1929).

This entry is of interest in this context primarily because it suggests the idea of breaking the body down into a number of parts or elements, which can then be re-assembled or added up in an alternative way. It takes the idea of the integrity of the human form apart, and suggests an alternative algebra by which it might be understood.

This is one of two entries under the title 'Man' in Documents' critical dictionary. The second entry, which is also a quote, makes a direct equation between the human body and the consumption of the flesh of other animals: (I quote)

not one of the millions of animals man massacres every year is necessary for his nourishment...A calculation based on very modest figures shows the quantity of blood shed each year in the slaughterhouses of Chicago is more than sufficient to float five transatlantic liners...

The alarming link between slaughterhouse carcasses and human forms occurs elsewhere in the magazine, as we can see:

Eli Lotar's photographs of the abattoir at La Villette (on the left of the layout here) raise the curtain for the topless legs of a chorus-line of dancers (on the right).

3 [Ame Bourdon / Le Bossu, Anatomical tables, Documents 5, 1930]

Another essay in *Documents*, Michel Leiris's 'Man and his Interior' begins with the story of a woman in a butcher's shop.

Catching sight of the inside of a disembowelled carcass and managing not to faint at the sight, she asks 'do we have nothing but vileness inside *our* bodies?'

This story, entitled 'An excess of cleanliness', begins a discussion of the disturbing beauty of a series of seventeenth-century anatomical tables by Amé Bourdon. (huge prints from the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, where Bataille and Leiris would have seen them).

For Leiris, what is incredible and moving, about Bourdon's anatomical tables are the anomalous humanisations of the bodies:

The male figures adopt unnecessary rhetorical poses: one holds a decapitated head; another contemplates a severed ear held gently between thumb and forefinger.

A female figure, despite having a cross section through her skull down to the centre of her brain, has long flowing hair, tears rolling down her cheeks, and in a bizarre act of modesty, covers her flayed genitals.

Leiris says, (I quote):

One understands why these representations of the human body, which offer to show us its secret workings, at the same time fascinating and fearsome ... are really much more beautiful and more erotically moving than all that painting pretends to give us.

4 [Deviations of Nature, Documents 2, 1930]

Bataille also engages in the fascinating but disturbing depiction of the human form in an essay on a late eighteenth century book by Nicolas and Genevieve Regnault called *The Deviations of Nature*. We are looking here at a layout of illustrations from Bataille's essay in *Documents 2*, 1930.

5 [A.P. Pinson, Acephalic child, 1770-89 N.F. & G. Regnault, Deviations of Nature, 1775, Acephalic child]

On the right you can see one of the original colour plates reproduced by Bataille.

Many of the images of so-called monstrous and unnatural human and animal specimens shown in the Regnault's book, were based on wax models made by the eighteenth-century anatomical sculptor André-Pierre Pinson.

They were a part of a collection of case studies known as the '*Cabinet Pinson*', which included this 'semi-acephalic child' (on the left) born without the roof of his skull, and now kept in the Museum of Natural History in Paris.

There is a link here, between the unnerving humanisation of anatomical diagrams noticed by Leiris, in relation to Bourdon, and the Regnault images that inspired Bataille's essay on 'deviations' of the human form.

Unlike Pinson, whose sculpted 'portrait-bust' is limited to the relevant details of the head, the Regnaults took liberties with the poses of their subjects so the 'semi-acephalic child' sits on a rock, in a landscape, like a stoic philosopher.

6 [N.F. & G. Regnault, Deviations of Nature, 1775, Monstrous children]

Elsewhere among the examples that Bataille reproduces, a 'monstrous child', born with no arms or head, and which did not survive into life, stands impossibly upright in a grassy landscape.

7 [N.F. & G. Regnault, Deviations of Nature, 1775, Double-enfants]

In his text, Bataille notes the failure of mankind to remain indifferent to its monsters, drawing attention to the cloak or veneer of 'scientific' respectability in such projects:

'a freak' he says 'in any given fair, provokes a positive impression of aggressive incongruity, a little comic, but much more a source of malaise'.

He continues (I quote):

If one can speak of a dialectic of forms, it is evident that it is essential to take into account deviations for which nature - even if they are most often determined to be against nature - is incontestably responsible

So in other words, the idea of describing these 'deviations' as unnatural is at odds with the fact that it is nature itself that naturally contains, or rather, insists upon, such forms.

As Bataille puts it:

On a practical level, this impression of incongruity is elementary and constant...that is why it is preferable to refer to monsters in order to determine it.

8 [Figure Humaine, Documents 4, 1929]

It is the absurd and pointless presentation of the human form for posterity that inspired Bataille's most scathing essay on the subject, entitled 'Human Face':

Owing to our presumably insufficient data, Bataille begins (I quote), we can cite but a single era within which the human form stands out in a senile mockery of everything ... conceived by man. The mere sight (in photography) of our predecessors in the occupation of this country now produces, for varying reasons, a burst of loud and raucous laughter; that sight, however, is nonetheless hideous.

9 [Figure Humaine, Documents 4 1929, Nadar, Demonstration Board]

The photographs that Bataille is talking about are publicity portraits of late nineteenth-century celebrities made, for the most part, in the Nadar studio.

These are not, however, the auratic early Nadar portraits of Charles Baudelaire and his contemporaries. Bataille shows instead the later studio work, much of it supervised by Nadar's son Paul: dancers, actresses and actors from bygone eras. (Here, the actor Mounet-Sully, is visible on the centre of each image)

These unintentionally hilarious photographs, originally collected in card albums, could be ordered directly from the Nadar studio by perusing the large demonstration boards of their back-

catalogue: the logic of which Bataille recreates in the pages of *Documents*. (On the left here you can see Bataille's layout for his essay, on the right one of the demonstration boards)

Despite the apparent claim of photography to represent and preserve something of 'human nature', Bataille suggests, any such random selection of examples erodes individuality until only outlandish costumes, melodramatic poses and forced smiles remain: (I quote)

white men and women have, as we know, tenaciously persisted in their efforts to regain at last, a human face ... so many strange, merely half-monstrous individuals seem to persist in empty animation, like the jingle of the music box, in innocent vice, libidinous heat, lyrical fumes.

Just as in his discussion of monstrosity in relation to the so-called 'deviations of nature', here Bataille sees the very human desire to represent humanity as something lost through the dehumanising process of presenting oneself to be seen.

For Bataille, the rhetorical structure inherent in the process of representation speaks louder than the contents of any individual image.

And it is only through revealing the ludicrous antics of photographic convention by bringing a number of examples together, that the absence of the wished-for content (a human face) is revealed. In a way, Nadar's catalogue is an alternative, nineteenth-century version of the Regnault's compendium of monstrous forms.

10 [The Big Toe, Documents 6, 1929]

The notion of the humanity (or not) of representations of the human body is, however, most famously expounded in Bataille's essay *The Big Toe*.

Which features some of the best of Jacques-Andre Boiffard's photographs in *Documents*, hugely enlarged close-ups of the body part in question.

Almost contradicting these unsettling images, Bataille says in his text:

The Big Toe is the most human part of the body

Planted in the mud, it allows humans to stand upright (differentiating from apes)

He suggests an architectural evolution of the body revealed through posture

Our feet are in the mud, but our heads are in the light.

The big toe, however, according to Bataille, is repressed, despite its fundamental importance to the human race.

It is 'subjected to grotesque tortures' that deform it such foot wrapping/high heels

I quote:

Man's secret horror of his foot is one of the explanations for the tendency to conceal its length and form as much as possible. Heels of greater or lesser height, depending upon sex, distract from the foot's low and flat character.

Man thinks he is a spiritual/intellectual being but nonetheless he still has painful corns on his feet.

Here we get a sense of Bataille's concept of base materialism - a movement from 'high to low', which draws attention to the inescapable (dirty) realities of life.

From the highest realm of thought and spirit (the head/mind), to the base of the body (the foot).

11 [J.A. Boiffard, Big Toe, 30 Year Old Male, 1929]

But there is also the issue of seduction in relation to the Big Toe, or fear and seduction in equal measure perhaps:

Things that are hidden away become a source of desire/fascination/fetishism

Although this is not purely an issue of form: as he says, I quote: 'the form of the big toe is not specifically monstrous: in this it is different from other parts of the body -the inside of a gaping mouth for example.'

Rather, I quote:

The meaning [of the big toe] lies in its insistence on a direct and explicit question of seductiveness...a return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening the eyes wide, opening them wide before a big toe.

In the Big Toe we see Bataille (with the help of Boiffard's photographs) rewriting the body, re-ordering or reprioritizing it: not only suggesting an axis of verticality along which to organise our priorities but suggesting a specific connotative movement along it.

12 [J.A. Boiffard, Mouth, Documents 5, 1930]

This idea is developed in the short critical dictionary text 'Mouth' which describes, I quote:

The narrow constipation of a strictly human attitude...the look of a face with a closed mouth, as beautiful as a safe;

There is an anti-surrealist, anti-idealised logic of repression at work here:

The safe is something that needs breaking into, cracking, to release its treasure

But there is also a relation between the horror of the 'monstrous' interior of the mouth described in the Big Toe, and the beauty of the closed mouth:

monstrosity is linked to beauty as it's entirely natural flip side.

13 [Man Ray, Anatomies, c.1929/30]

In the wider context of Bataille's writing at this time, the idea of the 'base' properties of body parts develops into an argument about geometry and alignment where 'The mouth (is likened to) the prow of animals'

The alignment - from anus to mouth, is essentially animalistic.

A dog, for example, when walking has its eyes and anus in line.

According to Bataille, human beings only ever attain this animal alignment in moments of pain or ecstasy, when the head is thrown back.

The image here, depicting this position is not from *Documents* however.

It is a 1929 photograph by Man Ray from a series called 'Anatomies' that Rosalind Krauss has used to explain how Bataille's idea of the mouth as prow might work in the field of representation.

Krauss sees this blurring of human and animal bodies and boundaries as a descent into formlessness, knocking categories and meanings off their pedestals.

14 [Photo-Eye, 1929, P.E. Hahn, The Speaker, & A. Renger-Patzsch, Flower]

It is interesting, however, to see such images and indeed Bataille's ideas, in the context of trends in modernist photography at the time, which often used the rotations and close-ups described by Krauss to suggest de-familiarisations of the body and the natural world.

Here, for example, I show two images from the landmark 1929 Stuttgart exhibition 'Photo-Eye': a work by Peter Hahn on the left and Albert Renger-Patzsch on the right.

Re-thinking concepts of nature, and the natural (and by implication monstrosity/the unnatural) with the help of the camera lens was not restricted to surrealist or even dissident surrealist practice, but was a mainstream trend in photography at the time.

So Bataille's theories on the natural architecture of the body should be understood in relation to the logic of birds' eye and worms' eye views.

15 [J.A. Boiffard, Renee Jacobi, 1930]

At the time, Bataille was openly antagonistic towards such developments (which he referred to as 'fastidious acrobatics') although he did make an exception for Boiffard: this, for example, was the only conventional 'female nude' anywhere in Documents and is premised on the idea of inverting the image to produce its strange acrobatic effect.

14 [Photo-Eye pages then forward 2]

Producing apparently unnatural forms through extreme proximity to natural phenomena was an important development in photography, especially in publications like 'The World in Beautiful' produced by Renger-Patzsch, the logic of which Bataille sought to turn on its head in one of his early Documents essays.

16 [K. Blossfeldt, Language of Flowers, Documents 3, 1929]

In The Language of Flowers, Bataille extends the notion of a natural architecture of the body to the natural world via the photography of Karl Blossfeldt, author of a book of extreme close-ups of plants called *Art Forms in Nature* in 1928.

In his essay on these images, Bataille draws attention once again to the dialectical relationship between beauty and its opposite: He starts linking flowers to love (as the declarations of affection).

Flowers represent the 'human ideal' of perfection.

But he goes on to point out that: 'Even the most beautiful flowers are spoiled at their centers by hairy sexual organs'.

Their roots (like our big toes) he says, are mired in filth and manure

I quote:

Roots in fact, represent the perfect counterpart to the visible parts of a plant, While the visible parts are nobly elevated, the ignoble and sticky roots wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as leaves love light. There is reason to note, moreover, that the incontestable moral value of the term base conforms to this systematic interpretation of the meaning of roots; what is evil is necessarily represented, among movements, by a movement from high to low.

So for Bataille, the natural world tends to lead us, if we move past a symbolic and idealised understanding of the world, to a materialist or base materialist conception to the low 'value' or qualities of bodies and plants.

17 [J.A. Boiffard, Fly, 1930]

In his last essay in Documents Bataille considers the effect of this base materialism on the body at the microscopic level, conjuring up images of flies, fleas and parasites. And it is here that Bataille becomes truly pessimistic about art and its signifying potential (a pessimism that endears him to contemporary artists).

We might see the close-ups of dead flies on flypaper (such as the example by Boiffard here) as a retort to the optimism of *The World is Beautiful or Art Forms in Nature* which insisted that if you look closely enough nature is quite wonderful, even architectural in its beauty.

The closer Bataille looks, the more deformed and ugly things appear.

18 [The Big Toe, Documents 6, 1929]

Let's step back, for a moment though, to the radical re-ordering of the body suggested by Bataille's interest in the big toe.

There is basic architectural analogy between human and vegetable forms

From toes and roots in the dirt to faces and flowers in the light.

In both cases the photographic lens is able to disrupt this architectural grammar, make the body unfamiliar through cropping, close-ups and focus.

In different ways, nature becomes its own unnatural or monstrous 'other'.

19 [A. Kertesz, Distortion, 1933]

Andre Kertesz produced hundreds of these photographic 'distortions' in 1933

They succeed, I would suggest, in blending Bataille's argument about the monstrous potential of the human form with the fragmentary notion of the big toe images. It is interesting to visualise the body slipping into an unformed or de-formed state.

20 [A. Kertesz, Distortion, 1933]

We might quite actually be able to see the slippage at work here - an uncanny ability to render the body (at once the closest thing to us) so unfamiliar.

Like the horrified scream in response to the big toe (or inside of the mouth)

This example, containing both the intact and distorted form, stages this encounter very dramatically.

21 [A Kertesz, Distortions (2), 1933]

The body loses its integrity but hangs onto its corporeal nature. The images remain resolutely 'of the body' and yet impossibly inhuman. It is as if the words of corporeal language remain but without their organization, lacking grammar.

This is the return of the dialectical bargain that Bataille suggests that so-called 'deviations of nature' insist upon: monstrosity as the absolute proof of the natural order.

But before moving on to look at the legacies of such ideas in contemporary art it is important to think about another key facet of Bataille's theorizing of the body - in this case in terms of the idea of process, specifically the process of drawing.

22 [L'Art Primitif, Documents 7, 1930, G.H Luquet, Le Dessin Enfantin, 1927]

Writing a review of a book on prehistoric art by G.H. Luquet, Bataille turned to drawings by children to make his point: including a watercolour by nine-year-old Lili Masson (on the left). Luquet, who had also written about children's drawings explained so-called 'primitive art' (the tendency of prehistoric peoples to make marks, even if only 'dirty hands wiped across walls') through comparisons with the doodles of children (such as the example on the right).

23 [M. Griaule, Abyssinian Graffiti, 1930]

In his review, Bataille engages with the idea that a process of deformation is at the heart of childhood image-making, suggesting an important distinction between the prehistoric urge to deform 'reserved for the representation of the human form' and contemporary children's drawings, which show an insatiable desire for alteration: (I quote)

It is a matter, above all, of transforming what is at hand ... this evolution is easy to follow, starting with some scribbles. Chance isolates a visual resemblance from a few strange lines that can be fixed through repetition...the altered object is transformed to the point where it becomes a new object, a horse, a head, a man. Finally, through repetitions this new object is itself altered by a series of deformations. Art proceeds in this way through successive destructions.

24 [Joan Miró, Recent Painting, Documents 7, 1930]

Elsewhere in DOCUMENTS there are stained, scribbled-over pages from Picasso's sketchbooks and Joan Miró's wildly crossed-out 1930 paintings. In fact, Bataille's short text on Miró followed his 'Primitive Art' essay in DOCUMENTS, so the reader moves straight from one kind of mark making to the other.

The key issue here is the assertion that the creative process proceeds, as Bataille puts it, not through the addition of drawn elements, but through the alteration or destruction of pre-existing forms.

And this tendency is particularly true (in prehistoric art at least) in the depiction of the human body, which seems to be particularly prone to this destructive or subversive 'alteration'.

In a sense then, the practice of drawing the body in this way relates to Kertesz's photographic practice of producing distortions from whole bodies, or even, at a stretch, Hans Bellmer's 'disarticulated' dolls.

25 [Exquisite Corpses, Varietes: Le Surrealisme en 1929, 1929]

We can oppose Bataille's theory, however, with one of the most important contemporary creative practices of the surrealist group: the exquisite corpse, based on the childhood game of consequences.

The game begins with a player drawing a head, then folding the paper, but leaving tell-tale lines poking out (which should be shoulders) before passing it on. The next player draws the torso and arms, folds and passes it to the final artist to complete the legs.

The motivation here is the production of the surrealist marvelous - the unexpected operation of chance in a positive / ideal form.

The game, however, is altered by its transition from children to surrealists in terms of the skill of the participants: the evident quality of the surrealist players.

(Joan Miró, Max Morise, Man Ray & Yves Tanguy)

Bataille's interest in the destructive nature of children's drawings and graffiti can be seen as a corrective to the surrealists' optimism about the productive nature of their process.

I would suggest, however, that the comparison be taken even further:

26 [The Big Toe, Documents 6, 1929, Exquisite Corpse: Tanguy, Miró, Morise, Man Ray, 1929]

The big toe, Bataille described as 'the most human part of the body' but because, he believed, the big toe permits the human race to stand erect (and not despite it), it is always hidden away or disguised: a shameful fleshy secret that constantly threatens the human preoccupation with sentience and consciousness.

The concept of 'base materialism' is derived from precisely this dialectical structural formulation. Our faces, like those of flowers, receive the sun's rays, just as our feet, like the roots of plants, are mired in the mud: beauty and abjection are two ends of the same stick (or stem). This bizarre philosophical position, derived in part at least from a reading of the human body (a deliberate travesty of empirical positivism), is characterised, as Bataille put it, 'by a movement from high to low'.

This radically subversive gesture is reflected, albeit in the most peculiar and abstract way, by the surrealist game of the exquisite corpse, which consists of a collective creative process of moving from top to toe that unmakes the body even as it is being assembled. The result rarely conforms to any anatomical model whatsoever, let alone one that corresponds to the kind of sophisticated binary polarisation suggested by Bataille.

But then, it could be argued, that is very much the point: what occurs is a disruption of the integrity of the concept of anatomy every bit as effective as Bataille's radical re-interpretation of humanity, in this case through a wilful mis-reading of the human form.

27 [Stone Found on a Beach, Documents 7, 1929, Meret Oppenheim, Stone Woman, 1938]

For Bataille, every example of what he referred to as 'deviations of nature,' (occasional anatomical aversions to conformity) were inherently and intrinsically proof of the rules that they seemed to flout. Nature could no more produce an unnatural form than that form could pass unnoticed. A phenomenon exemplified by this 'found-object' reproduced in Documents - a naturally eroded stone found on a beach, which has accidentally come to look like a face.

At the heart of this theory is an attitude to form and resemblance which is also uncannily and inadvertently produced in the exquisite corpse, where the various sections of the 'body' are only held in place by their relative positions: the 'head' is only a head because it occupies the highest point of the page. We can also see this clearly in Meret Oppenheim's Stone Woman. Where the presence of the woman depends upon a structural reading of various non-human or in-human objects.

28 [Hans Bellmer, Poupée, 1938, Exquisite Corpse, Greta Knutson-Tzara, Tristan Tzara, Valentine Hugo, 1929]

But representational equivalents to 'deviations of nature' can be found throughout surrealist imagery, expressed in perverse and polymorphous grammars of anatomical structure. In stark contrast to the logic of the exquisite corpse, where the notion of the 'head' is held in place, body parts and references to bodily functions float free from their moorings and start to unpick the very idea of resemblance. In place of a composed 'body' drawn-up from non-corporeal components, suddenly everything is anatomical and anatomy is everywhere: as Michel Leiris said of Picasso's paintings, everywhere we find 'human limbs, human heads, human landscapes, human animals and human objects...'

We can summarise these two distinct phenomena through their different relations of parts to whole like disfunctional languages:

In the exquisite corpse on the one hand, everything can be a part of the body (even a brick wall) as long as it is held in place by the architectural structure of the game. It is, if you like, a strict grammar with words that signify at random.

On the other hand, and here Bellmer *is* a good example, the body is everything, everywhere all the time: bodyliness has escaped from the confines of the outline of the human form to resonate and recur everywhere. Here the grammar of the language is formless but the words still come through loud and clear.

29 [Hans Bellmer, *Machine-Gunneress in a State of Grace, 1937*, Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Bad Trip at the Folies-Bergere, 1997*]

This opposition is important because contemporary artists like Jake and Dinos Chapman continue to play with the underlying rules of these games

Their work is premised upon a disruption of surrealist game-playing, and so can only really be understood in relation to it. The Chapmans are not, despite appearances, interested in exploring permutations and creativity (much less expressing some individual angst like Bellmer) but instead work through the possibilities presented by extremely limited parameters.

And it is here I think that the bringing together of Bataille's re-thinking or re-mapping of the body and the surrealist paradigm of the exquisite corpse come together. The anagram is an excellent analogy for what the Chapmans are involved in, constantly re-working or re-arranging the same meagre selection of elements into every more bizarre and unworkable permutations.

30 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Bubble Bobble, 1997*, *Exquisite Corpse, Rotring Club, 2000-1*]

The work on the left is exemplary in this respect, totally deformed, aberrant even, but still strangely legible, rational within its own terms. It is also important to note in this context, that as well as re-working body parts to perverse and pointless effect, the Chapmans also attempt to drain the life out of the exquisite corpse.

31 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Exquisite Corpse, Rotring Club, 2000-1*]

But it is vital that their exquisite corpses be understood as a rejection of the surrealist precursor, which refuse to play by the rules. If the surrealists' exquisite corpses were a springboard to the marvelous, the Chapmans versions are a ticket to a treadmill, which sees the two participants stuck in an endless game: victims of an affliction like Picassonoma (suggested on the left here).

32 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Exquisite Corpse, Rotring Club, 2000-1*]

The Chapmans return us to the surrealist game with both Bataille's radical attitude to the natural status of monstrosity and his pessimism about the way that the concept of nature has been rhetorically degraded, so the game becomes less about creativity than a kind of overdrawing or destructive obliteration: a deliberate descent into the formless.

33 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Tragic Anatomies, 1996*]

An obvious alternative point of comparison here would be the Chapmans' so-called 'tragic anatomies', which mix and blend body parts (although more often the repressed genitals than big toes) and place them on and between the faces and bodies of child-mannequins. The Chapmans (to use Bellmer's term) 'disarticulate' the language of corporeality from the grammar of bodily structure, merging the two together.

34 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Tragic Anatomies, 1996*]

The horrific nature of these figures lies precisely in their dialectical reference and relation to the idea of the 'natural' human form. Their monstrosity is dependent on an absolute proximity to nature and exacerbated by the already uncanny attempts to make the plastic mannequins life-like. Indeed, Sylvère Lotringer has recently suggested that there is something unbearably literal about these sculptures: they wear their symptoms, their signifiers on the surface, right out in the open, but don't refer to anything beyond this frank, brutal fact. In this way, he argues, they refuse the Bellmer get-out (a perverse imagination) instead confronting viewers with their own expectations.

35 [Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Zygotic Acceleration*, 1995]

Dinos Chapman has suggested that the brothers' work be best thought of not in terms of content or iconography (and here he seems to lend support to Lotringer's reading) but as a skin stretched over everything they produce. This is, perhaps, an entirely appropriate way of thinking about works that interfere or interface with surrealism at a rhetorical, rather than ideological or philosophical level. The Chapmans I would argue, articulate the effect of a complex of attempts in both text and image, to imagine new languages of the human form. And, beyond this, they force this process through to a point where humanity is obliged to recognize its own monstrosity.