

*Kay Sage's Your Move and/ as Autobiography*

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Kay Sage, an American surrealist painter, mounted her last exhibition, "Your Move," at the Catherine Viviano gallery in New York, November 6 through the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The catalogue that Sage produced as an accompaniment to the exhibition, containing reproductions of seventeen mixed-media works as well as a poem by Sage, is a testament to her vision for this exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Despite a lack of archival documentation from the show, the catalogue has a physical presence unlike many exhibition brochures. Its materiality, layout, and content manage to give the reader a sense of the experience of an exhibition, rather than simply the documentation of one. Unlike the brochures and short catalogues handed out at most of Sage's shows that simply list exhibited works, offer short biographical statements, and reproduce works shown in the exhibition, this catalogue is an artist's book with a cohesive artistic voice and vision.

Overall, the book follows a very simple structure; on each double page spread, a black-and-white reproduction of a work faces a line from her poem paired with the title of the artwork. In order to reinforce the connection between the text and the art works, Sage prints the poem in its entirety at the end of the book and, on the opposing page, lists the titles of the works. Through the typographical design of the two pages, the titles and the lines of the poem line up visually, with each line of text in the poem corresponding to a title on the opposite page.

Sage makes it clear to the reader of *Your Move* that he is looking at an artist's book not only from the emphasis on her own creative output, rather than critical text, but also from the physical presence of the book.<sup>2</sup> Instead of printing on a lightweight white or cream paper, Sage reproduces her work on dark, heavy

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cardstock. This quickly signals to the reader from the moment he touches and lifts the book that it is of a greater importance than a typically ephemeral and strictly informative leaflet and is intended to have a more substantial existence.

The cardstock on which the book is printed not only conveys her intentions to the reader, but it also connects the book with the works, defined as “objects—collages,” reproduced inside. In a letter to Catherine Viviano, her gallerist, Sage explained that her main concerns were the quality and texture of the paper and the layout. She wanted the gray sheets to have “the quality of cardboard” and the reverse sides to be like “shiny” paper.<sup>3</sup> These textures mimic the textures found in the collages themselves. Sage utilized some combination of pale woods, silver metals, glass, and plastic for all of the objects, creating an overall sense of unity among the works in the series. Her choices of materials for the book helped to bring the reproductions to life and unify the text and images. Sage explained to Viviano how the works should correspond to the lines of text from the poem. She wanted the titles “large enough so that they are read together with the line of text.”

The book serves not only to unify the individual collages, nor simply to concretize them on substantial pages, but to create an intrinsic link between these works and her poem printed within, also titled, “Your Move.” By arranging them in a one-to-one correlation on each pair of pages, Sage uses the unified and linear nature of the poem to reinforce the similarities in the visual works. This simple correlation also serves to weave the meaning of the poem together with that of the works. Four elements of the series share the title “Your Move”: the exhibition as a whole, the publication, the poem, and an individual assemblage. The title solidifies the complementary relationship between these elements.

In order to understand fully Sage’s intentions in creating this artist’s book, and to help in analyzing its meaning, it is important to examine the details of her biography surrounding this exhibition. After decades of wandering the globe, Sage moved from Paris with her husband, Yves Tanguy, and settled into a farmhouse in Woodbury, Connecticut in 1941. They lived and painted there together until Tanguy’s sudden death in 1955. While the 1940s and early 50s had been an artistically prolific time for Sage, after her husband’s death she focused less attention on her own work, and devoted most of her time and energy into the creation of a catalogue raisonné for Tanguy.

As the decade wore on, Sage’s health began to fail and she developed cataracts in both of her eyes. Failed surgeries and a distrust of doctors prevented her from finding a successful solution. She became more and more secluded. While this affected her work greatly, it did not completely halt its production. In the final few years of her life, because of her failing eyesight, Sage turned away from her critically

successful paintings defined by meticulous brushstrokes, controlled palette, and elaborate compositions. Instead of completely abandoning all artistic practice, she shifted gears toward collage and assemblage as her new modes of visual expression. Sage said of “Your Move” in a letter to her friend Marcel Duhamel, “I’ll have a show ... of objects I’ve managed to make to replace paintings.”<sup>4</sup> Needing further creative outlets, Sage also became more a more prolific poet, an art form she had experimented with for decades.

In addition to her physical illnesses, Sage also struggled with mental illness around the time of “Your Move.” In 1958, she attempted suicide for the first time, but was found, taken to the hospital, and survived. In 1963, however, after completing this last body of work, she retried what had failed five years earlier and shot herself in the heart. It is important for the interpretation of this body of work to recognize the facts of Sage’s life at the time the works, poem, and book as a whole, were created.

Despite the new modes of expression Sage explored for “Your Move,” both the works themselves and the book as a whole, she did not abandon the ideas that were important to her throughout her career. She continued to engage issues of gender and location through a surrealist vocabulary, as she did in her oil paintings. She was aware, however, that the assemblages failed to capture the same complexity of ideas and depth of imagery as her paintings. Because of this, and because of her increasing interest in her own poetry, she combined both her new form of visual expression and her exploration of text. Each medium serves to bolster the other and make the book greater than the sum of its parts. In this way, Sage achieves depth and complexity in this body of work, despite the limitations of her failing eyes. When the artist’s book is taken as a whole, it becomes much more than a “game of artistic tiddlywinks,” as one critic called it.<sup>5</sup> Rather than simply objects for amusement or whimsical toys, Sage’s assemblages are deadly serious works that invoke themes of war and suicide.

While at first glance, “Your Move,” as well as her earlier paintings, do not present the viewer with an immediate autobiographical interpretation, Sage was working on and constructing a story of her life years before she began “Your Move,” setting the stage for subsequent autobiographical interpretations. After Tanguy’s sudden death in 1955, Sage wrote *China Eggs*, an autobiography covering the time from her childhood until her sister’s death in 1934. While sections of the memoir are written in a fairly traditional narrative style highlighting important events, Sage wrote much of the book as a dialogue between two voices. The first voice assumes the position of the main narrator. The secondary voice plays the role of sidekick, or challenger to the protagonist.

Sage conveys clearly in this text that she is disinterested in constructing an objectively linear narrative of her life. Instead, she omits all dates, avoiding fixing the events to a specific time. She even draws attention to this omission by writing, "I wish you would get these things straightened out ... Why don't you give a few dates?" To which the other voice responds, "It only matters that they did happen at some time. If you try to pin me down, I am going to lose interest entirely."<sup>6</sup> Through these two voices, Sage examines the inconsistencies intrinsic in memory and the problems with defining one's own identity in singular or authoritative terms.

Along these same lines, Sage presents to her reader an identity that is not uniform or static but changes with perspective. She calls her ability to adapt to different situations, specifically life with her mother versus life with her father, "chameleonism."<sup>7</sup> Sage furthers this description of her identity by likening the performance of identity to changing clothes. Her identity is not only described as being performative, but also a multiplicity of different elements. She wrote, "They're not really contradictions. They are just the two sides of a question. Sometimes they amalgamate and sometimes they don't. When they do, they become a combination rather than contradiction. That's what I am. I'm a combination."<sup>8</sup> The "two voices" structure that Sage employs further reinforces her view of herself as existing in multiple. Throughout the autobiography, Sage demonstrates her sense that identity is varied and performative.

Sage viewed gender as a particularly malleable aspect of her identity. Early on in *China Eggs*, when discussing her mother, Sage wrote, "Her mentality was more masculine than feminine. I think she would have liked to be a man. I have always delighted to be a woman."<sup>9</sup> This description of her mother's gender identity shows Sage's openness to the separation of gender identity from biological gender, a theory that would become popular decades later. She also asserts her femininity here. Being a woman is something that Sage clearly considered and felt strongly about, despite this placing her in the position of an outsider to most of the rest of the Surrealists. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, she almost contradicts herself later on when discussing sexuality. Sage wrote, "I didn't like women and I had nothing to say to them. I wonder how many women enjoy making love. I have never talked to any woman about it. I can only talk to men about such things and they don't seem to think many women enjoy it. Not the way I do. I don't know what's the matter with women."<sup>10</sup> While she does not rescind her comment about identifying strongly as a woman, Sage does express her dislike of her own gender and her preference of male company. This may explain why she was so quickly drawn to the art of an almost exclusively male group. *China Eggs* demonstrates how Sage's attitudes about gender shift depending on the context. When with her mother, whom she feels is very

“masculine,” she embraces her feminine side, but suppresses that side of herself in situations where it is a disadvantage. Rather than firmly defining her gender identity, Sage allows the identities of those around her to inform how she views herself. Her identity is reactionary, rather than immutable.

Another aspect of her identity that Sage discusses with frequency throughout *China Eggs* is her nationality. Despite being born in Albany, New York, Sage spent much of her youth and adulthood in Italy and France. Her identification with these countries, rather than her native one, is evident throughout the autobiography. She wrote, “Besides, English is not my native tongue. I write much better in French. I should have written this in French.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I told you I can’t spell French. But I do dream in French.”<sup>11</sup> Using the word “native,” she draws attention to her idea that her birth does not determine her nationality and what she feels most comfortable with. She is not concerned with the formal aspects of French except for the sounds, speaking it and dreaming in it. French, according to Sage, is something she does not associate with her intellect but with her creativity. In this way, she seems to try to separate herself from American artists and bring herself closer to those of France, specifically the Surrealists.

When she was writing this book, Sage was living in Connecticut. She was trying to show her reader that, despite having been born an American, having lived more in Italy than in France, and having returned to the United States, her heart still lies in France. Sage’s writing reveals that the part of herself defined by nationality can be chosen, or at least is not tied to a person’s birthplace. She actively constructs this aspect of her identity by taking control of how she is perceived.

This autobiography poignantly ends right before Sage and Tanguy’s meeting in Paris. Writing so close to his death, Sage was not yet able to process her years with him and his surrealist friends. Instead of examining these years of her life in narrative writing, Sage explored them through poetry, painting, and collage. The final culmination of this exploration was “Your Move.”

The title piece, an assemblage entitled *Your Move* (1961, Fig. 1), combines all of the major themes that concerned Sage throughout her oeuvre: chess, war, gender, and autobiography. For this work, Sage attached bullet cartridges standing upright on a cardboard and plywood base. The cartridges vary greatly in size and are all empty except for one, the largest, which still contains its bullet. The arrangement and size variation of the cartridges is reminiscent of chess pieces. Sage placed a cluster of the smallest ones toward one side of the base like a group of pawns being played early in the game, with a large bullet in the center dominating the board like the queen. The title *Your Move* also emphasizes the game aspect of this work. Chess is strictly a two-

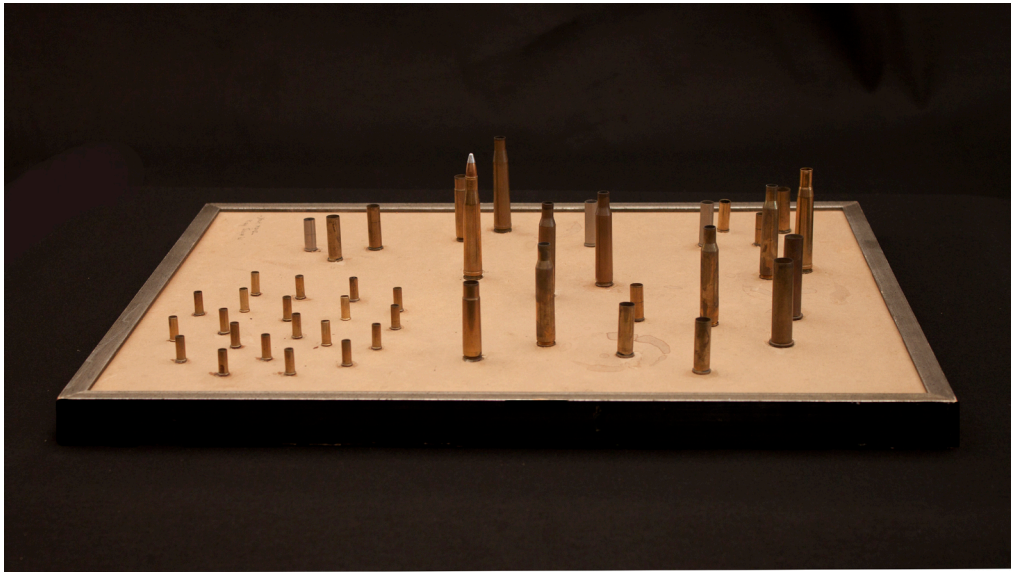


Fig. 1. Kay Sage, *Your Move*, 1960-61, mixed media construction, 20 x 16 inches, Collection of the Mattatuck Museum Arts & History Center, Waterbury, Connecticut, Gift of the Estate of Kay Sage, 1964-65

player game in which control of the board alternates back and forth between players. By saying, “your move,” the first person relinquishes control to the second, in a way, challenging them.

While *Your Move* is the title piece of the show and exemplifies many of the themes that Sage is concerned with, *Palais de Glace* (1961) is a visual and textual representation of Sage’s attitude toward identity (Fig. 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Like many of the other assemblages in the exhibition, Sage used tin foil and glass to create the composition of *Palais de Glace*. She covered the background of this small, paperback sized work in crinkled and cratered tin foil. Caged in by a large frame and glass pane, seventeen uniform, glass spheres rest on top of the foil. Because the balls roll around the foil landscape when the work is moved and bounce into each other in an infinite number of combinations, *Palais de Glace* is an incredibly dynamic and constantly changing assemblage. Light reflects off of the background and through the balls adding to the sense of motion and liveliness. This movement is echoed in the line of poetry associated with *Palais de Glace*, “and can still be played.” Just like the activity constantly taking place in this assemblage, the phrase implies that the playing of this game is an activity that can be repeated an unlimited number of



Fig. 2. Kay Sage, *Palais de Glace*, 1961, mixed media construction, 6 x 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, Collection of the Mattatuck Museum Arts & History Center, Waterbury, Connecticut, Gift of the Estate of Kay Sage, 1964-65

times. Like the identity that Sage realizes will forever be out of control, this game has been snapped free of order and rationale. All of this chaos, however, takes place in the safe confines of a sturdy wooden frame. In the same way that Sage is presenting an irrational identity within the rational and controlled production of a book that she oversees, so too is this rule-free game controlled by the confines she places on it. The title, *Palais de Glace*, further emphasizes Sage's message that the transitory nature of identity makes it a fragile entity. Like a glass palace that can easily be shattered, identity, and ultimately life, can be easily shattered by a variety of external and internal forces.

While they have been abstracted and might not be immediately evident to the casual observer, most of the ideas that Sage infused into this work come from her life and experiences with Tanguy and the Surrealists. Notably, the bouncing of the glass beads off of each other creating new trajectories imitates the scattering of balls that occurs in a game of pool. This is an important visual reference because it engages the importance of pool in her home and her relationship with Tanguy. As Suther explains, Tanguy had a terrible drinking problem and had the habit of banging his skull on the walls and other objects. To help combat this horrible tendency, Sage bought a pool table. Julien Levy remembers this period in their lives

in his memoir stating:

Yves agreed to install a huge and beautiful—the finest—billiard table they could find, in their vast and immaculate drawing room. Yves was immensely cheered. The shotguns were put away out of sight, the drinking tempered to improve his game, and the billiard balls were happily banged against each other, morning, afternoon, and night, to Yves' great satisfaction, and the relief of his friends, who found visits with him safer and more peaceful.<sup>12</sup>

This passage is evidence of the importance and centrality of billiards in their lives. It was not only a game that allowed them to pass the time in a pleasant way, but a tool used to control Tanguy and make him easier for both Sage and their company to handle. Its role as a useful device in combating the chaos and pain of having a violent, alcoholic husband moved the game of pool out of the realm of mere amusement for Sage. Instead, this pleasant pastime became a marker of her role as a wife to the volatile artist and a keeper of peace in their highly structured, well kept house.

The final reference Sage seems to be making in this assemblage is the book *Your Move* as a whole. In preparing this catalogue, she was unsure at first whether to include descriptions with the works' titles at the end of the booklet. In one of only two instances in the catalogue, she noted the number of objects included in a work, by mocking up a page for *Palais de Glace* on which she wrote, "17 free glass beads on tin-foil, under glass." Seventeen is not only the number of glass beads in this assemblage, but also the number of works in the exhibition, and the number of lines in the poem. This close numerical relationship emphasizes the parallel nature of the poem and the assemblages, which act to enhance each other's meanings in the visual/textual interface. The balls themselves visualize the bouncing around of ideas from work to work that occurs between the visual and the textual modes of expression. No linear or organized thread exists throughout the works in the exhibit, instead, the viewer can see how she had many ideas that influenced each other in an organic, fluid way. Their sound and motion is a literal representation of the play of ideas in Sage's and the viewer's mind.

The poem that appears in *Your Move* is seventeen lines long and divided into two stanzas. It works to reinforce the motifs and tone of the assemblages as it runs parallel to them.



These are games without issue  
some have been played  
and are therefore static  
others will be  
and can still be played  
there are no rules  
no one can win or lose  
they are arbitrary  
and irrelevant  
but there is no reason why  
anything should mean more  
than its own statement  
two and two  
do not necessarily make four...

If that is a scientist at my door  
please tell him  
to go away.

In the first five lines, Sage explains how the game of her identity is played out. Some parts are still being worked out “and can still be played.” They are influenced by the pieces around her, bumped and changed, forcing the power dynamics to shift. Her nationality is one example of a changeable characteristic that shifted according to the company she kept and her geographic location. Other sections of her identity, like her life with Tanguy, have been defined, settled, and completed, “and are therefore static.” At the end of the first stanza and into the second, Sage also explains that she is not merely a combination of moments and encounters strung together like simple addition. Her identity is much more complex. A simple and easy answer, like “two and two,” cannot be found. Neither math nor science, logical and rule-based systems, can find an explanation for her dynamic identity. These ideas expressed in this poem work in conjunction with the visual element of the assemblages by adding to and reinforcing each other. The titles of the works, printed on the same pages as the lines of poetry, work in the same way. Each mode of expression—textual and visual—enhances the other, creating a more dynamic and complex message about identity.

Generally, the implication of this phrase, “your move,” is that there will eventually be a winner and a loser. When Sage begins the poem, however, she turns this idea on its head. There is no goal of the games, they are “without issue” and

“no one can win or lose.” She takes one of the fundamental ideas that make games what they are and removes it. Sage also eliminates the notion of rules. While games have varying degrees of rigidity, without rules they become unstructured play. Sage, however, still asserts that they are games. By doing away with the concepts that confine games into a specific category and type of activity, she is aligning them, and therefore her assemblages and ultimately herself, with Surrealism. Having been founded on the principles of automatic writing and a dissolving of the rules that govern the conscious world, games where rules and winning are no longer the driving forces, are surrealist in nature. By defining these games as such, she emphatically aligns herself with the group of which she had always sat slightly on the periphery.

The other implication of the phrase “your move” is that there are two people, the speaker and the person being spoken to. At the point in a game when this saying is uttered, one person has just taken his or her turn, done something to advance their position, and they are relinquishing control to their opponent. This idea of an opponent, or a recipient of the words being spoken, is also implied at the end of the poem when she says, “please tell him.” She is asking the undefined listener to perform an action.

Sage’s opponent—the recipient of these two directives—is left unidentified, leaving the role open to be filled in a variety of ways. Most clearly, Sage’s opponent was Tanguy. Her husband, who had played opposite her for much of her adult life, had died. His absence left a void, as she no longer had anyone to respond to her call to play, no one to counter her statements. The indistinct opponent in this poem highlights the ever-present absence that Tanguy’s death created in Sage’s life.

More abstractly, Sage’s opponent is her uncontrollable surrounding. By calling out to no one in particular, she calls out to everyone who encounters her words, readers she cannot and will not ever know. She is presenting this unknown and unidentifiable world with an image of her identity and then challenges its ability to know her, understanding that history does not play by any rules or rationale.

Sage continues by instructing her reader to take everything at face value because it should not “mean more/ than its own statement.” She is encouraging the readers of the book simply to enjoy the playful aspect of these seemingly meaningless games. She then contradicts this statement, realigning herself with the beginning of the poem. She says, “two and two/ do not necessarily make four...” The answers to the questions may not be straightforward and based on the rules that seem to govern the world around us. Instead, identity formation is a more complicated, indefinable and organic process. A life cannot simply be constructed from an accumulation of combinatory parts. With the second person singular

pronoun *you*, Sage draws the viewer into interpretative statements and presentations about how *life* works in a universal way so that her implied comments about *life* become *your life* for the viewer, a life that is now in relation with Sage herself through her direct use of personal address. With this idea, Sage does not instruct the viewer but leaves him in the middle of a thought, forcing him or her to think independently for a moment and question everything she has just said.

Sage's incorporation of autobiographical elements in her abstract work and her use of text in the exhibition catalogue can be understood better when reading this work as an autobiographical act using a textual/visual interface as its mode of expression. In their introduction to the anthology of essays on women's autobiographical acts, *Interfaces: Women/ Autobiography/ Image/ Performance*, the editors Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith give the reader a brief, but insightful, introduction to their perspective on the self-representational acts of female artists. The scholars break down common conceptions of this mode of identity definition that find it narcissistic, male, and based on truth. Crucial to their argument is the understanding that, while it has been seen differently in the past, autobiography is not truth, or merely a "mirror" of reality.<sup>13</sup> In fact, when it comes to identity, truth and reality are non-existent. The "self" being expressed changes with time, situation, mode of expression, and the individual's selective engagement with influences. Smith and Watson explain that autobiography, as a person's image of his or herself at a given time in their life, is not something fixed or true. This notion is filtered through the processes of time, external influences such as social constructions and expectations, and the individual's physical being and the intent of their storytelling: "Identities, therefore, are discursive, provisional, intersectional, and unfixd."<sup>14</sup>

Watson and Smith further explain that, by creating a work in which she is the object being represented, the woman artist is engaging the long history of women being the muse and object of the gaze in art. This gaze has always given the woman a biography different from the one that she perceives herself as having. Women must also acknowledge their status as outsiders in the art world. They are placed in the difficult position of trying to change the "cultural constructions of femininity."<sup>15</sup> Women are attempting to critique both the masculine traditions that have come before them and are also engaging them as a mode of self-representation. The female autobiography is both empowering in giving artists the opportunity to reclaim the way they are looked at and complicating in the difficult history through which they themselves artistically developed.

Watson and Smith go on to explain that in autobiographical works by female artists, the artists often employ a visual/textual interface in order to express the "intersectional" and constructed nature of their personal narrative. In this

intersection the artists are negotiating their identities as well as engaging and adapting the works of others that have influenced them. In Sage's work, the text and the visual elements are side by side, neither subordinated by the other. The collages are much more overtly biographical and, without them, it would be a stretch to read the poem through this lens. It is the visual nods to her life that allow the meanings of the poem to unfold. The text does the same for the assemblages. Without them, their nature as games and their interaction with each other would be harder to find. This combinatory language itself mimics a game, with the intersection and interaction of the text and the images acting like the back and volley of action and reaction inherent in many forms of play. Collectively, a complex and ever-changing portrait of Sage emerges.

None of the associations Sage makes in either the text or visual elements in the "Your Move" exhibition are accidental. With the same carefully controlled and contrived attitude that she took toward everything in her life, from her oil painting to the appearance of her home, Sage developed these neat, clean and precise assemblages that alluded to Tanguy, as well as other artists that she admired and whose works they owned, such as Paul Delvaux, Giorgio de Chirico, and André Breton. She alludes as well to her own earlier works—such as *No One Heard Thunder*, (1939), *Near Five Corners* (1943), and *Watching the Clock* (1958)—forming a complex web of references to her life. Sage sets up this perspective on herself by using the main metaphor of games. When playing a game of chess, pool, or almost any game, one's position on the board, whether as queen or cue ball, determines whether they are at an advantage or disadvantage. Their situation and subsequent strategy is determined not only by where they are on the table or board, but where all of the other pieces are positioned at the moment. In the same way, her location and her peers, as well as her gender, age, and biography determined Sage's identity. Her status as an outsider was determined not only by the fact that she was female trying to gain acceptance in a predominately male group of artists but also by her status as a wealthy American. Gender, nationality, and economic prosperity all distinguished her from the group within which she sought a place. In her later years in New York, however, she was both an outsider and an insider. She was a wealthy American with citizenship that saved her and her husband from the war but she was creating art under the heading of Surrealism past the time it was in vogue, still a woman in what was essentially a man's world. Sage's identity and the power dynamics that surrounded her, like a Queen in a game of chess, were not fixed and permanent, but rather fluctuated in reaction to a large number of outside factors.

Games were not only an apt metaphor for Sage, they harked back to her roots in Surrealism. The Surrealists were fond of not only taking games and

reinventing them, but also inventing their own forms of play. The most prevalent of these was called *le cadavre exquis*, or exquisite corpse. In its original incarnation this was a verbal game but, in its visual version, it became as popular. Andre Breton explained the rules of the game in the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*. He said:

**Exquisite Corpse.** Game of folded leaflets consisting in having some people compose a sentence or a drawing, none of whom is allowed to make use of the previous cooperation of other people. The example, turned out as classic, that gave its name to the game, comes from the first sentence they got in this way: *The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine.*<sup>16</sup>

The two main elements active in this game were chance and community. Chance is the most often cited factor that drew Breton and his followers to this game. Each artist knew what they were going to create in their section of the leaflet, but the drawings by each were brought together by chance creating something that tapped into the collective unconscious of the group. Therefore, community was an important element to the “magic” of this game. As J.H. Matthews explained in *Languages of Surrealism*, “Their abiding interest in games is a sign of continuing trust in a force outside reason, gathering strength and taking direction from the participation of several persons at once.”<sup>17</sup> All of these elements helped to further the Surrealists’ goal of connecting the inner life of the subconscious and the external life of the waking world.

Community, partnership, and the bouncing of ideas from one person to another, were absolutely vital concepts to Sage’s creation of “Your Move.” The title itself implies an interaction between one person and another and the melding of ideas in the artist’s book between text and images, images and images, and text and text, perform in a similar manner as the collaborative nature of the exquisite corpse. When creating an exquisite corpse, the drawing that every person creates has one meaning or impact when taken by itself. It is, however, the interaction of these individual drawings that creates the meaning and interest of the work. The interaction of ideas by individuals bouncing off of each other and changing each other is a metaphor for Sage’s perspective on identity. By reading this fundamental game of Surrealism as a metaphor for Sage’s perspective on identity, her message of multiplicity in *Your Move* becomes elucidated.

The identity that Sage presents is paradoxical. On one side, she was a

meticulous person who structured her life exactly the way she saw fit. She was a careful, controlling person on the outside always managing her life and her work to the finest detail. The paradox is, however, that the identity she so calculatingly constructs in *Your Move* is, like her inner reality, chaotic, never stable and never defined. She presents an identity through this work that is out of control, like ricocheting pool balls, influenced by outside forces. This identity is contingent on her surroundings and influences, incorporating to varying degrees her adopted and native countries and the many strong personalities in her life, not least of which was her husband, Tanguy. Understanding that identity is elusive, Sage created *Your Move* to put confines on her uncontrollable legacy.

- 1 Kay Sage, *Your Move* (New York: Catharine Viviano Gallery, 1961).
- 2 Unless otherwise specified, *Your Move* refers to the artist's book combining the poem and assemblages.
- 3 Letter from Kay Sage to Catherine Viviano, October 4, 1961, AAA no. 2013.
- 4 Judith D. Suther, *A House of Her Own: Kay Sage, Solitary Surrealist* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 212.
- 5 Brian O'Doherty, "Art, Wry Constructions," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1961, 30.
- 6 Kay Sage, *China Eggs/Les Oeufs de Porcelaine*. ed. tans. Elisabeth Manuel, ed. Judith Suther (Charlotte and Seattle: Starbooks/L'Etoile, 1996), 244.
- 7 Sage, 70.
- 8 Sage, 46.
- 9 Sage, 9.
- 10 Sage, 178.
- 11 Sage, 174.
- 12 Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 268.
- 13 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women/ Autobiography/ Image/ Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 8.
- 14 Smith and Watson, 10.
- 15 Smith and Watson, 13.
- 16 André Breton, *Il Cadavere squisito, la sua esaltazione* (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1975), 5, 8.
- 17 J. H. Matthews, *Languages of Surrealism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 120.