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The Shameful Life of
SALVADOR DALÍ

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goes further in the same direction: 'Dalí exposed Surrealism's erotic motivations by linking it to the basic realities. Here he routs any poetic illusions which might have given the surrealists refuge. Dealt a death blow, they hastily expelled Dalí - too late, however, to save themselves from being eclipsed by the young painter from Barcelona.'¹¹¹

In 1993, forty years after he first met Dalí at the St Regis, Morse's scorn for Surrealism was unimpaired. 'The fly,' he wrote in *Animal Crackers*, 'fascinated Dalí as it has no other painter, and always with reasons that went light years beyond Surrealism.'¹¹² And in the same place he made perhaps his most muddleheaded statement of all:

Dalí's early attempts at a double image in his *Allegory of Sunset-Air* around 1930 are a fascinating metamorphosis. His works in this vein went totally unappreciated, and were clearly well over the heads of his Surrealist consorts. This was for only one reason. The transformation was the epitome of his Surrealism, but being SURREALISTS they totally missed Dalí's contribution both actual and potential to their wobbly movement, and one ill-timed for in the Great Depression of 1930 the world was in no mood for art without discernable [sic] reason to which one could cling in a global slump.¹¹⁴

Another major defect apparent in all Morse's writings on Dalí is his utterly unquestioning acceptance of the 'paranoiac-critical method', which, despite his determination to 'explain' Dalí to the American layman, he never seeks to elucidate. The so-called method is simply taken for granted. This lack is all the more glaring when we are asked to believe, for example, that early in 1929 it was 'actually functioning even though its literary definitions had not yet been spelled out'.¹¹⁵ For Morse, in 1973, the unexplained 'method' is 'no longer just a literary conceit promulgated by a half-mad surrealist clown. Instead it has become a respectable method of stimulating ideas with bio-feedback along brain wave channels as well as a means of eliminating the dangerous hallucinogenic drugs.'¹¹⁶ Once passing time enables a true perspective, moreover, 'Picasso's Cubism and Dalí's Paranoiac-Critical Method will turn out to be the two predominant influences in the [sic] 20th century art.' Not even Dalí ever made such a claim for his non-existent method.¹¹⁷

Then there is Morse's obsession with 'Dalinian Continuity', a term borrowed from Michel Tapié's 1957 study of the painter. 'Dalinian Continuity' means that Dalí repeats himself over and over again, but Morse never considers the possibility that such repetition is a flaw. On the contrary, he sees it a virtue. If a rose appears in two paintings separated by forty years, 'the importance of both these works is increased by Dalinian

Continuity';¹¹⁸ 'Dalinian iconography and Dalinian Continuity become inseparable as one traces the figure of the nurse sitting on the beach from work to work';¹¹⁹ we can enjoy a 'superb example of Dalinian Continuity' by comparing the figure who indicates an ellipse in *William Tell* (1930) and the one pointing at the egg in *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man* (1943); in *The Font* (1939) a 'white spot of holy light' over the grail [sic] is 'the same focal point that 28 years later reappears as a dot in [the] sail in *The Dream of Columbus*, thus reaffirming the inexorable principle that unifies so much of Dalí's oeuvre: Dalinian Continuity!'¹²⁰ In his attempt to prove that Dalí is Picasso's peer, Morse takes much comfort from 'Dalinian Continuity'. 'All of Dalí's art is linked into a single metaphysical unit by the phenomenon of Dalinian Continuity,' he assures us, 'yet in all Picasso's giant catalog there is nothing even remotely resembling the re-use of certain symbols that link Dalí's works of various periods into a concatenous manifestation.'¹²¹

In his seminal *Dada and Surrealism* (1968) William Rubin concluded that Morse wrote more as an apologist for Dalí's later work than an art critic or historian capable of risking value judgements. The assessment was not unfair.¹²² Reynolds Morse's monumental *A Dalí Journal*, however, is a major achievement. When published, hopefully without too many cuts (Morse can be hard on Dalí's entourage), the diary will prove to be our most detailed and reliable source for the day-to-day practicalities and impracticalities, the grandeur and the misery, of Dalí's life over four decades. 'Today,' Morse wrote in 1993, 'this Dalí Journal had turned me into a kind of mini-Boswell to Dalí's Johnson as my mother once prophesied many years ago.' Mrs Morse knew her son. The journal is of priceless value and Morse's true talent, beyond a doubt, is that of Dalinian chronicler.¹²³

The Rhinoceros and DNA

It was probably early in 1950 that Emmanuel Looten, a little-known Flemish poet, had made Dalí the unexpected and 'gelatinous' gift of a rhinoceros horn. 'This horn will save my life!' Dalí exclaimed to Gala, without quite knowing why.¹²⁴ Dalí had never before had the opportunity of inspecting a rhinoceros horn. Now he actually owned one. It had to be significant! The rhinoceros was added to his list of obsessive icons in two paintings done the same year: the second version of *The Madonna of Port Lligat* and *Rhinoceros in Disintegration*.¹²⁵ Then, on 5 July 1952, Dalí felt that his spontaneous prediction to Gala on receiving the gift was coming

true when suddenly he perceived that the painting of Christ on which he was then working was made up of . . . rhino horns! There could be no doubt about it. 'You should have seen me fall to my knees in my studio, like a real madman,' he wrote in his diary. Now that the revelation had burst upon him, he began to perceive rhinoceros horns in all his paintings, even in the ones done years earlier. How could he have failed to notice their presence before? He saw them out of doors, too – among the micaschist metamorphoses of Cape Creus and, particularly, in a projection on top of the Great Masturbator rock at Cullaró. It was clear that he must now exploit rhino horns fully, making up for lost time.¹²⁶

XXXVI One of Dalí's first efforts in the new genre was *Young Virgin Auto-Sodomized by the Horns of her Own Chastity* (1954). Based on a photograph he had seen in a sex magazine,¹²⁷ it was bought, fittingly, by the Playboy Collection (Los Angeles), for of all Dalí's paintings in praise of the female bottom it is the most blatantly erotic. Dalí, tongue in cheek, had no difficulty in denying the phallic nature of the picture's horns. 'The rhinoceros horn is derived from the unicorn, the symbol of chastity,' he told Reynolds Morse. 'Paradoxically this painting which has an erotic appearance is the most chaste of all.'¹²⁸

Rhino horns appeared in another painting done this year, *Dalí Naked Contemplating Five Regular Bodies Metamorphosed into Corpuscles in Which Suddenly Appears Leonardo's Leda Chromosomized by the Face of Gala*. The horns were accompanied by an element making its first appearance in Dalí's work and soon to become another new icon: the DNA molecule. As someone with a paranoid grandfather who had committed suicide, Dalí could hardly fail to be interested in the transmission of hereditary factors, and DNA really excited him. It had been identified in 1930, but it was only with Francis Crick and James Dewey Watson's model of the double helix structure of the molecule, published in 1953, that it caught the popular imagination – and Dalí's, as this painting shows.

The setting is a stylized Cape Creus. A 'hyperrealist' Dalí kneels on the shore with his left leg underwater and his genitals somewhat ludicrously hidden by a suspended sea urchin. Beside him, on the seabed, sleeps the same dog that had appeared in two works done in 1950. Gala's head (which does not look like her head at all) is formed of a whirl of molecules and rhinoceros horns surrounded by coloured molecules.¹²⁹ Reynolds Morse was about to buy the painting when Dalí introduced the coloured molecules, which presumably he had planned from the outset. The collector was horrified. He felt the balls added confusion and detracted

'from the impact of the great little work with Dalí kneeling there in the nude':

I felt this was a truly super-work until the artist decided 'to crap it up'. I used those words to Dalí in declining to buy this final version, and while he pretended not to understand my bold and impetuous position, I stood my ground. At the end Gala got into the act. She said her price for the work was set so high because Dalí had spent so many hours suffering as he kneeled in front of a mirror in the nude trying to capture his own pose.¹³⁰

At about the time that the DNA molecules began to pullulate in his work Dalí decided that Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* was also composed of rhinos' horns, surprising the staff at the Louvre with the 'copy' they allowed him to do from the original, in which the picture became an explosion of cones. Dalí commented darkly at a later date: 'These horns being the only ones in the animal kingdom constructed in accordance with a perfect logarithmic spiral, as in this painting, it is this very logarithmic perfection that guided Vermeer's hand in painting *The Lacemaker*.'¹³¹

Dalí's new-found rhinomania led to a film project to take the place of *The Wheelbarrow of Flesh*. It was called *The Prodigious History of the Lacemaker and the Rhinoceros*, and to work with him Dalí used a twenty-eight-year-old French photographer from Nevers whom he had met recently in Paris, Robert Descharnes. Several scenes of the film were shot between 1954 and 1961, one of them at Vincennes Zoo (where a reluctant rhinoceros was encouraged unsuccessfully to charge a reproduction of *The Lacemaker*), but it was never finished. Over these years Robert Descharnes increasingly gained the confidence of Dalí and Gala, took more than 18,000 pictures of the couple and began to study the painter's life and work. Years later he was to become the Dalís' last secretary.¹³²

Dalí made sure that he obtained the maximum publicity for his rhinomania. On 17 December 1955 he arrived at the Sorbonne in an open Rolls Royce filled with cauliflowers to deliver a lecture entitled 'Phenomenological Aspects of the Paranoiac-Critical Method'. It was one of the most brilliant performances of his career, and the students loved his closely argued thesis that cauliflowers, sunflowers and rhino backsides share a common morphology based on logarithmic spirals.¹³³ One of those present praised Dalí's ability as a debunker. 'We badly need superior entertainers to enable us to laugh at our familiar gods,' wrote Alain Jouffroy.¹³⁴

Dalí said later how amused he had been, as a result of his further investigations, to learn that the rhino takes its time over copulation – an

hour and half to be precise. He had also discovered that (like himself) the beast has a marked anal fixation and is given to studying its stools. Over the next few years Dalí got up to other rhino antics, was photographed by Philip Halsman deep in conversation with one of the creatures and even thought of launching a review with Albert Skira called . . . *Rhinocéros*.¹³⁵

New players

The mid-fifties saw the arrival on the Dalinian scene of three people who, in different ways, were to play significant roles in the painter's life.

The first was Isidor Bea, a forty-five-year-old scenery designer from Torres del Segre, in the province of Lleida. Bea had studied art and scenography in Barcelona, and after the civil war (which he never liked to talk about) worked for the stage designer Francesc Pou before setting up his own studio with two associates. He was employed by all the leading Barcelona theatres and acquired a considerable reputation. In the summer of 1955 he received an unexpected commission: to paint a ceiling in Palamós based on a small picture by Salvador Dalí. When Dalí was invited to view the result he was greatly impressed, the more so when they told him that it had only taken Bea one day, and he asked to be introduced.

Bea was just the person that Dalí needed at a time when he was planning a series of large-scale paintings, for, as a scenographer, he was used to laying out theatrical backdrops and had an unerring eye for perspective. Moreover he was affable, discreet, totally reliable and highly industrious. So Dalí determined to engage him. There was some initial haggling by Gala, but an agreement was reached. It was the beginning of a collaboration that was to last for thirty years. Soon Bea was helping Dalí to map out his giant *The Last Supper*. To make the task easier, a special pulley was installed in Port Lligat which enabled the canvas to be raised and lowered through a crack in the floor to the eye-level height that Dalí required. Thanks to Bea, the painting, which measured 167 x 295 cm, was finished before the Dalís returned to New York that autumn.¹³⁶

'I'm a painter from birth but a stage painter.' Bea said shortly before his death:

In Barcelona they taught us classical painting, you know, all the tricks, the basic rules for different styles and, of course, perspective. Particularly perspective, and the technique of how to blow up a small picture into a huge one. For me this became a purely mechanical matter. Quite straightforward. It wasn't easy for me at first to adapt to Señor Dalí, though – he had a very strong personality, a very contradictory personality. But we were soon getting along well. When he was with me he was

always perfectly normal, but the moment a journalist arrived he would begin to put on a show.

Bea soon realized that Dalí and Gala functioned like a limited company. 'It had taken them a long time to achieve success, and having done so they weren't going to give anything away to anyone else. That's the way they were. They took me on as an assistant and by God I worked hard. I was a sort of robot imbued with the spirit of Dalí.' The first summer Bea lived at the nearby Hotel Port Lligat, but then Dalí did up a shack for him next door. He was expected to slave, like Dalí, from dawn to dusk, and the painter only grudgingly allowed him Sundays off when Bea insisted that he was a practising Catholic and was obliged to go to mass and to rest.¹³⁷

By the time Bea began to work for Dalí the painter had met Peter Moore, who later became his secretary. Moore was born in London in 1919. His father, John Moore, an Irishman from Cork, was a tunnel engineer with Vickers Armstrong, and worked on the Continent. His mother was Liverpool Irish. When Moore was young the family alternated between Ostend and Nice. An only child, he got on well with his father, who was something of a character, and would always be grateful to him for insisting that he become fluent in French. 'If you acquire perfect French you'll be two people, and you'll earn twice as much,' he used to say. Moore took him at his word but went one better: by the age of ten he not only spoke French like a native but excellent Italian, thanks to an Italian maid who worked for them in Nice, and some Flemish.

When he was fourteen, and attending a private school in Nice, Peter Moore lost both his parents in a car crash. Since his father and mother had no brothers or sisters, the orphan was looked after by a guardian, Mr Watkins. And when, in 1938, aged almost twenty, he joined the British army's Royal Corps of Signals, he found his second home. He loved it. 'The army made me self-reliant, tough. I owe everything to the army. Without the war I'd probably have spent my life working in an Irish pub.' With his parents dead, no relatives, no fiancée and no ties, Signalman Moore was free to devote his energies fully to the army.

He did so with great success. His totally fluent French (he could easily pass himself off as a Frenchman) was of particular interest to the Signals Corps, and in no time, with the coming of the war, he was a corporal. In 1940 he went to Cherbourg with the British Expeditionary Force and was made a lance sergeant. Then, in 1942, came the landing in Algiers, where Moore was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Soon afterwards he was enlisted in Psychological Warfare, 'a strange outfit half civilian, half