

What Dalí Owes *La nature*

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Introduction

La nature was an essential magazine for the surrealists. Existing scholarship has attended to the interest shown in the magazine by André Breton, Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, Raymond Roussel, Alfred Jarry, and Marcel Duchamp, but leaving aside some passing comments by Michel Poivert (4), no previous study has addressed the long connection between Salvador Dalí and this important magazine. This essay presents more than fifty *La nature* images that Dalí used between 1932 and 1948 directly and that materially influenced five paintings, three books, a book advertisement, two *Minotaure* articles, a *Minotaure* cover, and the extraordinary 1936 Julien Levy exhibition catalogue. Analysis of these images will illuminate several misleading passages about paintings in significant books and exhibition catalogues.¹ Inevitably there are similarities with Ernst, not least because they both used the same corpus of *La nature* issues: 1878 to 1908. The surrealists' fascination with *La nature* began with Ernst. Ernst's *La nature* work has been widely studied – first by Werner Spies (1974), later by Charlotte Stokes (1980), and lately by Michel Chemineau (2012). Dalí continued the work laid out by Ernst by 1929, but with a stronger emphasis on the concealment of nature.

La nature, subtitled *Revue de sciences et leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie*, was a weekly magazine founded in 1873 by Gaston Tissandier, who remained its editor-in-chief until 1896. Within the editorial context of the late nineteenth-century, *La nature* was an innovative publication in many respects, above all in that it established a new visual language for scientific information. Unlike the largely decorative imagery of previous publications, in *La nature* illustrations played a fundamental role, integral to the scientific discourse. This is the notion to which Michel Chemineau subscribes when he asserts that “[U]n des grands mérites de *La nature* aura été de valoriser le statut de l’image dans la presse scientifique” ‘one of *La nature*'s greatest merits would be to elevate the status of the image in the scientific press,’ due to the decisive act of introducing an “aesthetic factor” to its approach to the subject (93).

¹ Dalí's 1970 retrospective at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, Robert Descharnes' 1984 *Dalí: L'œuvre et l'homme*, and the 2004-05 centenary retrospective at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The extraordinary imagery in *La nature* had seduced authors the surrealists admired such as Jarry and Roussel. The latter, Dalí's favorite writer, admired the luxurious bindings, the "couvertures bleues du journal *La nature*" 'blue covers of *La nature* magazine' (qtd. in Caradec 216; 188). Duchamp, one of the first admirers of Roussel's *Locus solus* and a great fan of scientific dissemination, was also a regular reader of *La nature* (Chemineau 265-89).

More important than these general notes of approval was the igniting spark of Ernst. As Ernst himself explained two decades later, it was in 1919 that he immersed himself in the images of *La nature* and was provoked by the absurd assembly of images from which he "[a transformé] en drames" 'transformed into revealing dramas' his "plus secrets désirs" 'most secret desires' (*Écritures* 259; *Beyond Painting* 14).

Five years later, in 1924, as Breton was preparing a publication on surrealism, Pierre Naville appeared in Breton's apartment with *La nature* under his arm, arguing that if they followed the pattern of the outdated and positivist-inspired newspaper, it would distance them from the stereotype of modern, artistic publications (Naville 104). Thereafter, *La nature* served as a model for the preparation of the new body of propaganda, *The Surrealist Revolution*, that saw publication later that year.

In 1929 Ernst achieved his most powerful use of *La nature's* images with his first collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes*. Breton was now thoroughly enthralled by both *La nature* and Ernst's work. Breton's introduction to *La femme 100 têtes* explicitly mentioned *La nature*, Breton and Éluard quoted *La nature* verbatim, without reference, in their co-written 1930 book, *L'Immaculé Conception*,² and Breton produced several collages in Ernst's style using images taken from another of Tissandier's publications, *Récréations scientifiques ou l'enseignement par les jeux* (1880).

Dalí's First Sightings of Ernst's *La nature* Collages

In his early stage of adopting surrealist practice, Dalí was watching Ernst. *La révolution surréaliste* no. 8 from December 1926 includes a 1925 Ernst painting of a cow, *La belle saison*, that Dalí faced toward the apparition of a bird in his 1928 painting *Spectral Cow*. Breton mentioned Ernst's collages in *La révolution surréaliste* no. 9-10, but no images of collage accompany Breton's article ("Surréalisme" 39). By 1928, Dalí had not yet incorporated collage into his surrealist images. Hence, Dalí finally saw Ernst's surrealist collages either in April 1929 when he met Breton in Paris or May at the collage exhibition in Camille Goemans's Paris gallery (Dalí, *Collected Writings* 111-14). What was exhibited there is not well known, but even if Dalí did not see inspiring collage there, he would see them in print soon after. Dalí

² See the comments of M. Bonnet and E.-A. Hubert on Breton (*Œuvres* 1645-46) and Hubert, "D'une imagerie."

was eagerly anticipating *Variétés* magazine's June special issue, *Le surréalisme*, which would include two of Ernst's *La femme 100 têtes* collages (*Collected Writings* 109-11).³ Finally, only two months after Dalí left Paris, *La femme 100 têtes* was published with Breton's introduction mentioning *La nature*. Immediately, Dalí began collaging elements into his paintings *The First Days of Spring*, and *The Accommodations of Desire*. The latter is the first visual work incorporating collage to be printed in *La révolution surréaliste* (no. 12, Dec. 1929, 18).

Whether Dalí had yet seen *La nature* itself is doubtful; it would be almost three more years before anything from *La nature* would appear in Dalí's work. The printed sources of Dalí's 1929 collages remain unknown; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which owns *The Accommodations of Desire*, suggests that the lion probably came from a children's book.

***La nature* Up to 1933**

It is very likely, though not confirmed, that Dalí discovered *La nature* through the surrealists in Paris. What is certain is that between the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933, the magazine was on Dalí's desk, Ernst's examples were on his mind, and by the end of the year, twenty *La nature* images appeared in Dalí's work.

Through 1932, Dalí was working on the text of his paranoiac-critical analysis of Jean Francois Millet's *The Angelus* (Adès 2). One of Dalí's central claims in his analysis is that it depicts masochistic masculinity coupled with predatory femininity. In his many depictions of this couple, there is a sickly excess of love between the boy child and an overbearing mother. The male child here is fearfully overawed by emotionally controlling female power. From *La nature* (1901-1: 306)⁴ Dalí extracted the image of the Surinam toad (*Pipa dorsiguera*) (*Mythe tragique* 54). This female Surinam toad has eggs embedded in the skin of her back, in Dalí's interpretation, a male child trapped inside the body of the mother, struggling to escape.

The advertisement for Dalí's book, *Babaouo*, a film script which first saw the light of day in mid-1932, was a multi-colored poster of gouache and the collage of two *La nature* images, two photographs of a woman gesticulating vehemently (fig. 1).

³ Furthermore, in early 1930, Breton's Ernst-inspired collages were published in the first issue of the Belgian journal *Documents* 34 (66).

⁴ The different numbers of *La Nature* appeared every week and were collected in two annual volumes. The first six-month period included December of the previous year and concluded in May, and the second six-month period covered June to November. Bearing in mind this distribution model, when referring to content from *La Nature*, this essay will cite the publication indicating the year, the six-month period (1 or 2) and the corresponding page. For more details, all cited articles will appear in the bibliography in chronological order. Links are provided to the images digitized by the Conservatoire National des Arts et métiers, Paris (URLs valid as of 2023).



Figure 1: Salvador Dalí *Babaouo* Poster, 1932. © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí. VEGAP/Copyright Agency, 2022.

In the *La nature* article, they are moving to music: in the first, to the end of Gounod's *Faust* ("Ange pur, ange radieux") and in the second, to the ostentatious chords of Russia's national anthem. When Dalí transferred these images to the *Babaouo* advertisement he guided our interpretations with several taglines, including "l'exhibitionnisme féminin" and "l'hystérie moderne". Hysteria was a subject of interest for Dalí and Ernst, and they both likely read the *La nature* 1882 article on Dr. Charcot's study of hysteria.⁵ The *La nature* article included a drawing of bearded man taking a photograph of a woman sitting up in bed (1883-2: 216). As Charlotte Stokes notes (459), Ernst used this as the basis of the second collage of *La femme 100 têtes*, "L'Immaculée Conception manquée," simply adding four more images, three from issues of *La nature* dated 1883 and 1889. Not only had Dalí seen Ernst's artworks based on *La nature*, but he might have had his own copies of the original sources. There is nothing in the second collage of *La femme 100 têtes* to suggest that the scene is one of the early experiments analyzing traits of mental health; indeed the title explicitly directs us something else; the allusion to hysteria is reserved for those familiar with the sources. Dalí reverses the communication strategy: exhibitionism and hysteria are explicitly mentioned

⁵ For Dalí's knowledge of hysteria see Santamaria de Mingo.

beside images of expressive women. The association of mental illness that Dalí implies is misleading, indeed, an invitation to productive confusion.

A related theme can be seen in Dalí's collage "Le phénomène de l'extase," published at the end of 1933 in the third issue of *Minotaure*. Forty-three images are collaged into eight loose rows. Except for a drawing of an art nouveau clock hand, and a photograph of an askew chair, the remaining forty-one images are photographs of faces: twenty-one photos of women's ecstatic faces, a man looking up, a man and two women together, a sculptural detail of a face, a sculptural detail of three faces, and sixteen close-up photographs of men's ears. As Michel Poivert has noted, these sixteen ears were cut from tables produced by the police officer and biometrics researcher Alphonse Bertillon, published in *La nature* (1901-2: 140). The painter's obsession with ears found fuel in these tables of the illustrious French policeman that Dalí mixes with modernist busts, pornographic photographs, and other elements of a sensual and disturbing character.

In late 1933, Dalí finished *The Enigma of William Tell*, one of his most significant and controversial canvases, which was ultimately the catalyst for the first attempt at expelling the Catalan painter from the surrealist community. This painting was one of the few which, in the early 1930s, Dalí produced in large dimensions (201.3 x 346.5 cm), and in the lower portion of the canvas, there is a miniature image copied directly from the pages of *La nature* (1904-2: 256), from an article which detailed various objects that can be created using nutshells. Dalí later described this all but imperceptible detail in the image as a crib-shaped nut (Museum Boymans-van Beuningen ill. 29). The use of this image could be compared with the cut apple Ernst incorporates in the painting *Au rendez-vous des amis* (1922), which was also cut from *La nature*. In the case of the apple, as Stokes says, "this odd image, like so many of the images in Ernst's works, suggests much without stating anything exactly" (456), while, in the case of the crib-shaped nut, Dalí does give it an exact meaning: "un berceau construit dans une noix, où éveillée, les yeux très vifs, se tient Gala enfant" 'a cradle built in a walnut, where awake, with very lively eyes, is the child Gala' (Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, ill. 29).⁶ It remains possible perhaps that Ernst's evocative recontextualizations of a cliché symbol is also an object of concrete irrationality, cloaked in a familiar symbol, whose enigma may one day be solved.

In addition to all these pictorial elements, *La nature* also influenced Dalí's writing this year. On 15 May 1933, numbers 5 and 6 of *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* were released. Dalí contributed articles to both issues. For no. 5, Dalí contributed an article on "Objets psycho-atmosphériques-anamorphiques" 'psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic objects,' including a table of drawings of fifty-one "morceaux de fer informes" 'pieces of shapeless iron' (47) conspicuously similar to a collection of irregular pearls in *La nature* (1900-1: 381). In no. 6, the painter published three short texts under the epigraph "Notes-communications."

⁶ Where no published translations are cited, translations are by the authors.

The first of these notes was about the false meteorites exhibited at the Natural Museum of Paris as reported by Stanislas Meunier in *La nature* (1902-1: 20). Dalí illustrated his text with a drawing that copied one of these false meteorites. The irregular pearls and false meteorites both resemble shit, Dalí concludes, and are therefore easily misidentified (41).

The second note was concerned with conic anamorphosis, one of Dalí's obsessions throughout 1933. The root of this fixation with conic anamorphosis is found in an article that featured in *La nature* (1905-1: 80) which refers specifically to this type of optical experience and its innovative application in the field of photography. Throughout 1933 and 1934 Dalí frequently referred to conic anamorphosis in texts and pictures, such as, for example, in the little wonder entitled *Gala et l'Angélu de Millet précédent immédiatement la venue des "anamorphoses coniques"* (1933).

These literary references to *La nature*, the influential pearls, false meteors, and images of conic anamorphosis, all present images that are misunderstood, seen as one thing while truly being another. Unlike Ernst's carriage of whole scenes or interiors into his collaged works, or transplanting an object from one context into another, each of the *La nature* images Dalí selected wholly separates the subject from its context: a woman on a full black or white background, a closely cropped photograph of an ear, a line drawing of a toad on a white page, a photograph of a nut shell on a table.

***La nature* to 1936**

After the deluge of *La nature* images in 1933, it is odd that between 1934 and 1935 no trace of *La nature* has been located in Dalí's work. Perhaps Dalí was somehow briefly separated from his magazines. In 1936 nineteen images clipped from its pages have been identified. In these, more than in the images used in 1932 and 1933, the physicality of the magazine influenced the final products.

In June of 1936, the eighth issue of the magazine *Minotaure* featured a cover designed by Dalí (fig. 2), combining oil and collage. The clouds and fountain pen nibs, collaged from *La nature*, are distinct in their monochrome tonality (*La nature*, 1900-2: 401; *La nature*, 1903-2: 292). This cover however was not the first version; Dalí made another that was lost. The first version featured mazes, possibly those that could be found in an article on labyrinths, mentioning the legendary Cretan minotaur, in *La nature* (1889-1: 330-334). Since the loss occurred at the last minute, the painter was unwilling to redo the work, probably because the collaged images could not be replaced, until he saw another engraving from *La nature*, which he himself describes as a "very rare photograph [sic] of clouds, very rare from a morphological point of view" (Etherington-Smith, 202). The discovery of this image gave him a new idea for the cover of *Minotaure* where the labyrinths are replaced by clouds because, as Dalí explained to Edward James, "clouds have

always been the sky's labyrinths, for it's by looking at them that one loses oneself in the sky" (Etherington-Smith, 202).⁷



Figure 2: Salvador Dalí, *Minotaure cover*, 1936. © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí. VEGAP/Copyright Agency, 2022.

⁷ The excerpts from this letter are reproduced by Meredith Etherington-Smith (202).

Coinciding with the publication of *Minotaure* in June 1936, an important exhibition by Dalí opened in London. Among the oils that could be seen in the British capital, which had been occupied by the surrealists following the first International Exhibition of Surrealism, was *Anthropomorphism, Extra Flat* (fig. 3), an oil on wood of small dimensions (11 x 19 cm), like the vast majority of the oils that Dalí painted at the moment. In 1970, Dalí retitled the image *Geological Justice* and described the painting as “[s]orte de paysage-figure, par terre, les deux bras écrasés et ouverts” ‘a kind of landscape-figure, spread out on the ground, both arms crushed and open,’ adding that he had painted it in Port Lligat (Museum Boymans-van Beuningen ill. 42). This last piece of information inevitably leads us to think that the painting probably depicts the landscape of the Costa Brava. However, the scene painted by Dalí corresponds to a dike on the Helgoland dune on the German coast, a geological formation to which *La nature* (1905-1: 93) dedicated a few pages in 1905. Dalí replicated one of the images in this article, and he only had to trace it on the wood, enlarging the dimensions of the emptier landscape at the bottom and to the right. The result is a painting that depicts a slightly larger coastal panorama than the magazine illustration.

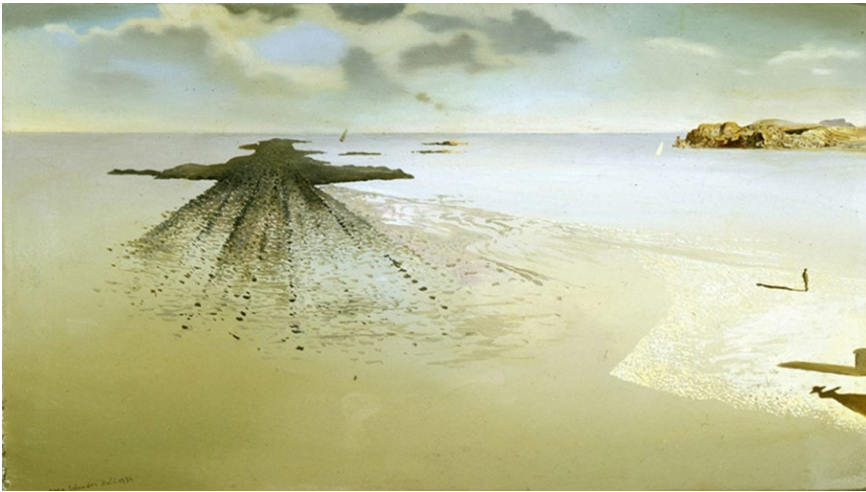


Figure 3: Salvador Dalí, *Anthropomorphism, extra flat*, 1936. © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí. VEGAP/Copyright Agency, 2022.

On the right, the painter added a dune and a minuscule figure with a corresponding, de-Chirico-style silhouette. He also converted the first of the shadows in the original image into an imperfect copy of the anthropomorphic landscape, resembling a morphological echo. The landscape-figure can be seen, in this way, as the duplicate of an enigmatic shadow that is projected from outside the painting.

Another figure that Dalí precisely excised from *La nature* (1906-2: 20) is the image of Doctor Eisenmenger who appeared in three paintings: *A Chemist Lifting with Extreme Precaution the Cuticle of a Grand Piano*, *Diurnal Melancholy*, and *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*. Doctor Eisenmenger has been collaged directly onto *Diurnal Melancholy*, and in the other two paintings, traced and painted — the dimensions of the printed photograph coincide exactly with the measurements of the painted figures. Dalí never mentioned that this character was taken from *La nature*. Indeed, the 1970 exhibition catalogue to Dalí's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum retrospective reports Dalí's saying that it was a man named Deulofeu, a pharmacist from Figueres. Reinforcing this misinterpretation, Dalí then gave *Diurnal Melancholy* the new title *The Chemist of the Ampurdan in Search of the Void* (ill. 48).

The photograph of Dr. Eisenmenger is well known to Dalinian scholars; in 1984 Robert Descharnes (155) disclosed the name of the doctor, but not the source of the image. The catalog of Dalí's great retrospective, held in Venice in 2004, identified Doctor Eisenmenger as Victor Eisenmenger (1864-1932), an Austrian physician, who became famous as Archduke Franz Ferdinand's personal doctor, and gave his name to "Eisenmenger syndrome," a type of hypertension associated with congenital heart disease (246). However, the doctor whom the *La nature* article discussed (1906-2: 20), and who appears in Dalí's paintings, is not Victor, but Rudolf Eisenmenger, a Hungarian therapist who designed an innovative but quickly superseded portable artificial respiration device.

The transition from printed paper to canvas or wood through tracing might well have conditioned the size of Dalí's paintings. Max Ernst's paintings, however — unlike his novel-collages — are not constrained to the format of his sources. In the *Nageur aveugle* series of paintings that Ernst painted in 1934, the *La nature* images are subjected to elaborate pictorial work and the result is much larger paintings in which we can see shapes coming closer to abstraction, far removed from Dalinian realism.

The 1936 Julien Levy Gallery Exhibition Catalogue

The catalog that Dalí designed for his third solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York, opening in late 1936, is a double-sided cardboard sheet on the back of which we find the list of the works exhibited — 20 paintings, 12 unidentified drawings, and the famous *Aphrodisiac Jacket* — and on its front we can see the painted figure of a "woman with drawers," with her limp breasts opening like drawers. Each of these breasts was designed as a flap of cardboard affixed to the sheet by the nipple, and lifting the flaps would reveal a concertinaed strip of paper displaying various miniature images from the exhibition.

In the right strip, three of the images come totally or partially from *La nature*. The first, which Dalí reproduces as it is without any kind of retouching or transformation, is an engraving made from a photograph of M. Morris, better

known as *India-Rubber Man* or *Elastic Skin Wonder* (*La nature*, [1898-2: 16](#)). After traveling through the United States and Canada, in 1898 Morris came to Europe where he became famous for the extraordinary elasticity of his skin. The enormous popularity of the character made it inevitable that the French magazine dedicate space to the image. Dalí would return to exhibit it in his autobiography, six years later, so we must deduce that the image made a great impact. This strong impression should first be related to the painter's fondness for soft elastic things and, more generally, with the strangeness of the image itself. Here we agree with Chemineau (260) when he talks about the "caractère onirique" 'dream-like character' and the "étrangeté intrinsèque" 'intrinsic strangeness' that inhabits the engravings in *La nature*.

Second is a small reproduction of the painting *A Chemist Lifting with Extreme Precaution*, in which Dr. Eisenmenger can be seen wandering.

The third image, no less rare and shocking, is the engraving of the skull of a giant extinct pachyderm, whose remains were found in the American state of Wyoming at the end of the nineteenth century. To the engraving from *La nature* ([1886-1: 65](#)), Dalí adds some details that convert the animal's exorbitant antler into four phallic-looking shapes, two of which appear crowned with a broad bean, "this extraordinary vegetable," Dalí wrote "that looks so much like a foreskin" (*Secret Life* 329).⁸

On the left of the catalogue cover, above the right shoulder of the "woman with drawers," is a typeset list: "dreams, objective and subjective phantoms, diurnal phantasies, images in half-sleep, overwhelming objects, object beings, morphological spectres, lilliputian uneasiness, paranoiac associations, experimental oneirism, caprices within the womb, drawers of flesh, malleable watches, very hairy apartments, subconscious images, and images of concrete irrationality."⁹

On the right side of the catalogue cover, Dalí had scrawled several statements in his peculiar handwriting style, notably the ambiguous "Dalí paints the invisible straight from nature." Bearing in mind the contempt with which Dalí wrote of naturalistic painting at the time, this declaration is explicitly ironic.¹⁰ The

⁸ We assume that Dalí meant glans instead of foreskin. These shapes also bear considerable resemblance to the configuration of the *Anthropomorphic Bread* that Dalí painted in 1932.

⁹ The same list appeared on the cover of the catalogue of Dalí's exhibition the previous summer, in London.

¹⁰ One only has to read the last page of *La femme visible* (1930) to verify the forcefulness with which Dalí shows this contempt for everything that stems from the natural world as opposed to the products of human imagination and thought. An example of this antithesis, which will be a constant throughout his life, is the caption he wrote in 1933 under the reproduction of a stone from the Cap de Creus that appeared in the magazine *Minotaure* (no. 3-4): "Essai de modern'style géologique, raté comme tout ce qui vient de la nature privée d'imagination"

conjunction of nature and invisibility recalls Dalí's first surrealist essay, "Sant Sebastià," whose opening section, "Irony," begins: "Heraclitus tells us, in a fragment collected by Themistius, that it pleases Nature to hide itself" (*Collected Writings* 19). Dalí developed his interpretation of the aphorism based on Alberto Savinio's interpretation, published in a 1919 issue of *Valori plastici*, that nature's concealment is a kind of irony.¹¹ Savinio interpreted "nature loves to hide" as nature hiding from itself through "auto-pudore" 'self-directed modesty' (14). Being modest, nature does not reveal itself through appearance. This short aphorism stayed with Dalí for decades, and he repeated at least ten times over forty-five years.¹²

Ultimately, this appeal to the invisible in nature simultaneously offered a clue as to the true origin of many of the images displayed on the catalogue's pull-out – that is, none other than *La nature*. As such, this reference to nature serves as a play on words, which both reveals and conceals a little secret as to the origin of the images.

La nature and The Secret Life

When Dalí left Europe to settle in the United States in 1940, he did not do so empty-handed. Among the work material he took with him were at least a few clippings from *La nature*, Gala and Dalí always traveled laden with articles and books. Some of *La nature* traveled with Dalí to the new continent as it served to illustrate his first autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, published two years after his landing on American soil. Of the approximately 250 images that accompany this text, five come from *La nature*. And whereas the images in the 1936 catalogue were accompanied by the aphorism that Dalí paints the invisible straight from nature, which we found would be more accurately expressed as painting the visible from *La nature*, from 1942 onwards Dalí hid his sources.

The other four images from *La nature* correspond to four clippings that are still preserved, unidentified, in the files of the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation in Figueres; only one of them is presented without any modification. In the other three, the painter intervenes in one way or another.

'Attempt at geological *modern style*, failed like everything that comes from nature deprived of imagination.' In another text from this same year, published in no. 5 of *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, the painter insists on "dénoncer un piteux défaut d'imagination . . . en tout ce qui concerne les misères grandiloquentes de la nature" 'denouncing this sorry failure of the imagination . . . concerning the grandiloquent poverty of nature' ("Objets psychosphériques-anamorphiques" 47; *Collected Writings* 248).

¹¹ For more on Dalí's use of this essay see Lahuerta, *Dalí, Lorca 367-68* and *Le Corbusier* 26. For more on Dalí's use of the irony of Heraclitus's aphorism see Santamaria de Mingo and Weir and Dibbs.

¹² "Meus quadros"; "Nous limit" 186; "En el moment" 1; *Femme visible* 12); *Conquest of the Irrational* n.p.; *Secret Life* 326; "Salvador Dalí's mimicry" 200; *Ten Recipes*.

In the last one that appears, at the end of the book, Dalí acts only through writing. The small image, no larger than a postage stamp, depicts a cut crystal decanter beside a cut crystal wine glass which is standing on a small flat plate. The glass, about half filled with clear liquid, has a shrimp bent over its lip, so that the shrimp's tail is inside the glass and the shrimp's head outside. The shrimp's body acting as a siphon, liquid runs down the shrimp's antennae dripping onto the plate beneath. In irregular and lowercase letters the painter scribbled the following words: "Voilà le genre de chose que j'admire du point de vue invention [sic]" "This is the kind of thing I admire from the perspective of invention" (*Secret Life* 386). The quality of the reproduction depends on the different editions, but in no case can Dalí's tiny calligraphy be read without the aid of a magnifying glass, nor can the signature of the true author of the drawing: L. Peuchot. The engraving, titled "crevette-siphon" 'shrimp-siphon', comes from the section entitled "Physique sans appareils" (*La nature*, [1887-2: 192](#)). The location of the image seems to be arbitrary, since it has no apparent relationship with the narration which it accompanies. Dalí mentions "inventions" more than sixty times in *The Secret Life*, but no inventions are mentioned in the text surrounding the image of the shrimp-siphon. Ten pages before, Dalí unfavorably compares surrealist inventions with those of Raphael and Vermeer (374-76); ten pages after the shrimp-siphon, Dalí refers to some lyrical inventions added to his Bonwitt-Teller window display (396). Most often invention refers to the embodiment of ideas, rather than the fabrication of mechanical contraptions, so this siphon "invented" by placing an animal's cooked body in an unusual environment, a temporary ready-made machine, is a keen example of Dalí's surrealist style. As happens, incidentally, with some of the illustrations that we find in *La révolution surréaliste*, the inconsistency between the text and the image is intended to cause the reader a certain bewilderment.

We can say the same of the following image, found on page 308 of the original edition, from a 1908 article on the cranes and Pygmies of Ancient Egypt (*La nature*, [1908-1: 412](#)). If we look closely we will see that the scene depicted represents two Nubian boys who scare birds with stones and screams. In this case, Dalí adds some details: a crutch, the silhouette of an erect phallus, and aerodynamic protuberances that are like the visual echo of the virile member, identical to ones found in the 1934 sculpture *Hysterical and Aerodynamic Female Nude*. It is curious to note that, in the lower right part of this sculpture, Dalí incorporates a limp and soft thing, supported by a crutch, very similar to the flaccid form that he also draws on the engraving of *La nature* in contrast to the upright priapus that precedes. Everything leads us to suspect that we are, both in one image and in the other, before a staging of what Dalí calls in a 1934 letter to Paul Éluard a staging of fantasies of impotence and erection.¹³

¹³ Around 1934 Dalí painted a picture with the title *Ampurdanese Yang and yin* where two "ganxet" beans appear intertwined in antagonistic positions, one up (concave) and the other

This same dialectic of hard and soft, of what goes up and what comes down, exploited by Dalí to satiety, still appears reproduced in the central figure of the boy with the sling, which is also slightly modified with a kind of pointed hat on his head, as if it were a streamlined helmet — a lengthened form similar to the grotesque cranial deformation of Dalí himself in his self-portrait as a grasshopper boy in 1933 (*Myself at the Age of Ten When I was a Grasshopper Child (Castration Complex)*) — with a pendant under his back. Dalí also adds a pair of barely perceptible female breasts, which give him a strange effeminate appearance. To finish off his intervention, the painter writes, above all, the statement "disturbing image," this last word in Catalan. It is possible that this evocation of the mother tongue may refer to the painter's childhood or adolescence and, therefore, the chosen image could be associated with some childhood memory with all the Freudian implications this may have. In any case, the symbolic correspondence between the penis and the birds — or between flight and erection - established by psychoanalysis, seems to be part of this meticulous Dalinian manoeuvre.¹⁴ Again, Dalí looks at an apparently bland image to transform it into a disturbing vision, impregnated with sexual insinuations and deep meanings and, once again, he manages to make a piece of printed paper become the illustration of his thought. This type of manipulation of the image is precisely what Ernst refers to when he speaks of "transformer en drames révélant mes plus secrets désirs, ce qui auparavant n'était que de banales pages de publicité" "transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires, from what had been before only some banal pages of advertising" (*Écritures* 259; *Beyond Painting* 14). Despite this confluence of intentions, as we have already pointed out, in Dalí's case the meaning is always more concrete, more precise. Ernst, on the other hand, bets on a more suggestive, more equivocal plastic language.

The following image illustrates the children's story of Dalí's stay in *El Molí de la Torre*, a rural property of Pepito Pitxot, a great friend of his father, where the painter locates some of his most extravagant erotic fantasies. The image taken from *La nature* corresponds to a swarm of bees (*La nature*, [1901-2: 204](#)), although the painter decides to baptize it as "Ants in Rotation" ("Fourmis in rotation") and presents it as his own work by stamping his signature ("GalaDalí") on the name of

down (convex), simulating erection and detumescence respectively. This motif was used repeatedly in many other paintings and drawings. On the incidence of the concept of Ying and Yang in Dalinian thought see Santamaria de Mingo (215-16).

¹⁴ In 1929 Dalí was already referring to the winged phalluses of antiquity, commented on by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and in the essay on Leonardo da Vinci. Later, Dalí dwells on this matter. He will do so, for example, in "Derniers modes d'excitation intellectuelle pour l'été 1934," where he says that the surrealists "savent depuis longtemps que derrière le 'sentiment d'élévation,' derrière l'aviation ' il y a tout court le phénomène de l'érection' 'have known for a long time that behind the 'uplifting feeling,' behind the 'flying,' there is simply the phenomenon of erection' (*Documents* 34 35; *Collected Writings* 254). In the second chapter of his autobiography, he will return to insist on this symbolism.

the drawing's author, Clément, one of the magazine's most prolific illustrators. Dalí ends this action, to a certain extent unlawful, noting, in addition to the signature, the date. Although the last figure of the number may raise certain doubts, as it does not seem entirely clear whether it is a 1 or a 7, observed very carefully, we are inclined to this last option, i.e. 1937. As we have already said, everything seems to indicate that Dalí began using *La nature* in late 1932 and early 1933.¹⁵ In any case, Dalí's action is not a simple misdeed, nor a mere fraudulent act; it has to be understood rather as an anti-artistic and provocative gesture in the transgressive line of what his friend and colleague Marcel Duchamp did in 1914. The Frenchman bought a print of a vulgar watercolor that represented a winter landscape by an unknown artist; he touched it up minimally with two small spots – one red and one yellow – he signed it, dated it and renamed it *Pharmacie* (1914).¹⁶ Dalí's operation on the engraving from *La nature* is situated in the same field of action as *Pharmacie* and basically raises the same artistic and philosophical questions that Stefan Banz formulates regarding Duchamp's *Large Glass*: the problem of authorship, the meaning of the signature, the conception of the work of art, the relationships between high art and kitsch, the blurred borders between an original, a copy, a replica, an interpretation, a correction, an alteration, a restoration – a complex network of questions that turn a simple apparently anecdotal fact into a matter of great philosophical significance – a type of intellectual exercise that both Duchamp and Dalí practiced frequently. Despite everything, the debate is still open.

Finally, the last of Dalí's cuttings from the magazine was simply reproduced with nothing retouched or attached (*Secret Life* 289). The image is situated in the precise moment of the story in which the narrator tells of his defense of the "modern style" and of the discovery of the entrances to the Parisian metro designed by Hector Guimard. The print selected by Dalí here is a drawing of a lock devised by the aforementioned French architect, who, interestingly, died in New York on 20 May 1942 – a few months before *The Secret Life* was released in the same city. The picture is taken from an article in *La nature* (1899-2: 276) lauding the artistic virtues of the Castel Béranger, a sumptuous *art nouveau* building located on Paris's La Fontaine street in the 16th *arrondissement*. The property, including all of its decorative details, was designed by Guimard in the last years of the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ In the catalog of *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, the exhibition that the Dalí Foundation published in 2004 with the illustrations of the 1942 autobiography, this drawing is dated 1931.

¹⁶ This piece, which was the second ready-made by Duchamp after the *Bicycle Wheel* and the first that can be considered as a rectified readymade, was part of the collective exhibition that the surrealists organized in June 1933 at the Pierre Colle gallery, in which Dalí was also a prominent participant. There is no doubt that the Catalan painter knew his friend's work very well. In the catalog of the exhibition *Pharmacie* appears just after Dalí's works.

The entrance to the residence is especially unusual and imaginative, with an ostentatious forged iron door guarded by two columns, which would be reminiscent of the classical style if not for the strictly vegetal decoration on the column shafts. It is precisely this ornamental motif which appears photographed in the article on “modern style” architecture published by Dalí in *Minotaure* in late 1933 (“De la beauté” 72). In the photograph taken by Brassai, these natural decorations are clearly visible; equally clearly seen is that electric doorbell, the result of some painstaking silversmithing, to which the author of the article in *La nature* referred and the design of which also appeared in the magazine just underneath the lock used by Dalí in *The Secret Life*.

Certainly, this extraordinary architectural construction of Guimard’s, charged as it is with textures and decorative elements that generate a sense of material abundance, is a real display of that “terrifying, edible beauty” that earned it so much of Dalí’s praise. It is for this reason that he elected to include it in his article in *Minotaure*, albeit without mentioning its title, just as he was to omit its name later from his autobiography. When speaking about Guimard, Dalí always made reference to the Paris metro entrances and never to *Castel Béranger*, despite the fact that this *art nouveau* masterpiece was included in two of his best-known literary works. And since Dalí never spoke of it, Dalinian scholars have not done so either.¹⁷

Of all the sketches that accompanied the *La nature* article on *Le castel Béranger* – five in total: a lock, the doorbell, a glass window, the vestibule, and a balcony – Dalí chose the ones that were not signed. The others carried the signature of the famous Louis Poyet (1846-1913), another great illustrator of the notable French magazine and a man deeply admired by Max Ernst (Spies 94). Dalí’s choice in this respect seems to have been born of the care he took not to reveal the authorship and origin of the print he had used. The same stratagem is evident in all the images Dalí extracted from *La nature* for the illustration of his autobiography, which may lead one to conclude that the painter intended to keep secret by any means necessary this source of iconographical content. His aim was thus to foster inaccuracy and confusion as to his artistic methods and the authorship of the works from which they derived.

In addition, it must be borne in mind that *The Secret Life* was especially aimed at the American public who were completely unaware of *La nature* and therefore found it practically impossible to recognize the origin of the images. Writing of Ernst’s work with the magazine, Stokes notes that “it was necessary that the images used – either in collages or copied into paintings – be both recognizable and recognizably subverted” (456). This could not be applied to Dalí’s case, because the Catalan painter always tried to make it difficult to recognize his sources. Just as in *The Secret Life* we find true memories and false memories, we could say that there

¹⁷ As far as we know, only Roger Rothman brings up this architectural work by Guimard in relation to Dalí (174).

are also true illustrations and false illustrations. As was frequently the case, Dalí was seeking to confuse the reader. In fact, his greatest entertainment was always that game with inauthenticity, characteristic of modern and contemporary art.¹⁸

La nature and 50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship

The last time Dalí used *La nature* images in his work was the illustrations he produced for *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, published in the spring of 1948, a little over 15 years after the first. *50 Secrets* includes at least two images taken from *La nature*. The first image is of a strange larval organism, of a species of marine annelid, copied or traced from an informative article on “the origins and development of life” ([1880-2: 414](#)). The painter superimposed upon the image several subtle additions, painstakingly drawn, to the extent that it becomes a highly Daliesque element that is all but indistinguishable from the rest of the sketch, with which it appears completely melded (*50 Secrets* 14). With no knowledge of the original picture, it would be very difficult indeed to reach the conclusion that this is partial collage. The idea of *détournement* — the decontextualization of the image — that governs the law of surreal collage underlies Dalí’s composition, but instead of scissors and glue, the painter has used his enormous skill with pencil and pen.

In another drawing from *50 Secrets* (108), he performed an operation similar to the one detailed above. This involved an image taken from another article in the same series on the topic of “the origin and development of life” ([1881-1: 326](#)), this time from 1881: “Young and adult sea urchin,” to which were added several Dalinian objects. On this occasion, however, the painter went to the trouble of inverting the image, as Ernst had occasionally done, perhaps both for aesthetic reasons and in order to obfuscate the identification of its origin. Regardless, these two are Dalí’s most materially transformed *La nature* images. Yet these ink and collage images retain the formal composition of an object in a white field, unlike the paintings which place the objects within an idiosyncratic space.

And now once again we encounter the presence of Ernst. Ernst’s 1923 painting *Au premier mot limpide*, a fresco from the house of Paul Éluard in Eaubonne later mounted onto canvas, featured a hand in a posture corresponding to a tactile illusion experiment described in *La nature* ([1881-1: 384](#)). The experiment, very simple and relatively well-known, consists of crossing one’s middle finger over one’s index finger and touching a marble or other spherical object with both fingers at once. This gives the illusory sensation of touching two separate surfaces rather than one. Dalí used this principle for the fifth secret in his book. In Dalí’s version, the experiment is much more complicated and extravagant, as the painter combines the tactile illusion with an optical one and uses the eye of a fish, a sea bass, in place of a marble. In order to clarify how this trick is performed, Dalí

¹⁸ See for example Rothman 489-90.

illustrates it with an image in which the hand with crossed fingers differs substantially from the hand in the *La nature* engraving and from Ernst's image, likely drawn from memory or from observing his own hand (43). This is the only time that Ernst and Dalí converge in the treatment of the same subject, and this convergence can help us to perceive the different uses that each one makes of *La nature*. Here Dalí's image serves to illustrate the hypnotic phenomena described in the text, and is not aimed at the aesthetic of the hand. Ernst however uses the beautiful original image for its formal and symbolic qualities, something Dalí had also done in the case of the Surinam toad, Dr. Eisenmenger, and *Geological Justice*.

Conclusion

La nature was an essential publication for Dalí, almost as much as for Ernst. The Catalan painter began to use *La nature* as a working tool between the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933 after seeing Ernst's examples. At first, Dalí used scissors to transfer the images of the magazine to his plastic compositions (*Babaouo's* poster, "Le phénomène de l'extase") and also used it as a source of information for some texts published in *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* and for the book on *L'Angelus*. In this first moment, Dalí only transferred to the painting the small detail that appears at the bottom of *The Enigma of William Tell*. In 1936 the presence of *La nature* in Dalí's painting became more pronounced, intensified, and fruitful. Throughout the 1940s, the painter would continue to take advantage of *La nature*, but only in the illustrations of his books (*The Secret Life* and *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*). In the first of these literary works, Dalí limits himself to cutting the engravings from the magazine and includes them with or without minor modifications, while in the second he performs a more sophisticated treatment, copying fragments of the engravings in his drawings to achieve the same surreal effect that Ernst's collages produce.

Importantly, what Dalí owed *La nature* was more than clippings snipped from its pages. As Dalí was approaching surrealism, Ernst's work was clearly an influence, but Dalí retained an even longer adherence to Heraclitus's ironic concealment. Arguably Dalí's first surrealist essay, "Sant Sebastià" begins with a salutation of the Heraclitus aphorism, "nature loves to hide" (*Collected Writings* 19). The rhyme with Heraclitus then is all too apparent, *La nature* loves to hide, and Dalí in turn hid *La nature*. This is most apparent in the last time Dalí returned to the subject of *La nature*.

Though he had used their images dozens of times, the first time Dalí wrote about *La nature* was in 1964, in *Diary of a Genius*. In the entry dated 21 September 1953, the painter alludes to an old issue of *La nature* from 1880, from which he states he had extracted a story of a medical nature and immediately transcribed it with minor modifications, as he had done previously with other texts (117). No story like this appears in the magazine from that year, or any other year. By the time Dalí wrote this passage, he had cut forty-five images from its pages, and

redrawn many others, yet the one and only time he mentions *La nature* by name, he misdirects us, misquotes, misattributes, misrepresents *La nature*. When we might anticipate that Dalí would finally mention his interest in *La nature* instead we get an example of what Elliott King has described as “his unending propensity to mythologize himself and his intentions.”

It has been clearly demonstrated that *La nature* was a focus of attraction for Dalí for a long time and that he exploited the magazine in very different ways beginning in 1933. He used it as a source of knowledge but, above all, took advantage of images recovered from the past to fertilize the present and compromise the future. Obsolete and anachronistic images that served to contravene the postulates of modern art. Images that Dalí reproduces sometimes without any type of modification and other times with retouching and additions. Images that he cuts, that he copies, that he traces — that he uses in his books, in his articles, in his paintings, and in his photomontages. A diversity of uses and functions destined to subvert the world of the image and to convert what is printed into the support of desire. A variety of practices from which we have learned a little more about the different work procedures employed by Dalí. And all this very much to his regret. Because, as we have seen, the painter took everything in strict secrecy, without ever revealing to us the origin of his sources.¹⁹

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¹⁹ The authors wish to thank Elsa Tilly, Musée d’art et d’histoire, Paul Éluard, Saint-Denis, and Dr. Nadine Engel, Museum Folkwang, Essen, for their kind assistance.

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