Picasso & Dalí. Delusive elements of spiritual geometry
By Ricard Mas
This anecdote was told to me by Captain Peter Moore, Dalí’s secretary. Later it would appear in print, with slight variations.[i]

It must have been in April 1972 when Dalí’s secretary arrived in Cannes, with Gala and the painter himself, on board the France. There, Moore met up with the editor Skira in the select Chateau de Madrid. Skira was with a group that included Picasso. They were celebrating something, perhaps a birthday. When the time came to settle the bill, Picasso offered to pay. He opened his chequebook and signed ten cheques, each for 100 Francs. Skira explained Picasso’s genius to Captain Moore: “the cheques will never be cashed: the signatures alone are worth three times as much.” Moore described Picasso’s ruse to Dalí, who tried to emulate it. A week later, Dalí went to Ledoyen, in Paris, and paid with five cheques. They were cashed... because Dalí, lacking bank authorisation, had signed as Gala. [Image 1]

It is 1881, the year of Picasso’s birth, and Western civilisation is riding high on the second wave of the Industrial Revolution. Oil and electricity are beginning to replace steam and draught animals as the principal sources of energy. New means of communication are increasing the sense of globalisation, bringing access to new cultures from Africa, Asia and Oceania. The telegraph, the radio and the telephone are about to alter the relationship between space and time. Photography is challenging art’s monopoly on representation, and very soon cinema will do the same to the performing arts. New technologies of mechanical reproduction flood the market with images at affordable prices. Even mirrors are no longer a luxury... Soon, very soon, Max Plank and Albert Einstein, in physics, will transform our conception of the universe. The old world based on neoplatonic ideas is vanishing at a dizzying pace.

It all begins with a selfie... To mark his first visit to the ‘City of Light,’ Picasso portrayed himself in the drawing Leaving the Exposition Universelle, Paris (1900), together with his friends Casagemas, Miguel Utrillo and Pichot, and two women: Odette, and Germaine Gargallo. They all look happy, except Picasso, preoccupied by the question of how to conquer Paris and, quite possibly, how to create something new, using new forms of representation.

The year after Picasso was born, for example, the lithographer and editor Louis Prank published the Illustrated Catalog and Price List of Artist’s Materials, a compendium of images to cut out and paste, an entertaining and educational practice deriving from the theories of Friedrich Froebel. Today’s scrapbooks are the descendants of “cut and paste” - in French, “découpage et collage”.

The phenomenon took off in the mid 18th century, when the sons and daughters of upper-class French families amused themselves by cutting out profiles with scissors... Then Étienne de Silhouette, Louis XV’s finance minister, set about cutting the pensions and privileges of the rich. As a joke, these childish cut-outs came to be known as “silhouettes”.

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The new world that emerges with Picasso brings with it a new conception of art, based on “découpage et collage”. Picasso and Braque, before declaring collage to be a fully-paid up member of the world of fine art techniques, cut and pasted many concepts. Continuing a tradition is not the same as cutting and pasting it... it is rather a case of deconstructing it, editing it.

1973, the year of Picasso’s death, saw the launch of the Xerox Alto computer, the first to incorporate the functions cut, copy and paste. [Image 2]

In this talk I will briefly discuss the ways in which Picasso and Dalí contributed to the phenomenon of “cut & paste,” and its implications in the shift in artistic paradigms. In other words, to the tension between reality and representation or, to put it in even simpler terms, the changing nature of the relationship between the thing and the name of the thing. In this linear journey from A to B, neither of the two artists will respect the rules of spiritual geometry.

Let us begin. In 1882, a year after Picasso was born, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche published The Joyous Wisdom, also known as The Gay Science. This essay contains his first formulation of the idea that ‘God is Dead.’ But in fact, Nietzsche could not foresee the consequences of his crime. With the death of a traditional God, the creator of the world, the traditional concept of the creator died too.

“What is not tradition is plagiarism,” wrote the Catalan thinker Eugeni d’Ors. Picasso decided to become a reformer of tradition, but rejected both mannerism and copying,
preferring to be a thief. Whether out of vice or necessity, Picasso would also become a
great forger.

One of the artists Picasso admired most was the French-Swiss illustrator and poster-
designer Théophile Alexandre Steinlen. Picasso admired him, as did the people of Barce-
lona, devouring his drawings in illustrated magazines such as Le Rire, Gil Blas and
L’Assiette au Beurre.

When in 2000 the Picasso museum in Barcelona put together an exhibition on
Steinlen’s work, I saw, in a display case, a page covered in practice signatures: “St...
Stein. Steinl…” According to the museum, it was proof of the admiration that Picasso
felt for Steinlen… To me, it was simply a series of attempts to forge the master’s signa-
ture. As early as 1930, the art critic Feliu Elias, who knew the Picasso of Els Quatre Gats
well, wrote about the state of art forgery in Catalonia, in the weekly magazine Mirador:
“the never-sufficiently-to-be-praised Picasso filled the collections of art lovers, in that
age of fake Corots, with Toulouse-Lautrecs, Steinlens, Degas, Pissarros and even Rusi-
ñols. However, now fake Picassos abound”. [2]

Once he became famous, Picasso would not forget this ability to get inside another art-
ist’s skin. In occupied Paris, during a supper at the restaurant Le Catalan, where he reg-
ularly met up with the photographer Brassaï, the poets Paul Eluard and Jean Cocteau,
and the painters Wilfredo Lam, Balthus and Óscar Domínguez, the name Joan Miró
happened to come up. Suddenly Picasso began to draw, and signed a Miró on the paper
table cloth. This drawing is now part of a prestigious French collection. [3]

There are even cases of authentic works by Picasso, sold by their creator under unfair
circumstances or when compelled by necessity, which, when they were presented to him
when he had become an untouchable deity of the art world, he denied having made, out
of pure spite. In other words, Picasso forged a ruling to declare that, in fact, he had been
his own forger.

This is not the case of the famous painting La douleur, the property of the Metropolitan
Museum, New York. In the museum’s online description we read: “When shown a pho-
tograph of this painting in the 1960s, Picasso denied that he had made it and dismissed
it as a ‘bad joke by friends.’ Recent research has shown, to the contrary, that it was one
of two paintings purchased in Barcelona in 1912 by Picasso’s dealer, Daniel-Henry
Kahnweiler, from Benet Soler, whose clothes shop Picasso frequented.”

But nobody considers the possibility that, as suggested by the unlettered investigator
Alain Moreau, this painting could be the work of the painter and sculptor Manolo Hu-
gué, a great friend of Picasso’s and, out of necessity, also a swindler and a fraudster. It is
possible that he gave it to the tailor Soler, who had broken off relations with Picasso’s
family due to an unpaid debt, in exchange for clothes. All one needs to do is read Josep
Pla’s Vida de Manolo contada por él mismo, [4] and look at some of Hugué’s paintings, to
see that this theory is not far-fetched.

For Picasso, forgery is a form of affirmation and dominance. Never servitude.
But how did Salvador Dalí confront questions of tradition and authorship? Here, the figure of the father is paradigmatic. According to Dalí, when he was a boy, his father seemed to him “un gigante de fuerza, de violencia, de autoridad y de amor imperioso. Moisés y Júpiter a la vez.”[5] (‘a giant of strength, violence, authority and imperious love. Moses plus Jupiter.’)

To survive, Dalí needed to eliminate this threat. As he told André Parinaud, “poco a poco Moisés se fue despojando de su barba de autoridad y Júpiter de su rayo. No quedó más que un Guillermo Tell: un hombre cuyo éxito depende del heroísmo de su hijo, y de su estoicismo”. (‘...Moses little by little was losing the beard of authority and Jupiter his thunder. All that remained was William Tell: the man whose success depends on his son’s heroism and stoicism.’)

Finally, after his glorious homecoming to his father in 1948, Dalí in mystical mood affirms: “había conseguido apropiarme de su fuerza y superarla. Lo que él no sabía es que, digiriéndole, le había llevado también a su resurrección y que revivía a través de mí. (...) Mi padre, Júpiter vencido, no ha cesado de renacer en mis constantes proyecciones mentales. Lo he reencontrado en la persona de Picasso y en los rasgos de Stalin, admirable en su poder y dureza, pero sin ningún terror, ningún miedo, sin que la sombra de una fascinación me paralice”.[6] (‘I had succeeded in taking over and overtaking his strength. What he did not know was that by digesting him I had also brought about his resurrection, and that he was living once again through me. (...) My father, the vanquished Jupiter, has never ceased being reborn in the mental projections I constantly make. He reappeared in the person of Picasso and in the lineaments of Stalin, admirable in strength and hardness, but devoid of terror or fear, without the shadow of any fascination to paralyse me.’)

Dalí is as vulnerable as a lobster without its carapace: like a hermit crab, he has to occupy structures in order to acquire the attributes he needs to survive or to fulfill his desire for domination. It is a way of thinking not far removed from Duchamp’s Grand Verre (Large Glass). Thus, aged seven, Dalí identifies with the picture of Napoleon printed on a wooden keg of maté that belonged to the Matas family, their neighbours in Figueres. “su panza estaba adornada con una imagen de Bonaparte. (...) Durante diez segundos, yo me nutría de su fuerza. Me convertía en Napoleón, dueño del mundo”.[7] ‘Its belly was decorated with an image of Bonaparte...for ten seconds his strength flowed into me. I became Napoleon, master of the world.’ [Image 3]
Dalí also kept a fancy dress costume of a king, a present from his uncle and aunt in Barcelona. As he grew older, his head grew too, but he continued to force the crown onto it, even though it made his temples hurt. “Tanto representaba a mis ojos –proclama- el poder que yo soñaba arrancar a mi padre”.\[8\] (This was how much the power that I dreamed of wrestling from my father meant to me,’ he proclaimed)

He also enjoyed dressing up as a clown. On one hand, he was interested in the split between the inner and outer life of the character, the cruel spectacle of a forlorn clown obliged to make others laugh. And on the other, according to his own sibylline interpretations, the clown was the Greek god Hermes, emissary of the gods, who, on the rare occasions when he is depicted clothed, wears robes similar to a Harlequin costume.\[9\]

In 1933 or 1934, Dalí attempted a shady manoeuvre: as Rainer Michael Mason argues in the exhibition Dalí verdadero / grabado falso, it is possible that Dalí obtained an artist’s proof of one of Picasso’s etchings, entitled Trois baigneuses II (1933), which belonged to Paul Eluard.\[10\] With the collusion of an engraver in the Lacourière studio, with whom he had made the prints for Les Chants de Maldoror, he modified it, increasing the space between the three figures that make up the composition and “enriching it” with some strictly Dalian additions: next to a humanoid figure composed of various objects, including a ball, a chair, two cups and two forks, he places a decapitated female form, kneeling in prayer, in the act of mutilating her own leg. The figure is held up by a hayfork driven into the ground by a character easily identifiable as Dalí’s father, depicted as William Tell. Dressed in his underwear, his penis protrudes from his pants, a scene that Dalí recalled from childhood: once, when he was very ill, his father had sat up with him all night. In the morning a client appeared demanding that he sign some pa-
pers urgently, and the notary, dressed in this fashion, refused; a fight ensued and they ended up rolling down the stairs, his father’s member bumping against the floor...

Mason suggests that it is reasonable to imagine that the artist’s proof was brought to Picasso by Paul Eluard. Eluard, looking for an illustration for his *Nuits partagées*, proposed that Picasso make a heliographic engraving of this “collaborative” work... And Picasso, of course, refused.

If Dalí is to be believed, because in the absence of proof it is more a question of faith in the veracity of Dali’s own account, Picasso agreed to finance Dalí’s first trip to America, in November 1934. US immigration records can be consulted online thanks to The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. It seems surreal... but it is a wonderful source of research materials. Millions of personal files, made available so as not to rule out the possibility of celebrating baptisms for the dead, allow us to trace the artists’ footsteps... [Image 4]

In 1935, the year in which he perfected the paranoiac-critical method, Dalí published an essay entitled “Les pantoufles de Picasso” (*Picasso’s slippers*)[11] in *Cahiers d’Art*. Dalí “cut & pasted” the beginning of Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch’s story *La pantoufle de Sapho*, (*Sappho’s slipper*), probably from the French edition of 1907. A double collage, because to the cut & paste of Sacher-Masoch he added the mechanisms of the paranoiac-critical method. This was described by Dalí in 1935, in *La Conquête de l’Irrationnel (The Conquest of the Irrational)* as a "spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivity of the associations and interpretations of delirious phenomena."

Dalí cuts out fragments of the irrational universe and embeds them in the grammatical logic of representation. Incidentally, the English expression “putting yourself in some-
one’s shoes” also leads one to the suspect that the tale of the slippers is a sign of Dalí’s intention to supplant the genius from Malaga. In the same way that the oh-so Dalinian doubled image, a conceptual variant of collage, was used on at least one occasion, in 1935, by Picasso, in a drawing of a double swan transformed into a scorpion. [12]

1935 is the date of Picasso’s first forays into literature. In his notes we can see that his art does not obey mathematical or geometrical hypotheses: “and if we draw a line from A to C and from K to T passing through X and Y crossing D times H it is the same as the parrot’s and I couldn’t give a damn because I have seen it more than a thousand times and I’ve got it right up me since it’s necessary to believe in mathematics and art is something else” [14]

Picasso had vacuum-packed Cubist space by eliminating the air that any vanishing point supplies. Forget the golden number postulated by the Rumanian diplomat and prince Matila Ghyka, a close friend of Max Jacob.

Artistic collage would be Picasso and Braque’s next move in the conquest of a new representational space. However, the first professionals to use collage were photographers: in group photographs and some full-body portraits, the camera’s lens was unable to bring figures and background into focus at the same time. This presented no difficulty for the painter. To solve the problem, the background was photographed first, and then the figures, and a new composition was assembled. It was a trick, a falsification, used to give the appearance of verisimilitude.

Collage, according to Wikipedia - whose foundation’s first home was in St. Petersburg, Florida - is ‘a technique of art production, primarily used in the visual arts, where the artwork is made from an assemblage of different forms, thus creating a new whole.’ If, for Picasso, forgery was akin to stealing someone’s soul, Dalí forged his own biography, elevating it to the status of mythology. The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí is a perfect forgery that mixes real events with fake ones, sometimes marking them as such. Dalí is the first artist who succeeded in making his own life a continuous cut & paste of Freudian and Christian myths.

I know it’s an unusual question... but why Cubism? Why did Picasso choose, with Braque, to follow Cézanne, and not the fauvist adventures of Derain and Matisse, or the expressionism of the Germans? Was it intuition, the desire not to follow in anyone’s footsteps, the need to establish of a controlled environment for the creations from his laboratory? In Picasso and Braque’s cubist space, the eye passes over the object, but arbitrarily, perhaps at random. There is no established mathematical theory. Picasso declared on one occasion, speaking of the influence of the populariser of science Maurice Joseph Princet on cubist painters: “Il n’en imposait qu’aux cons!” [15] (‘Only the idiots paid him any attention!’)

Is it a coincidence that in 1918 Max Jacob, Picasso’s close friend, translated The Book of the Lover and the Beloved, by the medieval Majorcan philosopher Ramon Llull? Llull, the author of Ars Magna, is the first philosopher of methodical reason: he designed, and proposed to build, a logic machine of a mechanical nature that would be able to prove
Josep Palau i Fabre, the great Picasso scholar, considers Ramon Llull and Picasso to be the Alpha and the Omega of modernity. He accords them both the status of Alchemists. Dalí, via the philosopher Francesc Pujols, was also an admirer of Llull’s thought. And if Llull hoped to build a logic machine, simpler but also more effective than those of Raymond Roussel, what Dalí hoped to do, with his paranoiac-critical method, was to feed this machine with irrational thoughts.

And the curious thing is that this machine really existed, incarnated in the person of Lídia Sabana, the celebrated Lídia de Cadaquès who played hostess to Picasso in 1910 and fed him on bouillabaisse fish stews; the same Lidia who, madly in love with the thinker Eugeni d’Ors, sold her cabin in Portlligat to Dalí, and taught him moral maxims like “honey is sweeter than blood.”

Lidia’s house in the village was at number 162 on the Riba d’es Poal. It occupied part of the land that had once belonged to a convent. To the right of the house, it is still possible to see the arches of what was once part of the cloister. A cloister that was used by Picasso in his Cadaqués-inspired illustrations for Saint Matorel, by the mystic in slippers Max Jacob; and that his friend Ramon Pichot had included in several landscapes. Picasso’s biographers claim that the artist was inspired by a monastery in Barcelona. [Image 6] Some art historians should travel more, and talk to the locals. If they did, they’d discover that Pierre Daix and Palau i Fabre got the dates of Picasso’s arrival in Cadaqués wrong; that when Picasso painted the canvas La barca griega he was in
fact painting the Greek boat that belonged to the Contos family, from Crete, who came to dive for coral every summer. [16] [Image 7]

We will never know if Pablo Picasso was a master of the art of perspective. Nor is it likely that he was particularly interested in an obsolescent technique. But we do know about Dalí’s difficulties with the third dimension. Already in his entrance exam for the Academia de San Fernando he struggled to complete his drawing at the size required. A composition with any degree of depth, such as The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition (1934), even at such a small scale, suffers as a result. Dalí, the great admirer of Vermeer, Rafael and Velázquez, who as a child adored his teacher Señor Traiter’s optical theatre, was incapable of representing the third dimension in a satisfactory fashion. Hence his obsession with, and use of, subterfuges such as projected photographs, traced copies and technical assistants like Emilio Puignau, a surveyor from Cadaqués, from 1948, and the scene painter Isidoro Beà for the rest of his artistic career. It is startling to see how, after Beà’s appearance on the scene, his canvases become bigger and bigger, with audacious perspectives and unprecedented geometric complexity. But this was not enough for him, and in the 1970s he explored avenues as outdated as stereoscopic images (1976 - 1980) or as innovative as holography (1973 -1974). The important thing is the credibility of the system of representation.

There’s a Spanish saying that runs: “Díme de lo que presumes y te diré de lo que careces”. “Tell me what you’re most proud of, and I’ll tell you what you lack.” Dalí avoids perspective by the use of mystic space. For Dalí, there are two worlds: the earthly world of putrefaction, and the world of astronomy, celestial and eternal. The invitation to astronomy that he issues in his first published article, Sant Sebastià, (Saint Sebastian) is in fact an invitation to the immutable principles of geometry, of mathematics, of all that is measurable and immanent.

Microbes, the invisible menace made a reality by the precision of microscope lenses, are pathogenic agents transported by sentimentality. Dalí was a great reader of popular science magazines, and enjoyed articles on mechanics, astronomy and physics. We can take a plate illustrating types of Philodina Roseda and compare it with drawings des-
tined for the *Book of Putrefactions.* Philodina Roseda is a practically immortal organism, because when removed from its natural habitat, water, it dries out, and then, when water returns, it rehydrates itself. What’s more, it can reproduce sexually without the need for a second sex.

After visiting Picasso in April 1926, Dalí took the first steps on the path towards his own style, which began to take shape in the summer of 1927. While Dalí painted, his sister Anna Maria and Federico García Lorca strolled on the nearby beach of El Sortell, in Cadaqués, where they collected fossils, stones and pieces of glass polished by the sea, which Dalí used to make the pictorial objects, part real and part fantastic, that he called “apparatuses.” In her book on Salvador Dalí, Anna Maria writes that: “we often become fascinated watching a crab or a shoal of prawns in these clear waters, and just as when I was a young girl, I take great pleasure in observing how life unfolds in these little pools nestling among the rocks.” [127]

Hanging in his studio there is a reproduction of *Deux femmes courant sur la plage* (1922) (*Two women running on the beach*) and posters that proclaim “Viva Picasso!” But Dalí’s new course towards a personal grammar ignores Picasso and takes inspiration from Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights,* in the Museo del Prado, the Lullian wisdom locked away behind the geometries of the palace of El Escorial, Renaissance mysticism and symbolism, and his own sexual experiences.

In the summer of 1927, Dalí stages his personal non-place in a space divided into putrefied earth and cosmic heavens. The division is as simple and dramatic as the seaward horizon on a day of “calma blanca” in Cadaqués, the “white calm,” a phenomenon in which the wind stops blowing and the surface of the sea becomes a strange and awe-inspiring mirror.

*Honey is Sweeter than Blood, Little Ashes, Apparatus and Hand...* these are the principal works Dalí produced in the summer of 1927. A summer during which Dalí, Anna Maria and Federico amused themselves creating astronomical collages, planning the as yet unpublished *Book of Putrefactions,* and culminating in a romance that would have tragic consequences.

*Apparatus and Hand* is the first of Dalí’s works to deal explicitly with the theme of masturbation. It includes one of the celebrated *apparatuses* collected in the sand, reminiscent of the drawing *Heliometer for Deaf-Mutes* already included in his recent work *Sant Sebastià,* the rotting donkey and the phallic fish; the mutilated Venus, the bather from *Depart. “Homage to Fox Newsreel,”* a guilty hand inspired by a piece of coral that Federico found on the beach and laid beside the figure of the Virgin in the dining room of the Dalís’ house, the rocky landscape of Cadaqués, the clouds in Mantegna’s *Transit of the Virgin,* and, like ejaculated desires, praying mermaids floating up to heaven. Thus far, a description of the painting. But the composition leads us back to a work illustrated by the Portuguese painter Francisco de Holanda in around 1573: *De Aetatibus Mundi Imagines* (*Images of the Ages of the World*), a Renaissance masterpiece – de Holanda studied in Rome under Michaelangelo - which is kept in the Biblioteca Nacional de Ma-
drid, fifteen minutes on foot from the Residencia de Estudiantes, where Dalí lived until 1926. This book would inspire the whole Dalinian cosmology. [Image 8]

Dalí will surprise us throughout his life and his work with multiple acts of structural mimetism. The result is, invariably, self-referential. Dalí explains himself only to Dalí.

According to Peter Moore, in his memoir of Dalí’s life, when Picasso died, Life magazine wanted to dedicate an entire edition to him. Dalí promised the magazine a portrait of the genius from Malaga that he had drawn years earlier. But Moore saw Dalí tear out a blank page from an old book in his library, and prepare to draw on it. This portrait of Picasso, executed in a style more reminiscent of the early Dalí, was not published in Life. But Moore published it as a lithograph. Later, he discovered that Dalí had copied Picasso’s face from a photograph by Brassaï...

Let’s return to Picasso in Paris, 1900. His friend Casagemas falls in love with Germaine Gargallo. She pours scorn on his virility and he commits suicide. The pairing of death and desire is a universal theme. Picasso paints his friend’s funeral in the manner of El Greco’s The Burial of Count Orgaz. It was his first incursion into the fourth dimension, which transcends space and time. Which folds watches as if they were Camembert cheeses. Which completes the life cycle that Casagemas could not complete in Life. Which is hidden among Ramon Pichot’s twirls in La Danza. (The three dancers). We find it in the silence of Germaine Gargallo, unfaithful to Casagemas and Ramon Pichot, preferring Picasso. We find it in the depths of the gaze of Picasso’s last self-portrait. And, as strange as it might seem, in Dalí’s last self-portrait as a horse - the same horse that Casagemas rides in the afterlife, proclaim-
ing his false happiness as he expires. And indeed, faced by the inevitability of death, who has not cheated a little?

List of Images:
1 Dalí’s signature on a blank sheet of paper from the St. Regis hotel, 1955. Private Collection, Cadaqués.
2 Screenshot of the operating system of the Xerox Alto, 1973. Creative Commons Licence.
3 I found the maté keg from Dalí’s childhood, in the Herboristería del Rey, a herbalist’s shop in Barcelona. In the shop they tell the story of how, in the 1960s, Dalí came and persuaded them to give him one.
4 Manifest of the Champlain, the ship in which Dalí and Gala arrived in the USA for the first time, in 1934.
5 Ramon Llull’s logic machine, published in his Ars Magna, 1313.
6 Tourist map of the coast of Cadaqués.
7 The Greek fishing boat belonging to the Contos family, in a photograph from 1910.

[12] André Breton published fragments of poems by Picasso in Cahiers d’Art, 1936, pp. 50-55, including the following: “le cigne sur le lac fait le scorpion à sa manière” (“In its own fashion, the swan on the lake makes a scorpion.”)