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Abstract

For the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, New York, Salvador Dalí created a surrealist funhouse called Dream of Venus. This installation, which included sound and performance, aimed at a controversial sensation, a truly surreal experience for its visitors. Labelled as "tacky, Oceanside amusement park attraction" and wrapped up by consumer commodity, however, Dalí's surrealist funhouse is been said to have lost much of its provocative power. This contribution investigates to what extent the avant-garde aesthetics and politics became part and parcel of American consumer culture, commodity culture and capitalism. Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's poststructuralist analysis of the axiomatic regime of capitalism and their view on madness provides a toolbox for taking a closer look at surrealist (vain?) efforts to combat capitalist dominion.

Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus* at the 1939 New York World's Fair: Capitalist Funhouse or Surrealist Landmark?

Christel Stalpaert

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1 Dream of Venus[1]

[AU1]

It must have amused and shocked the visitors of the 1939 New York world's fair. Lured by a siren's recorded chants (sung by B-movie legend Ruth Ford), fairgoers purchased 25 cent tickets from a ticket booth shaped like a hideous fish, and then entered the surrealist pavilion through a pair of giant women's legs made from plaster. The doorway was topped by Botticelli's Venus, blown up to billboard height. Once inside, visitors encountered a topless sleeping Venus, goddess of Love, who reclined in an outsize bed draped in red satin, covered with flowers and leaves. An adjacent aquarium contained telephones floating around like seaweed and bare-breasted mermaids who were either milking a bandaged cow or tapping on floating typewriter keys.

Dalí agreed to create a pavilion for the world's fair in order to introduce the large American audience to the surrealist movement. The mermaids, "seen at close range and a trifle water-magnified, should win more converts to surrealism than a dozen high-brow exhibitions", claims a contemporaneous review in *Time* magazine (*Time*, 10). As they were familiar with Freud's psychoanalytic methods of examination, surrealists believed in the omnipotence of the dream to liberate people from the reign of logic and to find a new way of expressing oneself. In his *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), André Breton regretted that in the western world:

> boundaries have been assigned even to experience. It revolves in a cage from which release is becoming increasingly difficult. It (…) depends upon immediate utility and is guarded by common sense. (…) The mind hardly dares express itself and, when it does, is limited to stating that this idea or that woman has an effect on it. What effect it cannot say; thus it gives the measure of its subjectivism and nothing more. (Breton in Waldberg 1971, 66–67)

[AU2]

Instead of the superficial mode of expressionism, surrealism designated a new mode of "pure" expression, by means of revealing unconscious dream thoughts. "I would like to sleep in order to enable myself to surrender to sleepers, as I surrender to those who read me with their eyes open, in order to stop the conscious rhythm of my thought from prevailing over this material", reports Breton (in Waldberg 1971, 67).

In line with these surrealist writings, Dalí's sleeping beauty in *Dream of Venus* can be interpreted as a brave explorer of the human mind, fleeing the suffocating cage of common sense, crossing the boundaries of consciousness and displaying her dreams to those who gaze at her with wide open eyes. Her imagination on the verge of sleeping is staged underwater, in the adjacent aquarium and subsequent 'chambers'. Indeed, you can hear her dreaming: "In the fever of love, I lie upon my ardent bed. A bed eternally long, and I dream my burning dreams – the longest dreams ever dreamed without beginning and without end … Enter the shell of my house and you will see my dreams" (in Schaffner 2002, 18).

Dalí used bizarre and delirious images to reveal Venus' dreams, but in fact created an unforgettable landscape of *his own* most inner fantasy; "an erotic underwater

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[1] For a detailed description of the several surrealist 'chambers', see Schaffner (2002).

fantasia" (2003, 71).[2] In Dalí's world, Venus does not represent a goddess, sublimating the feelings of love. Instead, with an ironic reference to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Dalí evokes the mad passion of lust for love and sexual pleasure.[3] His mermaids refer to the legendary aquatic creatures whose beautiful singing lured the fishermen towards the devastating rocks. These mythological stories were integrated into Catholic moral discourse in order to warn mortals against the dangerous seduction of the flesh. Dalí, however, was not interested in disciplining human beings. On the contrary, he wanted the visitors to freely experience the dream of convulsive passion and mad love. The Botticelli reproduction aligned directly above the plaster women's legs suggests that the visitor enters the very womb of Venus herself.

Freud's psychoanalytic writings inspired surrealists to become "the explorer of the human mind to extend his investigations" (Breton in Waldberg 1971, 66). It is precisely in these words that Dalí described his representation of Columbus as a new version of the artist's famous *Rainy Taxi* (1938) in one of the first 'dream chambers' beyond the glass tanks of *Dream of Venus*. Dalí conceived this historical personage as the passenger of an ivy-strewn taxi, bearing a sign 'I Return' (to Europe). Columbus was to be continually sprayed with interior rain, as had been done at the 1938 version at the Galerie Beaux-Arts courtyard for the *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris. A huge fish-tail peeping through the front window mirrored the mermaid theme. According to some critics, the connection between Columbus and Venus was "incomprehensible" (Kachur, 150), but the link between Columbus and the artist himself, on the other hand, was obvious. Both Dalí and his alter ego Columbus had an adventurous mind and endeavored towards yet undiscovered territories. Dalí himself observed that he shared Columbus' desire to leave, to escape, to find himself in the middle of the sea, trying to cross the line of the horizon, making his exit from the known world. Looked at through the lens of poststructuralist discourse, this reads as a critique on the dogmatic model of representation and recognition in art. In fact, Dalí maintains a rigorous distinction between on the one hand knowledge, understood as the recognition of prefabricated truths, and on the other hand thinking, seen as the creative creation of new concepts. In this sense, the surrealist dream image becomes an alternative one, exceeding pat representations of the real and instead tickling the invisible or unrepresentable.[4] In *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, the artist confesses the following:

> Columbus discovered America while he was looking for the Antipodes. In the Middle Ages, metals like lead and antimony were discovered in the search for the philosopher's Stone. And I, while I had been looking for the most directly exhibitionist way of showing my obsession with bread, had just discovered its invisibility. (…) One does not immediately see

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[2] Lewis Kachur pointed at the stereotypically gendered "Godivers" performing underwater. "They could play milkmaid or secretary, typing on floating keys, or chat on the telephone" (Kachur, 142). These gender issues will not be discussed here, though.

[3] The delirious images testify of mad love – "l'amour fou", as Breton pointed out in his poem of 1937. "La beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas", judges Breton (1945, 108). It is the same convulsive passion that is at stake in Dalí's *Dream of Venus*.

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have elaborately written about the distinction between knowledge and thinking in *What is Philosophy?*, p. 54.

> what one is looking at, and this is not a vulgar phenomenon of attention, but very frequently a clearly hallucinatory phenomenon. The power to provoke this kind of hallucination at will would pose possibilities of invisibility within the framework of real phenomena, becoming one of the most effective weapons of paranoiac magic. (337)

The "hallucinatory power" that reveals "the possibilities of invisibility" that Dalí refers to, is displayed in his *Dream of Venus*. The bizarre setting of his surrealist funhouse was meant to invite the visitors to move beyond common sense, and hence to discover the yet unseen, to hear the yet unnoticed, to feel the yet not experienced. The waterless enclosure in the *Dream of Venus* pavilion contained a ceiling hung with inverted black umbrellas, displayed like surrealist objects. Most of the umbrellas were open, some of them were accompanied with hanks of human hair or a telephone receiver. In using ordinary objects which no longer had a use value, Dalí unmistakably proceeded the surrealistic quest of "the golden fleece of everyday magic" (Rosemont 1978, 52). By diverting objects from their customary use and displaying them as seen in dreams, Dalí wished to discover and reveal the dreamlike magic of these supposed gratuitous objects. It is precisely the immediate utility of goods in a logocentral society that surrealists put into question, hence tackling one of the baselines of capitalism.

2 I Can't Get No Satisfaction … of the Appetite of the Mind

The unsettling images were not used for entertainment purposes only and did not serve cheap pleasure. It was the surrealist's intention to move towards a solution of the principal problems of life. "Why should I not expect more of the dream sign than I do of a daily increasing degree of consciousness? Could not the dreams as well be applied to the solution of life's fundamental problems?", Breton wondered in his *First Surrealist Manifesto* (in Waldberg 1971, 67). This intention goes hand in hand with the common knowledge that surrealism politically moved to the left. Shortly after the first surrealist manifesto, Breton wrote that the true liberation of humanity was only possible after the proletarian revolution. The title of the surrealist journal that appeared from 1930 onwards – *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* – speaks for itself.

During the decade 1929–1939, the surrealist movement most explicitly acted as a supportive (artistic) force that sided with revolutionary actors that fought capitalism (e.g. the Communist party, proletariat and the labour organizations). In line with communist thought, surrealism combated every effort of capitalist recuperation, rubbing their shoulders with Marxism. This is no surprise, as Marx pointed out in his *Theories of Surplus Value* that capitalist production is hostile to certain aspects of intellectual production, such as art and poetry.

In 1930, the newspaper *L'esprit française* addressed an inquiry to several revolutionary intellectuals to find out whether, with regard to the sale of works of art, they were pessimistic or optimistic about the relations between intellectual work and those who make it profitable. Breton replied to the inquiry that the intellectual producer should strive to satisfy the *appetite of the mind*, as natural as hunger.

The other mode of intellectual production, aimed at satisfying needs on the part of the producer, such as money, honours or glory, was considered to be problematic. "Such an individual is an integral part of the capitalist world", Breton writes, "and the extent of his disappointments with that world should not, certainly, morally exceed those of any other exploiter – for example, a trader in rubber" (in Rosemont 1978, 91). These words would prove to be prophetic, as Dalí would experience severe problems in protecting his artistic concept against what he called the brute commercial forces of his sponsor and rubber agent Gardner.

In the *New Yorker*, Salvador Dalí appropriated the surrealists' 1930s leftist ideology by stating with regard to his *Dream of Venus*, "I paint for the masses … for the people" (in Kachur, 126). To create art for the masses indeed seemed to be the solution to move away from the capitalism that ruled the glamorous world of upper-class chic. It was a matter of *épater la bourgeoisie*, of shaking off the weight of artistic convention. For this reason, surrealists wished to move beyond the museum walls and were eager to blend high and low culture. They experienced the traditional art hierarchy – which only granted museum status to painting and sculpture – as insufficient and inaccurate, believing that galleries and museums should broaden their purview to accommodate photography, film, architecture, industrial design, and performance. Surrealists radically diffused the line between low and high culture, but also between disciplines, hence following the principles of critic Gilbert Seldes, who in 1924 published his widely read book *The 7 Lively Arts*. Slapstick films, cartoons, comics, musical comedies, black humour, revues, popular songs, and vaudeville (along with their mass audiences) were thus elevated to the formerly exclusive precincts of high art.

Paradoxically, many surrealists were attracted to the Hollywood industry of [AU3] celluloid dreams to satisfy the appetite of their artistic mind.[5] Applying Taylorist and Fordist production principles to the creative process, the "dream factory" of Hollywood seems at odds with the leftist surrealist ideology. Hence, Breton, arbiter of surrealism, held serious reservations about the potential of film for surrealist endeavours. In the pamphlet *Au grand jour*, which appeared in Paris in 1927 and in which the exclusion of Antonin Artaud and Philippe Soupault from the surrealist group was made public, he condemns Artaud for being a film actor and perceives the acting as a "concession au néant".

On the other hand, not all surrealists saw film in the same bad light as Breton did.[6] Comedy, musicals, horror films and animated cartoons were 'low culture' genres that provided fertile territory to "dislodge our faith in a realist apprehension of the solidity of reality" (Richardson, 62). For example, some surrealists even adored the humour of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton because of its "taste for anarchy and insubordination" (Richardson, 62).

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[5] The fascination of surrealism with Hollywood has been explored notably by Kyrou (1967, 1985), Matthews, (1979), Hammond (2000), and Richardson (2006).

[6] André Breton was in fact very ambiguous himself in his attitude towards film. The film *Un Chien Andalou* (1928–29) created by Dalí and Buñuel was hailed as a surrealist masterpiece. In *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930), Breton explicitly mentions film, next to painting and literature, as a surrealist product.

Dalí himself actually went to Hollywood twice: first in 1945, to stage the dream sequence for Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Spellbound*, and again in 1946, at the invitation of Walt Disney to collaborate on *Destino*, an unrealized animated film based on a Mexican ballad (Schaffner 1999, *Levy Gallery*, 43). In line with the times, Julien Levy, one of the many sponsors behind Dalí's *Dream of Venus* pavilion and one of the most influential surrealist art dealers of that time in New York, enlivened his gallery by mixing culture with entertainment, and by putting movies and comics alongside the ballet on his programme. Cultural interest in the cartoonist's art was percolating at the time in America; the Museum of Modern Art included two frames from Disney shorts in the 1936 *Fantastic Art*, *Dada*, *Surrealism* exhibition. Yet, Levy bears the distinction of being among the first to show the work of Walt Disney in a commercial gallery; in 1938 he exhibited animation art for the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Schaffner 1999, *Levy Gallery*, 107).

Many surrealists also had a close relation to the world of fashion for the same purpose; to undermine the world of appearance and to destabilize the border of high-brow art. For example, Man Ray very actively photographed models and mannequins for *Harper's Bazaar* in the mid-1930s. Artists like Meret Oppenheim even worked as couturiers and fabricated fur-lined jewellery for Elsa Schiaparelli. Dalí himself produced a number of surrealist store windows for Bonwit-Teller's department store on Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street and collaborated with Schiaparelli in dress designs from 1937 onwards. New York glossy magazines would advertise the infamous Dalí-rouge as that year's fashion, together with his infamous shoe-hat. A variety of surrealists used mannequins in their displays, such as Marcel Duchamp's, who used a headless mannequin in the New York bookstore window display for Breton's *Arcane 17* (1945).

Throughout the 1930s, the playful, inventive spirit of surrealists tickled the decorative arts. Kurt Siligmann's *Ultra-Furniture* (1938), a stool made of four women's legs, competed for attention with Dalí's *Mae West Sofa* of 1936, a lip-shaped sofa inspired by the erotic lips of the Hollywood actress. To conquer America, surrealists rubbed their shoulders with fashion, 'low', commercial culture and entertainment. It seemed to work. The American painter Dorothea Tanning remembers how The Julien Levy Gallery brought:

> mostly from France where radical things were happening to art and ideas, a stunning series of visual explosions whose seismic vibrations were felt in studio lofts and galleries all over town and as far away as California. By the time the Museum of Modern Art got around to its famous exhibition *Fantastic Art*, *Dada*, *Surrealism* in 1936, the Julien Levy Gallery had given New York four years of surrealist chocks, such as the Dalí exhibition I walked in on one day (…) where both Dalí and his wife occupied the place like an invading army (in Schaffner 1999, *Gallery*, 15).

3 A New Mode of Exhibiting Art

In blending low and high culture, surrealism "moved into three-dimensional space", as Kachur put it (108), and as such it addressed a broad public space. Much in the same way, the surrealist funhouse *Dream of Venus* deliberately wormed its way up the entertainment business in order to investigate new modes for exhibiting art, outside the walls of traditional museums. Dalí himself cultivated a disdain for the suffocating labels with which art was customarily shrouded. His particular sense of adventure called for a radical blurring of the lines between art and life, between high and low culture, aiming at complete human freedom. He intended *Dream of Venus* to be provocatively anti-institutional and cross-disciplinary. Hence, the pavilion does not only incorporate the visual arts and performance, but also architecture. A less conventional, more corporeal interaction with art replaced the usual contemplative encounter with pictures on a wall. The circuitous aspect of the pavilion, a kind of 'passage' through surrealist 'chambers' displaying performances, objects and wall paintings, surely questioned the traditional mode of exhibiting art. With a marked point of entry, the visitor followed a determined sequence of surrealist encounters, tickling all the senses in the most intriguing manner. Another way in which the visitors' expectations were thwarted was the ceiling. This is normally an unnoticed zone in conventional museum exhibitions, but here it was stuffed with inverted umbrellas and became a stunning focal point.

Dalí's art dealer and sponsor of the surrealist pavilion at the fair, Julien Levy, had the same effect in mind: he also intended to question the traditional mode of exhibiting art in Dalí's pavilion. He had visited the experimental 1938 *Exposition International du Surréalisme* in Paris and was eager to bring the concept of the unsettling environmental display to New York. As Kachur (106) submits, he thought beyond his gallery to envision a newly theatricalised Surrealist installation in a broad public space.

Already in his own gallery, Levy had used the unsettling architectural elements of the curved wall. On the opening of the gallery, in October 1937, *Vogue* enthusiastically wrote, "The newly-planned walls are broken up artfully, dipping and waving and straightening out again. The rug is dark wine, the walls white, the effect naked and modern" (in Schaffner 1999, *Gallery*, 20). Levy not only redefined the conventional backdrop for serious painting and sculpture – the naked, stark white walls would replace the velvet walls and Victorian decoration galleries that were mostly used in those days – he also questioned the static display of paintings and sculpture. Ingrid Schaffner describes his gallery as follows:

> Pictures hanging on those [curved] walls took on a cinematic sequencing, directed by the dealer. Accelerated by the viewer's advance, the curve rapidly dissolved one image into another, like frames in a film screened through a projector. A gallery press release announced that pictures 'present themselves one by one, instead of stiffly regimented as they would be on a straight wall'. (Schaffner 1999, *Gallery*, 21)

She concludes very appropriately that "Julien Levy made art lively" (22).

This liveliness of the arts was not only achieved from an architectural point of view, however. Levy cleverly picked up the shift that was taking place in the American art world and codified the rituals of post-war gallery commerce. Galleries changed from upholstered enclaves and salon-style sanctuaries to fashionable forums with an expanded public. As Schaffner observes, "there was always something amusing going on" in the Julien Levy Gallery (36). Press releases, snappy announcement cards and opening-night cocktail parties created a discourse that attracted a mix of visitors: critics, collectors, curators, and artists, who then generated reviews, gossip, speculation, interest and sales.[7] The step that Levy made towards the public grounds of the upcoming and much ballyhooed New York world's fair in 1939 thus seems fairly logical.

4 Several Americas

In 1935, in the depths of the Great Depression, when America's future seemed bleak, a group of New York City retired policemen decided to create an international exposition to fire the nation's imagination, to provide hope for prosperity and to lift the city and the entire country out of depression. According to the official New York world's fair pamphlet, the world's fair allowed the visitors to take a look at the world of tomorrow: "Here are the materials, ideas, and forces at work in our world. These are the tools with which the World of Tomorrow must be made." The 1939 world's fair proclaimed progress and the arrival of Modern America. While the main purpose of the fair was to lift the spirits of America and drive much-needed business to New York City, it was also felt that there should be a cultural or historical association. Therefore, it was decided that the fair should mix fine art with commercial entertainment forms, that it should blend great mass attractions with class-specific interests. Surrealism fit these decisions well, as it was in those days perceived as a link between both "worlds of upper class chic and fashion" (Kachur, 108). It is precisely this mix that drew Dalí to the New York fair. The artist was convinced that America was the right place to obtain this goal, not Europe. In *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, he writes:

> I had a growing desire to feel myself in contact with a 'new flesh', with a new country, that had not yet been touched by the decomposition of Post-War Europe. America! I wanted to go over there and see what it was like, to bring my bread, place my bread over there. (324)

This radical choice for America, the so-called 'land of the dollar', seems at odds with the surrealists' fight against capitalism, but one must not forget that surrealism came into existence in a Europe that suffered from the outcome of World War I, an outcome that was completely different for Europe than for America. Both the American and European economies crashed at the end of the 1920s, but, as Robert W. Rydell has pointed out, the formulas for salvation from the depression varied in Europe and America, echoing in different sorts of world's fairs. He reports that:

> European and British world's fair promoters, usually national governments, tended to stress the development of empire as the key ingredient for national recovery, while American exposition promoters, usually industrialists and local civic leaders acting with federal government sponsorship, tended to place more weight on the marriage of science and technology to the modern corporation as the blueprint for building a better tomorrow. (7)

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[7] From sales income, Levy made 50% if the work came directly from the artist, but he only received a portion of that if another dealer was involved (Schaffner 1999, *Gallery*, 25).

In service to the American world's fair, a scientific and cultural association was introduced "as science is the best use of the human intelligence to study and improve the environment of human living". Moreover, the university presidents members of the committee stressed that education was not merely an institutional activity. Instead, they highlighted the value of the radio, motion pictures, and the theatre for "providing 'extra-curricular' instruction to Americans" (in Rydell 1993, 113).

In order to understand Dalí's radical choice for Modern America, one must also keep in mind that by 1939, the Nazi world conquest was on its way to becoming a reality. Hitler annexed Austria and seized Czechoslovakia. The world was burning and America seemed to have the only fire truck in the house. Albert Einstein, who had been invited to serve as the nominal chairman of the ACS of the 1939 world's wair, was on the verge of becoming an American citizen in 1940 and uttered the following warm praise in favour of the United States: "In America, the development of the individual and his creative powers is possible, and that, to me, is the most valuable asset in life. (…) In some countries, men have neither political rights nor the opportunity for free intellectual development. But for most Americans, such a situation would be intolerable" (in Jerome and Taylor 2006, 70). It was in this context that Dalí wrote the following words of acclaim about America:

> And often what with us had tragic undertones assumed at most an aspect of entertainment in America. (…) Far from the battle, having nothing to gain and nothing to lose or to combat, they could be lucid and see spontaneously what made the most impression upon them among all the things that were happening in Europe. (…) Europeans are mistaken in considering America incapable of poetic and intellectual intuition. It is obviously not by tradition that they are able to avoid mistakes, or by a perpetual sharpening of 'taste'. No, America does not choose with the atavistic prudence of an experience which she has not had, or with the refined speculation of a decadent brain which it does not possess, or even with the sentimental effusion of its heart which is too young. No, America chooses better and more surely than it would with all these things combined. America chooses with all the unfathomable and elementary force of her unique and intact biology. She knows, as does no one else, what she lacks, what she does not have. And all that America 'did not have' on the spiritual plane I was going to bring her, materialized in the integral and delirious mixture of my paranoiac work. (325)

The complex concept of Modern America was also a topic in the poststructuralist writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they claimed that capitalist America did not exist, that there were in fact several Americas. According to them, "America is a special case". To them, it acts as an intermediary between East and West, because:

> it proceeds both by internal examinations and liquidations (not only the Indians but also the farmers, etc.), and by the successive waves of immigration from outside. (…) They know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings. They know how to practice pragmatics. The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. (22, 28)

These observations refer to America as a rhizomatic configuration, rather than the solid, structural or generative model of the tree. This botanical concept of the rhizome was developed by Deleuze and Guattari to denote a multiple, non-hierarchical and creative mode of thinking, as opposed to the arborescent conception of knowledge that is based on dualist categories, binary choices and distinct identities. The rhizomatic configuration that they attribute to several Americas refers to an open structure that apprehends heterogeneity and multiplicities. According to them:

> Everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside. American books are different from European books, even when the American sets off in pursuit of trees. The conception of the book is different. *Leaves of grass*. (Deleuze and Guattari 2007b, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21)

However, can one escape the tenets of capitalism as easily as Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest? They do acknowledge that the recuperative power of capitalism is not to be underestimated. Whereas all social formations usually restrict or structure movements or flows by means of coding, capitalism – as a radical exception – is a regime of decoding in tandem with a process of axiomatisation. The decoding creates the false libratory effects of capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari are Marxists insofar as they consider real freedom to be unavailable in the world of monetary equivalence enacted by capitalism. As a matter of fact, in the same chapter in which they observe the subversive possibilities the multiple Americas offer, they outline how "the flow of capital produces an immense channel, a quantification of power with immediate 'quanta', where each person profits from the passage of the money flow in his or her own way (…): in America everything comes together, tree and channel, root and rhizome. There is no universal capitalism, there is no capitalism in itself; capitalism is at the crossroads of all kinds of formations, it is neo-capitalism by nature. It invents its eastern face and western face, and reshapes them both – all for the worst. (…) An impasse. So much the better. (…) for there is no dualism, no ontological dualism between here and there, no axiological dualism between good and bad, no blend or American synthesis" (22).

5 A Story with a Rubber Tail

An impasse is exactly where Dalí ultimately found himself when he headed for a surrealist conquest of America. His affinity with the entertainment industries and low culture had ambivalent consequences, which left him in a difficult position.

To begin with, Dalí's pavilion was not located in the main fairgrounds but was relegated to the Amusement Zone, along with popcorn, barbecue stands, a roller coaster, and other carnival games. One would expect Dalí to be situated, as Kachur writes, "on the cutting edge as investigating Eros" (Kachur, 2003, 71). Squeezed between a popcorn concession stand and the chalet-like spires of Sun Valley, the avant-garde had instead been literally cast away from 'serious' art. Dalí had to compete with top moneymaking amusements like Jungle Land, the Parachute Jump and Rose's Aquacade, but was not able to outshine the other attractions of "the truly carnivalesque midway" (Kachur, 128). Compared with the semi-nude acts of Gypsy Rose Lee's spectacle *The Streets of Paris* (1940 season), for example – described as an "unabashedly topless young woman who entertained in the Zone"

(Kachur, 2003, 71) – Dalí's Venus was labelled as "modest". Bel Geddes' Crystal Lassies were endlessly reflected in the mirrored glass on the walls and even the floor. This crystal polygon multiplied the image of the semi-nude, sensuously moving dancers a thousand times more than was the case in Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, "providing access for the desiring gaze from all sides and points of view" (Kachur, 154). Billy Rose's Aquacade featured "dozens of synchronized swimmers and divers as well as singers and dancers, a cast of 350, in a 300-foot pool (…), a 10,000-seat amphitheatre" (Kachur, 157). This obviously outclassed the 11-meter-long glass tank of Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, filled only two meters deep with water. Aquacade was considered to be more spectacular, more sensational, more thrilling and hence got more public attention. Dalí skirted a thin line between the naked and the nude, rationalising the blunt nakedness with an "overlay of fine art veneer", as Kachur put it (157), but his exploration of the unknown territories of the unconscious and the dream were downcast to cheap amusement, being measured on the basis of soft-core entertainment criteria, and ultimately being evaluated half-heartedly.

What Dalí himself experienced to be more problematic, however, was that he had to deal with the censorship of the Fair's Amusement Area Chairing Committee to realize his design. The title, for example, was negotiated from the artist's first choice, *Dalí's Naked Dream*. The main point of contention, though, was the refusal to give Botticelli's Venus the head of a fish. The Fair's Amusement Area Chairing Committee wrote that, "A woman with a tail of a fish is possible; a woman with the head of a fish is impossible" (in Etherington-Smith 1996, 245). As a consequence, the visitors only saw a censored and popularised version of the artist's original concept. "The pavilion turned out to be a lamentable caricature of my ideas and my projects", Dalí complains in his memoirs (377).

Dalí's attempt to wed art and the masses was problem-ridden from the start. To secure financing for the surrealist adventure, Julien Levy joined forces with a 'rubber man', W.M. Gardner from Gardner Displays, Pittsburgh. Gardner would finance the pavilion provided that *Dream of Venus* would feature his products, mainly in the form of rubber mermaid tails (Harriman 1939, 23).[8] Dalí was not happy with this. "I had designed costumes for my swimming girls executed after ideas of Leonardo da Vinci's, and instead of this they constantly kept bringing me horrible costumes of sirens with rubber fish-tails", he sighs. He calls the fluorescent gold and silver wigs – which he had not designed either – a "wholly and gratuitous and anonymous fantasy of the corporation's" and concludes that, I realized that all this was going to end up in a fish-tail – that is, badly" (376–377). A whole struggle followed. In his memoirs, Dalí recalls how he used "the challenging force" of his scissors and cut open, one after the other, the dozen siren's tails, thus making them unusable. He attacked the wigs by cutting them into braids and dipping them in tar, to be stuck to the umbrellas which were to line the ceiling of the pavilion. Yet, this did not end the struggle. He was displeased with the quality of his ordered goods and even spoke of sabotage. In the meantime, Julien Levy's exhibitions at his gallery became a resounding success, with the help of flashy magazines,[9] which reported his success and hailed his popularity. "[Dalí's works] sold like hotcakes", Levy writes in his memoirs (199). The gallery was significantly called "one of New York's most fashionable art shops" (in Schaffner, *Gallery*, 53. See also *Newsweek*, 48).

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[8] "Levy was only one of the many sponsors behind Dalí's *Dream of Venus* pavilion. As reported in the *New Yorker*, it was 'promoted and financed by a group of substantial men', including 'William Morris, the theatrical agent; Julien Levy; Edward James, an art collector and a Dalí fan; I.D. Wolf of the Pennsylvania State Exhibit at the Fair; W.M. Gardner of the Gardner Display Company; Ian Woodner, an architect; and Philip Wittengerg, a lawyer'" (Schaffner 1999, Gallery, 59, fn. 73). See also Harriman 1939, 22–27.

Dalí was reproached for being "fully capitalized on his easily-won American reputation", for becoming "an entertaining crackpot". Critics blamed Dalí for going down on his knees for fashion commodities, 'low' culture and entertainment modalities. Franklin Rosemont, for example, calls him a "venal and reactionary charlatan" lured into capitalism by Levy, who cultivated "the marketability of Dalí's work". Rosemont holds him responsible for "the popular equation of surrealism with Salvador Dalí, an abysmal misconception more firmly entrenched in the English-speaking world than anywhere else" (Rosemont 1978, 28, 93).

By the end of the 1930s, Breton was convinced that Dalí drained surrealism of its political content and simply reconstituted it as pure entertainment. He anagrammatically dubbed him 'Avida Dollars' and expelled him from the movement.[10] In his eyes, Dalí's mode of 'intellectual' production had shifted from satisfying the appetite of the artistic mind to meeting needs on the part of the "rubber man", such as money, honours, glory, etc.

In fact, Dalí himself was very unhappy with the result of *Dream of Venus*. The funhouse did not match his surrealist endeavours at all. He realised that the promised liberty was a fake and a farce and left for Europe: "This pavilion was to be called *The Dream of Venus*, but in reality it was a frightful nightmare, for after some time I realized that the corporation in question intended to make *The Dream of Venus* with its own imagination, and that what it wanted of me was my name, which had become dazzling from the publicity point of view" (376). Indeed, in the end, capitalism proved to be the main track for the fair to follow in order to escape from depression. "Imperial dreams (…) were never far removed from the consciousness of America's exposition's organizers", states Rydell correctly (7).

The 1939 New York world's fair is said to have been the largest world's fair of all time, acquiring the status of the capitalist phoenix rising from its ashes after the Great

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[9] The Julien Levy Gallery reached a large public by calling upon both publicity magazines and art journals. "In addition to receiving constant notice in *The Art Digest*, *The Art News*, and *The New York Times*, the gallery received regular coverage in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Life*, *Newsweek* and *Time*" (Schaffner and *Levy* 1999*, Gallery*, 53).

[10] Dalí's exclusion from the surrealist movement had been proposed as early as 1934 for having avowed, in his typically frivolous way, pro-Hitler sentiments. However, "Dalí formally renounced his pro-fascist views and remained a peripheral figure in the group through 1935. Briefly reconciled with the group in 1938, he participated in the International Surrealist Exhibition of that year, then drifted away permanently. 'Since 1936', Breton wrote in 1942, Dalí's work 'has had no interest whatsoever for surrealism'" (Rosemont 1978, 93, 196, fn 44).

Depression. It soon turned out to be that Grover Whalen, former chief of police and president of the committee, saw the fair as an opportunity for corporations to present consumer products, rather than as an exercise in presenting science and the scientific way of thinking in its own right, as Harold Urey, Albert Einstein and other scientists had wished to see the project. "As events transpired", reported astronomer and astrochemist Carl Sagan, whose own interest in science was nevertheless sparked by the fair's gadgetry, "almost no real science was tacked on to the Fair's exhibits, despite the scientists' protests and their appeals to high principles" (Sagan, 404). Even in his praise for America's ideals of freedom and diversity, Einstein did not hesitate to warn that these noble principles were in danger or at least needed vigilant guarding. He voices his disappointment in the 1939 world's fair by recommending that "it is all the more important (…) to see to it that these liberties are preserved and protected" (in Jerome and Taylor 2006, 70–71). Dalí was likewise disillusioned with his word's fair adventure, which led him to publish a pamphlet titled *Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and Rights of man to His Own Madness.*[11] He hired a small plane to fly over the city and dropped copies of this manifesto on Manhattan below. He refused to attend the opening on June 15, 1939.

6 The Rights of Man to His Own Madness

In his *Declaration*, Dalí rid himself of any moral responsibility for the world's fair pavilion *Dream of Venus* and uttered the desire to break with all logical chains of capitalist society as follows:

> When, in the course of human culture it becomes necessary for a people to destroy the intellectual bonds that until then with the logical systems of the past, in order to create for themselves an original mythology which corresponds to the very essence and total expression of their biological reality … then the respect that is due public opinion makes it necessary to lay bare the causes that have forced the break with the outworn and conventional formulas of a pragmatic society. (in Schaffner 2002, 106)

The question arises whether destroying the intellectual bonds that tie us to logical systems provides a way out of the tenets of capitalist society. It has been suggested more than once that Dalí cultivated the mythic image of the 'mad artist' as a spectacle. Dalí's press agents released a press clipping entitled "Is Dalí insane?", hoping for big box office successes with a curious public. Reviews of *Dream of Venus* also significantly claim that "there is plenty of Broadway method in Dalí's madness" (in Kachur, 126).

From a poststructuralist point of view, Deleuze and Guattari also seem to suggest that even madmen are trapped in capitalism for life. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they pointed at the intertwinement of capitalism and schizophrenia. Capitalism automatically creates schizos, because of its process of decoding in tandem with axiomatization. It produces "an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge" (37). What is peculiar is that capitalism constantly pushes schizophrenic modalities into the margin, hence denying the residue of what it actually creates. The schizo is trapped – so it seems – within the very recoding institutions of capitalist society itself; in the analyst's office. In this way, capitalism constantly turns against schizophrenia with all its powers to bear, but at the same time schizophrenia continues to act as a boundary for capitalism. "It continually seeks to avoid reaching its limit while simultaneously tending toward that limit." (37) Along with Deleuze and Guattari, one could say that schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself. Hence, schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death. "Our society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not salable" (266–267). Dalí likewise believed that the position of the madman provides a way out of the axiomatic system of capitalism. Therefore, he demands in his declaration the rights of man to his own madness. In demanding the right to be mad, Dalí at the same time again links himself and Columbus as Catalans, and as explorers of new (American) worlds:

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[11] Excerpts of his declaration appeared in "Dalí Manifests", *Art Digest* 13 (August 1, 1939). Other art periodicals were silent on the "Declaration". Its entire text is reprinted in Levy's *Memoir of an Art Gallery*, on p. 219–222.

> If I'm the madman, then give me madness or give me death", he aroused. "In the nightmare of the American Venus, out of the darkness (bristling with dry umbrellas) the celebrated taxi of Christopher Columbus … [sic] CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, DISCOVERED AMERICAN, AND ANOTHER CATALAN, SALVADOR DALÍ, HAS JUST REDISCOVERED CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. (in Schaffner 2002, 108)

The identification with Columbus gets another dimension here; the explorer's historical voyage is deepened with an interior voyage. In an extraordinary tale about Columbus, Jacques Besse describes the explorer's historical voyage in terms of following non-decomposable distances, and the interior historical voyage in terms of enveloping intensities. At a certain moment in the tale, Colombus has to calm his mutinous crew and becomes admiral again only by simulating a (false) admiral who is impersonating a dancing whore. The peculiarity of Columbus here is that he was something only by being something else, hence displaying the qualities of the schizo. Deleuze and Guattari were thrilled by this tale by Besse because it points at the double stroll of the schizo during Columbus' 'great discoveries'. "The 'great discoveries', the great expeditions do not merely involve uncertainty as to what will be discovered, the conquest of the unknown", says Deleuze in an interview with Claire Parnet:

> but the invention of a line of flight, and the power of treason: to be the only traitor, and traitor to all. (…) The creative theft of the traitor, as against the plagiarism of the trickster (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 41. See also *Anti-Oedipus*, 96).

Deleuze here points at the creative qualities of Colombus as schizo, displaying the ability to move beyond logical certainties, common sense and fixed identities. It is true, just like Dalí, Colombus the Great Discoverer might have been motivated by the riches he hoped to find. But at least he opened up lines of flight, moved into the great wide open and hence produced differences. In fact, Dalí's schizophrenic utterance "the only difference between me and a madman is that I am not mad", is not a matter of synthesis. It is a matter of what Deleuze and Guattari have called an "inclusive disjunction that carries out the synthesis in itself in drifting from one term to another and following the distance between terms" (86).

During a boat trip with Gala and the fisherman of Cadaques, moving forward with the characteristic slowness of a row-boat, passing by the rocks of Cape Creus, Dalí is intrigued by all the images capable of being suggested by the complexity of the innumerable irregularities of the rocks. He is delighted by the way the rocks at every stroke continually become metamorphosed:

> What had been the camel's head now formed to the comb, and the camel's lower lip which was already prominent had lengthened to become the beak. The hump, which before had been in the middle of its back, was now all the way back and formed the rooster's tail (304).

Watching the 'stirring' of the forms of those motionless rocks, Dalí wishes his thoughts to be like them:

> changing in the slightest displacement in the space of the spirit, becoming constantly their own opposite, dissembling, ambivalent, hypocritical, disguised, vague and concrete, without dream, without 'mist of wonder', measurable, observable, physical, objective, material and hard as granite (305).

He realizes that, if he really wants to return to Paris as a conqueror, he should arrive there rowing a boat. "I ought not even to get out of this boat", he writes, "but go there directly, bringing this light of Lligat clinging to my brow. (…) Row, Dalí, row!", he encourages himself, "Or rather, let the others, those worthy fishermen of Cadaques, row. You know where you want to go; they are taking you there, and one might almost say that is was by rowing, surrounded by fine paranoiac fellows, that Columbus discovered the Americas!" (305–306)

[AU4]

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