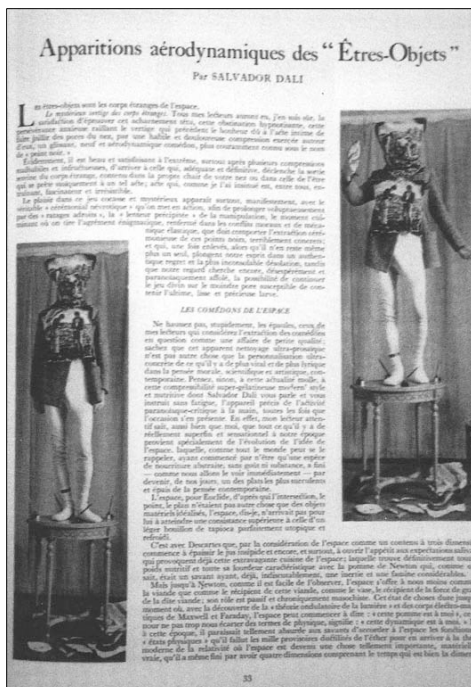


# Zodiac and Surreal Appearance

By T. A. Scott

Was Zodiac explicitly motivated by [Surrealism](#) or was the relationship more subtle? When the infamous serial killer decided to disguise himself, did he intentionally imitate the delirious appearance of [Salvador Dalí](#) within the pages of [Minotaure](#) or was his cloak purely coincidental? Both criminal and surrealist were exploring similar territory. The successive executions carried out by Zodiac in California were extreme instances of transgression. His relentless taunting of victims and authority thoroughly terrorized the public. From their movement's very inception, such ghastly criminality attracted the attention of surrealists as they sifted through fait divers, noting surreal appearances in brief and often sensational news stories. Particularly lurid events spurred them to publish. Surrealists rallied for anarchist assassin [Germaine Berton](#) in the inaugural publication of [La Révolution Surréaliste](#). Her execution of monarchist [Marius Plateau](#) in 1923 was regarded as vindication, an inevitable strike against the corrupt, repressive political establishment.<sup>1</sup> They also rejected official, simplistic explanations of the [Papin sister's](#) butchery in [Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution](#). The sisters murdered their employers and dominated French headlines. Surrealists regarded their crime as poetic retaliation against an oppressive social order.<sup>2</sup> Later that same year they similarly justified the double patricide committed by [Violette Nozière](#).<sup>3</sup> With all available insolence, surrealist leader [André Breton](#) firmly declared the abusive Monsieur Nozières the actual criminal, not his daughter.<sup>4</sup> Seventeen others contributed to [Violette Nozières](#), a book of poetry that explored French society's repressive response to her crime.<sup>5</sup> Salvador Dalí also investigated the underlying irrational forces he considered responsible for such devastation and published his ideas in [Minotaure](#). His essay *Aerodynamic appearances of "Beings-Objects"* focused on subconscious pressures that swell to produce external, often startling and fully observable appearances in the world like "blackheads squeezed out from an oily nose."<sup>6</sup> This invisible force affected human behavior both positively and negatively, from producing modern art and architecture to irrational, often brutal criminality, totalitarianism and even war. At the very least, Zodiac is a product of that invisible force, a surreal appearance. The psychological, literary, cryptographic and philosophical signatures that bind Zodiac to Surrealism gather together and form a litmus test.



How Zodiac and Dalí each faced repression, how they confronted ensuing dilemmas of authoritarian power and violence could not have differed more.

Delusory power and obsession are unifying themes in both disguises. Each carefully crafted design deliberately emphasizes a commanding militaristic image. The ominous illustration of Zodiac created by [Robert Graysmith](#) appears fully armed with sheathed bayonet, half-boots and pants fitted with blousing rubbers.<sup>7</sup> Dalí's well-known Napoleon fixation is evident as he mimics the French general, wearing martial frock coat and riding trousers.<sup>8</sup> The artist deliriously projects a megalomaniac object; Zodiac represents abject fear and power. The hoods intentionally destabilize appearances while concealing identity, blurring the line between "being" and "object". As surrealist Georges Bataille noted, "When the face closes up and covers itself with a mask, there is neither stability nor solid ground."<sup>9</sup> The mask fashioned by Zodiac emphasizes the foreboding role of executioner. The image of [Jean-Francois Millet's](#) *Gleaners* covers the hood worn by Dalí and replaces his recognizable face with

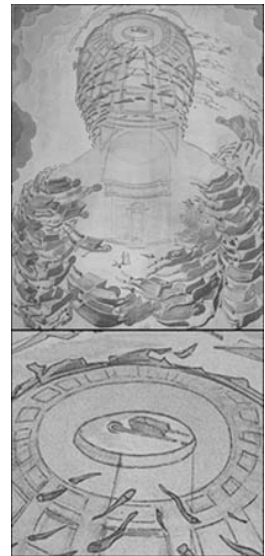
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a symbol of his obsession. In his *Aerodynamic Appearances* article, Dalí shifts away from the principal of a person activating an object to actual erosion of the boundary between object and self.<sup>10</sup> Zodiac paradoxically began where the artist eventually concluded. The surrealist wears his mask to prove an intellectual point; the psychopath requires no hood whatsoever:

The surface of the psychopath . . . shows up as equal to or better than normal and gives no hint at all of a disorder within. Nothing about him suggests oddness, inadequacy, or moral frailty. His mask is that of robust mental health. Yet he has a disorder that often manifests itself in conduct far more seriously abnormal than that of the schizophrenic.<sup>11</sup>

Unconscious symbolism is expressed in each design. Zodiac cretinized the astrologic symbols representing spirit (circle) and matter (cross) into a hunting metaphor that proved most effective at instilling utter terror in both victim and society. The circle represents life, a circle of animals from Middle English, with crosshairs of the hunter.<sup>12</sup> Dalí constantly revisited Millet's *The Angelus*. Using his paranoid-critical method, which spontaneously establishes connections between objects that may initially appear to be unassociated, Dalí exposed the painting's unconscious meaning, surfacing its hidden eroticism and morbidity.<sup>13</sup> His method intentionally uses the delirious state to interpret irrational thoughts and behaviors. [Dr. Jacques Lacan](#) proposed a theory of paranoid psychosis that paralleled Dalí's method. The psychiatrist describes paranoid delirium as "utterly unlike the symbolic obscurity of dreams, it leads us to say that 'in the delirium the unconscious expresses itself directly in the conscious' . . . One can say that, contrary to dreams, which must be *interpreted*, the delirium is by itself an *interpretive* activity."<sup>14</sup> In Dalí's essay *Paranoiac-critical interpretation of haunting imagery "The Angelus" by Millet* he confirmed "paranoiac delirium constitutes in itself a form of interpretation", so it is not surprising to see the outwardly plaintive painting draped over Dalí's torso as the artist performs his delirious procedure.<sup>15</sup> Dalí perceives a submissive woman clasping her hands in front of a wheelbarrow that symbolizes her sex, its sacks of grain arranged in a specific sexual position. The man stands beside his pitchfork, a phallic symbol, with hat in hand to conceal his erection. Dalí's infatuation culminates in *The Wheelbarrows*, a swirling fragmentation of the Pantheon comprised of innumerable wheelbarrows, with its vital symbol appearing at the apex of the oculus.



wheelbarrows, with its vital symbol appearing at the apex of the oculus. The undercurrent of fear in the Zodiac symbol and the unconscious sexuality of *Angelus* are powerful subliminal messages that imprint deeply.

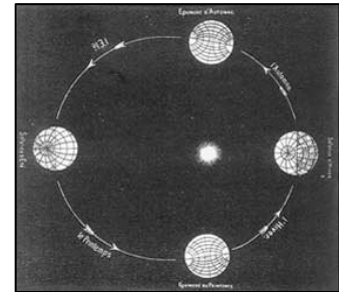
What subconscious factors account for the megalomania and aggression? Surrealists propose unrelenting repression of the subconscious affects the individual throughout their life, influencing the decisions of artist and serial killer alike, eventually peaking with one or more critical, sometimes violent events. Dr. Lacan believed this subconscious pressure also aggregated at a social level, building into large scale political crisis, at times even war.<sup>16</sup> Both Dalí and Zodiac were suffering delusions of grandeur; the former recognizes this fact but the latter does not. Paranoids like Zodiac often accumulate persecution and erotic delusions as well. In his essay on the Papin Sisters crime, Dr. Lacan goes on to suggest the inevitability of violence in extreme cases of paranoia.<sup>17</sup> Dalí always retained control as he systematically analyzed irrationality using his paranoid-critical method; despite being an

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organized and methodical killer, Zodiac's malevolent actions were compulsive and only amplified his paranoia and narcissism, sinking him ever deeper into a fully depersonalized condition. The artist parodies authoritarian power during his interpretive activity, thereby exposing its delusionary basis.<sup>18</sup> Zodiac obsessively sought power to unleash violence without reprisal, to satisfy deep compulsions for attention, control and to murder. The search for power and repeated taunting of authority is the paranoid's defense mechanism for self doubt and a fear of other men.<sup>19</sup> His frequent boastful expressions of pleasure, especially when confounding, all point to a severe lack of empathy and no remorse. His remarks regarding spurned advances suggest a deep hatred of women; no female victim ever survived his assault, unlike their male counterparts. Surrounding himself with complex codes and ciphers is another coping mechanism used by paranoids.<sup>20</sup> These narcissistic, antisocial and paranoid signatures result in a profound inability to cope in an unjust world. This confluence of psychopathy produced a string of horrible crimes that were likely committed in a deeply depersonalized state. If Zodiac experienced childhood trauma or severe neglect, such episodes may have been manifestations of multiple dissociative identities, a diagnosis made by [Dr. David Van Nuys](#).<sup>21</sup>

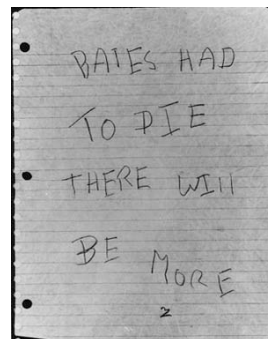
Other surrealist parallels exist beyond psychological. Both artist and murderer relied on Astrological symbolism. Between 1932 and 1936, Salvador Dalí was supported by *Zodiaque*, a French intellectual society. Architect [Emilio Terry](#) and [Vicomte Charles de Noailles](#) were notable members.<sup>22</sup> There were twelve *Zodiaque* patrons who each in turn supported Dalí for one month of the year, receiving an original painting by Dalí in return. This society purchased much of his work between 1932 and 1935, and it swiftly proved to be a lucrative investment. [Julian Levy](#) arranged a solo exhibit for Dalí at his Manhattan gallery, where prices for his paintings quickly appreciated. By 1936, Dalí made the cover of *Time* with a 1929 photograph by [Man Ray](#) from the [James Thrall Soby](#) collection. His reliance on *Zodiaque* faded and the group eventually disbanded in 1939. A more literary parallel is the 1934 *Proclamation* by [E. L. T. Mesens](#), curator, publisher and vital contributor to Surrealism in England and Belgium.<sup>23</sup> Mirroring the Zodiac design, his aggressive announcement once again employs Astrologic symbols coldly arranged in a circle with a cross comprised of Equinoxes and Solstices marking the four seasons. The accompanying enigmatic prose is alarming and authoritarian in tone. Emphasizing a global reach that encompasses the circle of life, Mesens concludes:



We have already overthrown multiplication tables  
We will never go back to the house of crime  
We are tireless even in our sleep  
Hope you get the message

Today  
Around the world  
It's the  
ROUND  
of the  
WORLD

Another literary connection exists between the 1920 Dada journal *Z* and the signature and symbolism used by Zodiac in the 1967 [Cheri Jo Bates](#) murder confession letter, and in the 1970 Halloween card mailed to [Paul Avery](#), reporter for the *San*



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*San Francisco Chronicle*. Before the onset of Surrealism, Z was a seditious Dadaist periodical edited by [Paul Dermée](#) that specialized in publishing ruthless critiques of mainstream politics and sacrosanct culture.<sup>24</sup> Its initial printing featured a brusque section entitled *Responses* which contained the notorious insult of Gide by [Francis Picabia](#): “If you read [André Gide](#) aloud for ten minutes, your mouth will smell bad.”<sup>25</sup> The same form of literary aggression appears in the writings of Zodiac, especially his terse, mocking critique of [William Friedkin’s](#) 1973 film *The Exorcist* in a letter mailed to the *Chronicle* on January 29, 1974: “I saw + think ‘The Exorcist’ was the best satirical comedy that I have ever seen.”<sup>26</sup>

After reading the sarcastic review of *The Exorcist* followed by a second taunting reference to [Gilbert and Sullivan’s \*The Mikado\*](#), an irritated San Francisco police detective [David Toschi](#) grumbled “Another Gilbert and Sullivan swipe . . . why Gilbert and Sullivan?”<sup>27</sup> Four years earlier, Zodiac derisively adapted a major solo from the first act of *The Mikado* in his July 26, 1970 letter to the *Chronicle*. In this latest reference the killer provides a corresponding bookend by reworking lyrics near the opera’s conclusion: “He plunged himself into the billowy wave and an echo arose from the suicide grave.” Both allusions focus on Ko-Ko, Lord High Executioner, who is the character Zodiac clearly identifies with. The vicious execution-style slayings committed by Zodiac are a twisted real-life reinterpretation of the opera’s central role. After Ko-Ko exclaims “Punishment!” Mikado playfully describes the pending torture as “something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or melted lead.”<sup>28</sup> Zodiac debases this notion in his boastful letter dated October, 13, 1969 when he threatens to “pick off the kiddies as they come bouncing out” of their school bus. However, by 1974 over four years had passed since the last confirmed Zodiac murder, indicating the suicide simile may be a conscious move away from the High Executioner personality beneath “the billowy wave” of the unconscious.<sup>29</sup> Surrealism plays a subconscious role in the explanation, especially when the question narrows to “Why *The Mikado*?” The key to understanding *The Mikado* is recognizing the anarchist element in Gilbert’s writing, prose from the pen of a proto-surrealist. Of all the operas, [Topsy-Turvy](#) filmmaker [Mike Leigh](#) considers *The Mikado* “the most extreme exercise in Surrealism in this series.” Leigh emphasizes Gilbert’s continuous challenge to our everyday expectations by playing “with different levels of reality . . . outside the framework of the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief.”<sup>30</sup> When [Brian Macdonald](#), associate director of the [Stratford Festival](#), brought his production of *The Mikado* to Broadway he spoke about its surreal design: “One reason Gilbert stands out so well today is that as a writer he was surreal. He creates this mythical Japanese kingdom, with its Lord High Executioner, and makes it so British that you know exactly what little boils he’s lancing . . . If you treat it as surreal theater, it works sublimely.”<sup>31</sup> The association with Surrealism is apparent, with hysterical setting and characterizations, dramatic delirium surrounded by societal repression, and juxtaposed story elements where comedy deals with themes of death and cruelty. Mikado eventually reveals why Zodiac fixated on Ko-Ko, providing the answer in this prescient observation from the middle of the second act: “It’s an unjust world, and virtue is triumphant only in theatrical performances.”<sup>32</sup>

I saw + think "The Exorcist" was the best satirical comedy that I have ever seen.

Signed, yours + truly :

He plunged him self into the billowy wave and an echo arose from the suicide grave  
tit willa tit willa  
tit willa

Ps. if I do not see this note in your paper, I will do something nasty, which you know I'm capable of doing

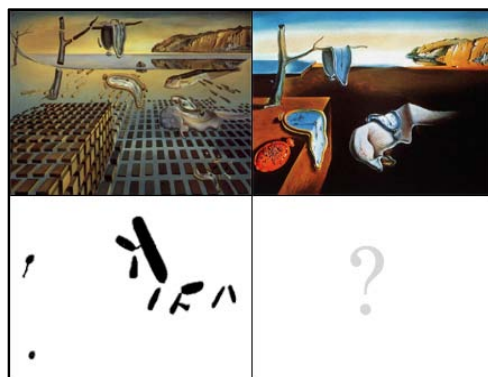
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There is joint obsession on wordplay and puzzles. The disoriented image located near the bottom of the Exorcist letter appears to be a deconstructed version of an actual symbol, possibly a clue to the killer's identity. The pictogram itself is constructed with eleven distinct strokes, and Zodiac is likely offering another riddle in the form of a graphical anagram. Similar rearrangement may also exist in the source plaintext of the many ciphers he created, but has any of this evidence been analyzed from a visual context? [Hans Bellmer's](#) surreal output is fundamentally based on visual anagrams: "I tried to rearrange the sexual elements of a girl's body like a sort of plastic anagram . . . a sentence that invites us to rearrange it . . . to reveal what is usually kept hidden . . . I tried to open people's eyes to new realities . . . The anagram is the key to all my work."<sup>33</sup>



[Man Ray](#) used common objects to create ambiguous landscapes. His *Gun and Alphabet Stencils* scatters letter blocks like spent bullet shells from a revolver that glows ominously. The letters refuse to assemble themselves into recognizable words and the entire composition defies rational interpretation. The most prolific anagrammatist was [Marcel Duchamp](#), who obsessively collected every variety throughout his life, incorporating them in his work. His *Etrangler l'étranger* is both a perfect anagram and a pun, to strangle the stranger.<sup>34</sup> Duchamp presented three versions of his iconoclastic *L.H.O.O.Q.* in 1919, 1930 and 1942. The anagrammatic title of his mustached



Mona Lisa serves a dual purpose, although its overall tone remains aggressive and insolent. In spoken English, the title appears to be a fairly straightforward reading of "look", but when the letters are individually pronounced in French, "elle a chaud au cul", the meaning then vulgarizes loosely to "there is fire down below".<sup>35</sup> Another well-



known example is the derogatory anagram "Avida Dollars" derived from Salvador Dalí's name upon his 1939 banishment by [André Breton](#) from the inner surrealist circle.<sup>36</sup> The fragmentary appearance of the symbol in the 1974 *Exorcist* letter is similar to the visual disintegration used extensively by Salvador Dalí during his Nuclear Mysticism period in the 1950s, a phase where he explored recent advances in science, especially quantum physics. Dalí published his *Anti-Matter Manifesto* in 1958, writing: "In the Surrealist period I wanted to create the iconography of the interior world and the world of the marvelous, of my father Freud. Today the exterior world and that of physics, has transcended the one of psychology. My father today is Dr. Heisenberg."<sup>37</sup> His painting process during this later period broke subject matter down into smaller particles, and Dalí re-

interpreted some of his past work.

*The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* from 1954 represents a decomposition of his celebrated *Persistence of Memory* from 1931. Such scientific disintegration derives from and partially replaces themes of decay found in his earlier works using insects, mainly flies and ants as symbols of atrophy and death. Can



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the Zodiac's *Exorcist* enigma be similarly reassembled to achieve meaning? The extent of disintegration in the *Exorcist* pictogram appears to be intentional. Zodiac wants to provide clues, but only vague hints, nothing more. This fits his overall taunting behavioral pattern and the nature of most other cipher letters he authored. The purpose here is to intensify sexual excitement levels both during and especially after each murder, a "perverse additional thrill brought on by an unavoidable fear of capture."<sup>38</sup>



There is a pervading interest in cinema, with its innate and potent capacity to express enigma and desire, compelling both artist and killer to extremes. Anticipatory sexual perversion similar to Zodiac's fear of capture appears in the Surrealist film [Un Chien Andalou](#) (*An Andalusian Dog*), the acclaimed collaboration between [Luis Buñuel](#) and Salvador Dalí.<sup>39</sup> In his 1929 introduction to the screenplay, Buñuel described their film as "Un désespéré, un passionné appel au meurtre", a desperate, passionate call to murder.<sup>40</sup> The aggressive glorification of violence in their script and public statements were calculated for maximum social and artistic disruption, forming the foundation of the film's enigmatic construction. An English translation of the screenplay appeared in Julien Levy's book *Surrealism* in 1936.<sup>41</sup> The sexually obsessive sequence involves an androgynous figure investigating a severed hand in the middle of a street encircled by a crowd and police. Two other figures in an apartment above look down as the group disperse, leaving the lone figure transfixed in frenzied traffic. The male figure takes sadistic pleasure in this lingering, dangerous situation and in the resulting death. Thereafter, sexual tension intensifies as the male leers at his female counterpart before the assault. The primary intent for Dalí was "to reveal the principal conviction which animates all Surrealist thought: the overwhelming importance of desire."<sup>42</sup> Dalí regarded his groundbreaking film as a work of "adolescence and death which I was going to plunge right into the heart of witty, elegant and intellectualized Paris with all the reality and all the weight of the Iberian dagger."<sup>43</sup> Dalí and Buñuel also briefly collaborated on [L'Âge d'Or](#) (*The Golden Age*) in 1930. The central theme of their follow-on feature was frustrated desire, with societal repression continually postponing climax.<sup>44</sup> The protagonists fall prey to uncontrollable urges, resorting to violence in a desperate attempt to satisfy their lust. A clear need for superiority is expressed by Zodiac in letters referencing other cinematic subjects, including the "Blue Meanies" allusion from [Yellow Submarine](#) in his letter to *Los Angeles Times* on March 13, 1971, and his mocking review of *The Exorcist* in the *Chronicle*. Besides the Dadaist Z symbolism previously noted, the Paul Avery Halloween card also contains a surreal spectacle of peering eyeballs that bear a striking resemblance to Salvador Dalí's dream sequence for [Alfred Hitchcock's Spellbound](#). Moreover, Zodiac purposefully modified the card including a dozen additional hand-painted "evil eyes" around the solitary eye originally printed by the Gibson card company.<sup>45</sup> Enigmas conceal meaning and encourage

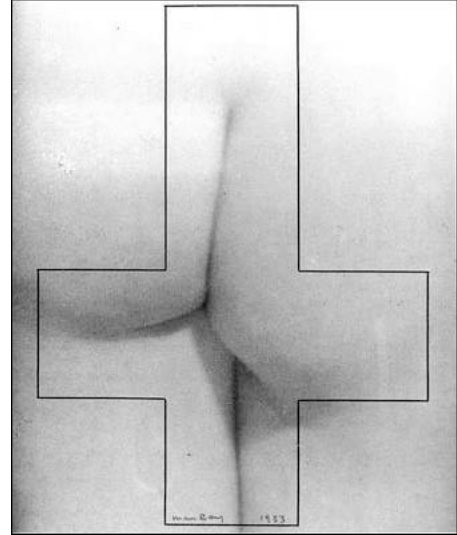


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anarchy, increasing tension and fear. It was a deliberate, confrontational tactic used by Zodiac and the surrealists, perhaps representing their closest alignment. The shared objectives were to perplex and terrorize, to intensify shock value and satisfy narcissistic desires.

A significant connection with Sadism is evident in Surrealism's unconditional advocacy of individual freedom and deference to [Marquis de Sade's](#) libertarianism. Lineage was quickly and resolutely established in Breton's first manifesto, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, with his affirmation "Sade is Surrealist in sadism".<sup>46</sup> Fifteen years later, Breton's allegiance had not wavered as he included the Marquis in his anthology of black humor, stating the writings of Sade "can be considered the most authentic precursor of Freud's work and all of modern psychopathology."<sup>47</sup> Sade was a core influencer through his interrogation of societal norms and sexual rebellion.<sup>48</sup> The poet [Paul Éluard](#) emphasized the importance of primitive instinct in Sade's philosophy and his confrontation with Christian morals, affirming "all the appetites of the body and mind that rise up against it."<sup>49</sup> Éluard asserted Sadism itself actively critiques the moral and social laws that regulate behavior, transcending simple carnal desire to challenge and liberate broader ideological repression.<sup>50</sup> Selections from Sade's original draft of *Justine* were published during 1933 in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. Man Ray also dedicated *Monument à D. A. F. de Sade* in May of the same year.<sup>51</sup> His photograph's stark displacement of erotic and sacrilegious symbolism is a fitting monument to sadistic desire.<sup>52</sup> The superimposed and inverted cruciform powerfully projects a virulent anticlericalism, a physical and spiritual act of sodomy that represents another link to Sadean thought.<sup>53</sup> Man Ray subsequently used the image in the decorative binding for his personal copy of Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*.<sup>54</sup> In his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*, Man Ray concluded that Sade's work represented a protest "against the injustice and skullduggery of his time", another example of surreal appearance rising from societal repression.<sup>55</sup> This reasoning contributed to his fundamental belief "that art was the pursuit of liberty and of pleasure."<sup>56</sup> Sade also influenced Buñuel and his atheism is partly attributable to discovering *120 Days of Sodom*. Sade's ideas are manifest throughout *L'Âge d'Or*, especially at its conclusion. Aristocratic survivors of an orgy emerge from a castle led by a figure that resembles Jesus, who briefly returns to finish off a young victim, followed by a subsequent snowy scene that centers on a cross draped with the scalps of murdered women, a model Sadean statement on religion's repressive role and the inevitable ensuing violence. Another explicit allusion to Sade appears in Buñuel's 1953 film *Él*, whose central character is compelled by jealousy to sew up his wife's vagina, directly referencing a similar scene in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*.<sup>57</sup> Buñuel confirmed the central role played by Sade in surrealist theory, describing his introduction to Sade as "an extraordinary thing for me . . . the only important thing was total liberty of thought . . . Sade more than anyone was the great influence, not only on me, but on the Surrealists."<sup>58</sup>



Surrealism's intellectual ties to Sadism are augmented by Zodiac's fundamental connection with The Marquis de Sade. Sharing the same narcissistic world view and instinctual disdain for society, both despised authority as each struggled for power over others, feeding a singular compulsion to fully gratify selfish desires. Sade's lurid prose in *Juliette* emphasized crime as the essence of pleasure and "from the flames by which it licks us is kindled the torch of our lust. Only crime is sufficient, it alone inflames us, and only crime can ravish pleasure through all degrees of our sensibility."<sup>59</sup> Zodiac practiced an extreme form of Sadism where sexual gratification is reduced to crimes of pure brutality, "as if violence had replaced the act of sexual intercourse."<sup>60</sup> Pleasure came

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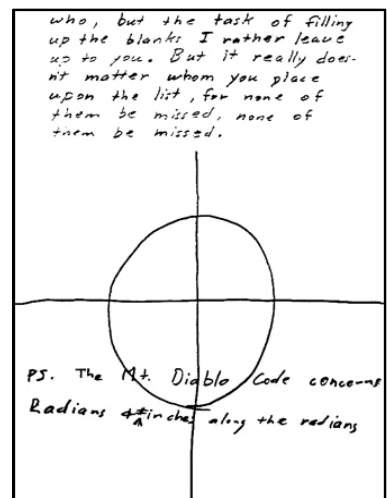
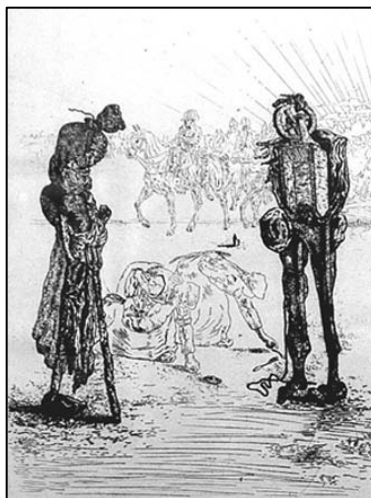
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solely from power over others, not the sexual act itself. "The more pain he caused, the more pleasure he felt. Directly after an attack, Zodiac was compelled to gloat, pitilessly writing or phoning his victims' families, breathing silently into their ears."<sup>61</sup> To prolong control and maximize gratification, Zodiac bound his victims at Lake Berryessa in September 1969 with precut lengths of clothesline. A likely product of a broken home and years of abuse, the serial killer's psychological profile offers a bleak contemporary example of Sadean isolation: "Zodiac would have developed into an angry, withdrawn, and lonely adolescent, whose young life would have been filled with fantasies of violent retribution, themes of power and domination, and perhaps unusual or aggressive sexual preoccupation."<sup>62</sup> Sade and Zodiac possessed equivalent personalities, as [David Coward's](#) introductory description of Sade in his translation of *The Misfortunes of Virtue* substantiates:

For the true Sadean lives in isolation, sealed in a world bereft of all feelings save ecstatic gratification and terror. There is no evidence to suggest that even Sade was freed by sadism. He spent many years alone, felt the absence of human warmth keenly, and found release in private hallucinations which compensated him with an illusion of power.<sup>63</sup>

Aggression and sexual impulses intertwined early in Zodiac's childhood, creating an ideal student of Sadism.<sup>64</sup> His underlying hatred of women prevented any chance of a meaningful relationship. "Love was violence . . . and the only successful relationship Zodiac could ever have with a woman was murder."<sup>65</sup> Such profound confusion and isolation eventually made its appearance in the world through serial acts of sadistic murder.

Investigating the irrational was a supreme struggle for surrealists. Tensions mounted as they distinguished between order and Orwellian control, discipline and totalitarian power, justifiable violence and brutal criminality.<sup>66</sup> Their various theories often clashed and were heatedly debated inside and outside the inner circle, creating dissention within the ranks that lead André Breton to eventually excommunicate several members. Breton's 1934 "Order of The Day" expelled Dalí for "counterrevolutionary actions involving the glorification of Hitlerian fascism". Tenuous Leftist politics at that time influenced Breton's perspective and he chose to disregard Dalí's core intention to tell "one and all that to me Hitler embodied the perfect image of the great masochist who would unleash a world war solely for the pleasure of loosing and burying himself beneath the rubble of an empire: the gratuitous act par excellence that should indeed have warranted the admiration of the surrealists."<sup>67</sup> Through his daring investigation of the irrational, using Jean-Francois Millet, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and others as subjects, Dalí gained insight into the subconscious and its dealings with the conscious world, creating remarkable surreal masterpieces in the process. His art initially appears to affirm but actually unmask delusions of power, exposing the inherent weakness of despots. He achieved the intellectual conquest he worked so diligently for: "Dalí, the absolute rationalist, wanted to know all about the irrational . . . to reduce and submit this irrational whose conquest he was making."<sup>68</sup> His forty-two engravings for the 1934 edition of [Les Chants de Maldoror](#) by proto-surrealist [Isidore Ducasse](#) represent some of Dalí's very best work. One plate in particular





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illustrates his entirely successful, unified interpretation of the charged eroticism in Millet's *Angelus* and *Gleaners* with the infused megalomania of [Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier's 1814](#) in the background.<sup>69</sup> Meaning once hidden in the subconscious is now fully revealed.

Zodiac reserved all scrutiny for his victims by parodying *The Mikado*. The pathologic killer does not merely reference or lift simple quotations verbatim, but with a cold, scornful technique he proceeds to adapt a significant portion of the first act, his twisted version of the Ko-Ko solo with chorus: "But it really doesn't matter whom you place upon the list, for none of them be missed."<sup>70</sup> Yet Zodiac rejected all such analysis when the subject turned to himself. Instead, locked in an isolated existence he quickly surrendered to repression, opening wide the dark path to violence. Besides a trail of innocent victims, his notorious fate is marked by a futile search for control while lost in a deeply depersonalized state, possibly alternating between multiple dissociative identities. Zodiac unleashed a highly sadistic interpretation of Breton's definition of Surrealism, a brutally literal reading of *Manifeste du surréalisme* with chilling adherence to its dictates "in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."<sup>71</sup>

Dalí's insightful parody in the pages of *Minotaure* nearly seventy-five years ago revealed how little power Zodiac actually possessed. In the end, Zodiac could only temporarily satiate the narcissistic forces compelling him to murder serially— and this ultimate sign of weakness is his deeply ironic legacy. Disguised in a similarly delirious manner, artist and killer began from the same repressive location but moved in opposite directions, inceptions from opposing sides of the same surrealist coin. As each took divergent intellectual and criminally debased pathways, both revealed how thin the line between sanity and psychopathy truly is.

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