

**On conceptual construal in Salvador Dalí's  
Surrealist representations of sexuality:  
A cognitive linguistic perspective**

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*Received 27.03.2023,  
received in revised form 16.12.2023,  
accepted 19.12.2023.*

**Abstract**

Both verbal and visual communication rely on figurative strategies of metaphor and metonymy to give meaningful form to perception. Three Freud-inspired Surrealist classics by Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) – the newspaper gouache *Mae West's Face Which Can Be Used as a Surrealist Apartment* (1934-1935), the painting *Anthropomorphic Chest of Drawers* (1936), and the assemblage *Lobster Telephone* (1938) – represent various aspects of sexuality by means of complex interplays of visual metaphors and metonymies. Though most of them have conventional verbal counterparts, their source domains have been elaborated in novel ways. As a result, the metaphors and the metonymies function as multimodal prompts that 'open' subconscious associations and thus allow the viewer to interpret Dalí's ideas in terms of surreal scenarios related to sexuality.

**Keywords**

image, metaphor, metonymy, scenario, sexuality, Surrealism, visual perception

## **O strukturze pojęciowej surrealistycznych obrazów seksualności autorstwa Salvadora Dalí: Analiza kognitywna**

### **Abstrakt**

Komunikacja werbalna i wizualna nadaje strukturę znaczeniową bodźcom poznawczym dzięki metaforze i metonimii. Trzy klasyczne dzieła Surrealizmu autorstwa Salvadora Dalí (1904-1989) – wykonany na papierze gazetowym gwasz *Twarz Mae West, która może być używana jako surrealistyczne mieszkanie* (1934-1935), obraz *Antropomorficzna komoda* (1936) oraz asamblaż *Telefon-homar* (1938) – są inspirowane psychologią Freuda i przedstawiają różne aspekty seksualności za pomocą złożonej gry znaczeń opartych na metaforach i metonimiach wizualnych, z których większość ma konwencjonalne odpowiedniki językowe. Ich domeny źródłowe zostały jednak wyrażone na nowe sposoby. Dzięki temu wspomniane metafory i metonimie pełnią funkcję multimodalnych wypowiedzi, które w umyśle odbiorcy mają ‘otwierać’ podświadome skojarzenia umożliwiające interpretację dzieł Salvadora Dalí jako surrealistycznych scenariuszy odnoszących się do seksualności.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

metafora, metonimia, obraz, percepcja wzrokowa, scenariusz, seksualność, surrealizm

### **1. Introduction**

Language reflects various patterns of perception-based construal, such as perspective, attention, judgment / comparison, and the figure-ground distinction (Croft and Cruse 2004). Grounded in human bodily experience, they give rise to numerous conventional<sup>1</sup> expressions based on metaphor and meton-

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<sup>1</sup> The conventional character of the linguistic expressions depends on the extent to which the given metaphors and metonymies motivate their conceptual structure (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 55).

ymy, which play a fundamental role in linguistic communication (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Panther and Thornburg 2007).

The art theorist and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (1905-2007) first drew attention to the fact that such patterns also operate in visual communication (Lakoff 2006: 155). He argued that “what makes language so valuable for thinking, then, cannot be thinking in words”, but “the help that words lend to thinking, while it operates in a more appropriate medium, such as visual imagery” (Arnheim 1969: 231-232 cit. in Lakoff 2006: 154). In a similar vein, Johnson (2007: 209 cit. in Forceville, Urios-Aparisi 2009: 4) argues that in art “the processes of embodied meaning are the very same ones that make linguistic meaning possible”. Because “different dispositions of the mind are subject to the same rules” and “because the mind always functions as the whole” (Limont 2014: 75), art “is a form of reasoning, in which perception and thinking intertwine” (Arnheim 1969, 1974 cit. Limont 2014: 74-75).

The present paper applies such assumptions in the analysis of three sexuality-related Surrealist classics by Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) – the newspaper gouache *Mae West's Face Which Can Be Used as a Surrealist Apartment* (1934-1935), the painting *Anthropomorphic Chest of Drawers* (1936), and the assemblage *Lobster Telephone* (1938). It argues that these works involve complex interplays of visual metaphors and metonymies. Though most have conventional verbal counterparts, in Dalí's art they have been elaborated in highly original ways and function as multimodal prompts that help the viewer ‘open’ subconscious associations providing access to Dalí's surreal scenarios.

## **2. Metaphor and metonymy in visual construal**

Because visual / pictorial metaphor is a fundamental pattern of construal in art, it is difficult to define it neatly (Serig 2006: 231). Aldrich (1971 cit. in Serig 2006: 232) regards it as the “seeing-as” experience, purely perceptual, which forms the basis of all art both for the creator and the viewer. For Dent (1987

cit. in Serig 2006: 232) and Dent and Rosenberg (1990 cit. in Serig 2006: 232) visual / pictorial metaphor is based on the interaction of two subject matters, of which one is more prominent than the other; it is also isomorphic with verbal metaphors, which are present even if no words are used. This places the viewer in the central position and allows them to create “the pictorial rules of ‘grammar’” (Serig 2006: 232) or “visual syntax” (Yus 2009: 154). A work of art is thus “a highly complex” form “arranging different elements [...] into a coherent complete composition layout” (Arnheim 1969 cit. in Limont 2014: 80). Though such a scheme can be general, it nevertheless carries the most significant part of the meanings (Arnheim 1969 cit. in Limont 2014: 81) of paintings (Forceville 1988), cartoons, drawings, and sculptures (Kövecses 2002, Schilperoord and Maes 2009, Yus 2009), comics (Eerden 2009, Shinohara and Matsunaka 2009), as well as TV commercials (Urios-Aparisi 2009).

Metonymy is another fundamental element of visual syntax in art. Jakobson (2002: 92), for example, argues for “the manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism, where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches”. Metonymy is also the conceptual basis of portrait painting. As Kövecses (2006: 111) discusses, “it is motivated by the most natural way for humans to recognize each other: through recognizing the face of another human being.” Jakobson (2002: 92) also claims that metonymy dominates in “the art of the cinema, with its highly developed capacity for changing the angle, perspective, and focus of ‘shots’” and “an unprecedented variety of synecdochic ‘close-ups’ and metonymic ‘set-ups’ in general”.

Metaphorical and metonymic creativity not only projects the artist’s internal states, but also perceives and discovers “meanings embedded in reality” (Limont 2014: 79). These meanings are related not only to objects and events, but also to emotions. In spite of diverse subjective perspectives possible, they can be understood by various recipients in similar ways (Kövecses 2006: 227-246, Limont 2014: 79).

### 3. Surrealism

Dominant between the two world wars, Surrealism regarded the objective reality as incapable of dealing with the complexity of human experience. In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), the French poet André Breton (1896-1966) asserted that the movement “rests on the belief in the superior reality of forms of association neglected heretofore, in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought” (1972 cit. in Maddox 1990: 40). All opposites or ‘antitheses’, such as feeling vs. reason or substance vs. spirit, were to be eliminated (Forceville 1988: 151). Some of those ideas had their sources in Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) psychoanalysis, which rejected the limitations of rational thinking and instead emphasized the role of the subconscious psyche (Maddox 1990: 42).

The manner of working of the Surrealist imagination defies the conventional principles of association. As a result, ‘surreality’ involves elements too distant from one another to be conjoined by the conscious action of the human mind (Breton 1976: 89-90). Instead, it is based on

pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought’s dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations. (Breton 1972 cit. in Maddox 1990: 40)

The bigger the distance between the two ‘antithetic’ realities, the stronger the force of the image thus created (Reverdy 1918 cit. in Breton 1976: 73). Breton’s poem “Free Union” well illustrates it:

My wife whose hair is a brush fire  
Whose thoughts are summer lightning  
Whose waist is an hourglass  
Whose waist is the waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger

Whose mouth is a bright cockade with the fragrance of a star of  
 the first magnitude  
 Whose teeth leave prints like the tracks of white mice over snow  
 Whose tongue is made out of amber and polished glass  
 Whose tongue is a stabbed wafer  
 The tongue of a doll with eyes that open and shut  
 Whose tongue is an incredible stone  
 My wife whose eyelashes are strokes in the handwriting of  
 a child  
 Whose eyebrows are nests of swallows  
 My wife whose temples are the slate of greenhouse roofs  
 With steam on the windows [...]  
 (Auster 1984: 183)

The uncommon associations create double images that map shapes and attributes, for example colours, quality of light, etc. of one object onto another (Lakoff 1987a). Surrealism assumes that such associations are reversible (Forceville 2002a: 7) because – as Breton claimed in the second *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929) – all dichotomies “cease to be perceived as contradictions” (1972 cit. in Forceville 2002a: 6).

Metaphor and “its crucial characteristic of rendering *one* kind of thing *in terms of another*” thus became a fundamental strategy facilitating the “bridging” of “the seemingly irreconcilable opposites” (Forceville 1988: 151). As its function was to re(create) reality (Forceville 1988: 151), metaphorical *rapprochement* became a common Surrealist practice – the poet and philosopher Robert Champigny (1922-1984) even coined the term ‘the S device’ to refer to it (Sellin 1975: 19 cit. in Forceville 1988: 151).

The Surrealist idea of *picta poesis* or “the fusion of painting and poetry” meant that both these forms of artistic activity were equally capable “of revealing to the consciousness the faculties of spiritual life” (Breton 1972 cit. in Gómez de Liaño 1990: 22). Such painters as Joan Miró (1893-1983) and André Masson (1896-1987) represent the spontaneous, intuitive approach, rooted in dream and folly. René Magritte (1898-1967), Victor

Brauner (1903-1966), and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) employ “realistic technique by which the identity of the object is firmly designated” (Maddox 1990: 40). Such technique is a close pictorial counterpart of Breton’s double images in poetry.

#### **4. Dalí’s Surrealist art**

Dalí believed in the power of the automatic processes, but he at the same time “sought to elaborate his psychic revelations with all the precision and artistic skill at his command, in a conscious and deliberate manner” (Maddox 1990: 42). Though his works reflect all sorts of hallucinations and aberrations, they are still full of realistic detail.

Strongly influenced by Freud’s ideas of the subconscious, Dalí claimed that various objects could reveal hidden sexual desires. Not only did he frequently explore the connections between sex and food (*Lobster Telephone* Salvador Dalí 1938 | Tate 2023, Maddox 1990: 46), but he also used other sexual symbols.

##### **4.1. *Mae West’s Face Which Can Be Used as a Surrealist Apartment (1934-1935)***

The 31 × 17 cm gouache on newspaper features Mae West, or Mary Jane West (1893-1980) – a popular American actress, singer, and sex symbol<sup>2</sup> of the 1930s – best known for the film *I’m No Angel* (1933). Currently at Art Institute of Chicago, USA, it allows the viewer to recognize an apartment in the actress’s face (<https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/salvador-dali-face-of-mae-west-poster-in-2023--1010776710103754744/>).

In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), Breton (1976: 78) said that, however superficial such interpretation might be, some passages from William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) plays rely on the Surrealist technique of double image. Based on some

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<sup>2</sup> Because she was a pop culture icon well known for her large bust, *Mae West* became an image metaphor-based slang expression for an “inflatable life-jacket” (Hawkins 1987: 393).

striking associations, Ariel's song from *The Tempest* (ca. 1611) meets the criterion:

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
 Of his bones are coral made;  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
     Nothing of him that doth fade,  
 But doth suffer a sea change  
 Into something rich and strange.  
 (Shakespeare 1980: 6)

In the first image, the oblong shape of the bones matches the like shape of the coral skeletons<sup>3</sup>; in the second one, the shape and size of the eyes, as well as the quality of light reflected in them, match the like properties of the pearls.

Like Breton's and Shakespeare's poems, Dalí's gouache employs the technique of making free associations and the artistic execution of "the potentialities of the double image" (Gómez de Liaño 1990: 16). Basing on the initial six lines of Ariel's song, its rhyming pattern of ABABCC, as well as the alliterative repetition of sound segments in the initial line, the following verses describe its texture in a slightly more complex rhyming pattern of ABABCDCDEE, because it contains six rather than just two images:

Five frantic features her face shows:  
 Hair-locks are into the curtains draped;  
 Where the cheeks are, the floor goes  
 Soft lips are into a sofa shaped;  
 Nostrils open into a fireplace;  
 Of long forehead wall is made;  
 Eyes – two pictures take their parallel places:  
 Not a part of it does fade,  
 But does witness a surreal change  
 Into image rich and strange.

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<sup>3</sup> Both the bones and the coral skeletons are made of calcium.



The texture of the gouache is thus based on metaphors which superimpose shape, tactile, visual, as well as implicitly dynamic elements of one image onto another. Parts of the face of a living person match various lifeless objects, thus reflecting Dali's "fascination with giving life to the inanimate" (Maddox 1990: 46). The hair-locks are curtains – both can be folded. The cheeks become the floor – both are flat surfaces and, additionally, the colour of the wood of which the floor is made matches the colour of the cheeks. The lips have a shape of a sofa – the upper one becomes its back; the lower one is the seat; both the lips and the sofa share the property of softness. The nostrils are two openings of the fireplace – both elements share the properties of dark interiors and the movement of the airstream. The forehead and a part of the cheeks form the wall – again the property of flat surface is shared. The eyes become two pictures placed on both sides of the nose / fireplace; in this case, the shared properties are symmetry and the use of vision.

The image metaphors represent the occurrence of "two physically impossible elements" which are "saliently posed in a homospatially unified figure" (Forceville 2002a: 3). The clear mapping of the features from the source image onto the target image creates the anomaly of the hybrid image that thus comes into being. The title of the work suggests that the conceptual operation proceeds from the face to the apartment, but the interpretation in the opposite direction is also possible. All the image metaphors are novel – they do not have conventional verbal counterparts.

But the overall meaning of the gouache does not depend on such metaphors only. The images that make it up are a part of more complex construal operations. First, both the lips and the sofa metonymically evoke sexual associations. Lips stand for kissing via the common metonymic relation of the body part-for-its-function – the same as in the conventional expressions *lip clap* and *lip eroticism* (Goldenson and Anderson 1994: 138-139). Slightly apart, they also reflect the physiological effect that provides access to the sexual emotion itself (Pease and Pease 2007:

204, 212). The sofa, in turn, represents a potential act of love-making via another common metonymy of the object-for-its-purpose. English is full of various expressions that reflect the role of bed in erotic contexts, for example *bed-hop*, *bed-mates*, *bed-presser*, *bedroom eyes*, *bed-swever* (Goldenson and Anderson 1994: 25). They are all related to the most conventional euphemism for the sexual act, which is *go to bed with somebody*. Secondly, the placement of the sofa in the very centre of the room metaphorically emphasizes the importance of the bed-related associations: what is important is usually *central*; what is less important is often *marginal* (Deane 1995: 633-635). Third, the intense red colour of the lips / sofa and of the opposite wall also has clear sexual associations – sex leads to increased body temperature, which, in turn, makes one’s skin look red. In this way, Mae West evokes the metaphor of lust-as-heat and associations with *hot stuff* or *a red hot lover*. The metonymies of the lips and the sofa thus make up a part of the metaphorical source domain – the underlying cognitive operation is a visual case of metonymy-within-metaphor (Goossens 2003: 363-365). Fourth, the large windows resemble enlarged eye pupils, which is another bodily symptom of sexual emotions (Pease and Pease 2007: 204, 212) – the physiological effect again provides access to its cause. Fifth, the shape of the nostrils conveys further sexual associations – *having one’s nose wide open* means feeling the heat of lust. Lust is frequently represented as fire – someone can *light your fire*, make you *burn with desire*, or eventually become an *old flame* of yours (Lakoff 1987b: 410). The mappings are another novel instance of metonymy-within-metaphor. The nostrils / fireplace – much like the lips / sofa – occupy the central position in the room, which additionally underscores the importance of sexuality. Finally, the whole face is a three-dimensional structure, so the overall image represents it metaphorically as a container for the emotions – we often look for emotional cues *in* the person’s face. The gouache can thus be read as an implicit invitation to come to the room and make love.

The Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) argued that visual stimuli could give rise to temperature-related associations (1979). He believed that “the horizontal is received as cold, the vertical as warm, and the diagonal as cold-warm” (Limont 2014: 79). The gouache extends upwards – its shape thus reflects warmth, which is another element of the above-mentioned metaphor of lust-as-heat.

Lips / sofa, eyes / windows, nostrils / fireplace, and the predominantly red colour of the forehead-face / wall all function as figurative visual referents related to the scenario of lovemaking. In a prototypical version, the scenario has the following form: erotic eye contact → kissing → sexual contact in a horizontal position on the bed. They create the prototypical visual syntax in the mind of the viewer, thus making a coherent interpretation of the gouache possible.

The six novel image metaphors representing the parts of the face as the parts of the apartment could hardly have counterparts in conventional discourse. It is in this sense that Dali’s gouache is closest to Breton’s Surrealist poem – both are full of striking associations. The remaining metaphors<sup>4</sup> and metonymies are conventional. However, their source domains, for example the room mapped onto the face, the redness of the lips / sofa mapped onto sexual heat, or the shared metonymic associations between the lips and the sofa, are elaborated in novel ways. The complex interplay of these patterns of conceptual construal jointly yields a highly original work of art.

#### **4.2. *Anthropomorphic Chest of Drawers* (1936)**

The Freudian influence is possibly most evident in *Anthropomorphic Chest of Drawers* (1936). The work is a 25.4 × 44.2 cm oil painting on wood, currently at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-

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<sup>4</sup> The implicit interpretation of the eyes as ‘windows of the soul’ possibly reflects the more complex metaphor of knowledge-as-vision.

Westfalen in Düsseldorf, Germany (<https://www.dalipaintings.com/the-anthropomorphic-cabinet.jsp>).

A nude, partly reclining female figure occupies the central and the largest part of the picture:

Frail hand extended, rejecting the outside world, a disjointed figure – a chest of drawers for a chest – looks within itself, head down. Drawers pulled out, darkness within, the exterior world represented in the top right corner (it appears to be Cologne with its double-spired cathedral), seems to retreat, casting an ethereal light on the disconcerting figure.

(realitybitesartblog 2023)

The picture shows “a woman simultaneously opening up and withdrawing” (realitybitesartblog 2023). It can be read as

a manifestation of Freudian internalization and reclusion, the woman (with draw-handles for nipples) is engrossed by the drawers that have spontaneously opened from within her, threatening to disclose their contents – her interior world – a white cloth protruding from one. In this sense the anthropomorphic cabinet becomes a symbol of psychoanalysis.

(realitybitesartblog 2023)

The work’s message is that the subconscious, sex-based layers of the psyche play a dominant role in our lives.

Two image metaphors identify the figure as a woman: the draw-handles or knobs are the nipples of her breasts; the keyhole of a mechanical lock in the bottom drawer is the vaginal orifice. The keyhole / orifice makes it possible to unlock all the drawers / the woman’s interior world because she is guided by subconscious sex-based instincts and emotions. The double images provide access to sexuality and its impact on human life via the metonymic relation of object / body part-for-its-function. Both metonymies jointly express the idea that the *unlocked* sexual instincts have control over our subconscious inner lives. They also form the basis of the metaphor which represents the

human body as a mechanism.<sup>5</sup> The metaphor expresses the idea that our sexual instincts, once *unlocked*, can acquire full control over our psyche. In other words, the impact of sexuality is represented as a mechanical function that eliminates all conscious thought from our actions.

As much of human sexuality, for example dreams, conflicts, and repressions, has a strong emotional basis (Goldenson and Anderson 1994: 49, 93), the central metaphor of the picture represents the body, specifically its torso, as a container for the emotions – we commonly experience joys, fears, anger, etc. *in* our hearts or chests (Kövecses 2002: 184, Lakoff 1987b: 383). The prototypical seat of emotions in Western culture is thus elaborated as open drawers<sup>6</sup> that reveal their contents. The piece of cloth that hangs down from one of them is a metaphorical objectification of one of the hidden emotions or instincts – instead of being just an immaterial experience *in* our hearts or chests, the emotion or instinct is elaborated as a specific object.<sup>7</sup> The position in which the cloth is placed metaphorically represents lack of rational control as disorder or deviation from a straight pattern – people can think *straight* and they have *straight* ideas; if they lose rational control or go insane, they have *twisted* minds or their ideas become *bent* or *twisted* (Cienki 1998: 121-122).

The female figure also holds her head down as if she were interested in the contents of the drawers, which reflects Freud's idea that much of the libido is hidden and subconscious. Her lowered head also means being subject to the libido's force – she looks as if she was *sinking* into it or *falling under* its influence.

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<sup>5</sup> The metaphor dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it became really influential as a result of the impact of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century science (Mudyń 2008: 108-109).

<sup>6</sup> Dalí's drawers "symbolize the memory and the unconscious and refer to the 'idea drawer', a legacy of reading Freud's concept. They express the mystery of the hidden secrets. Most children explore every drawer, cabinet and closet of their home" (Dalínian Symbolism – Dalí Paris 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Other conceptualizations of emotions represent them as substances, that is, fluids or gases inside the body (Kövecses 1986: 43, 2004: 141).

The figures in the outside public world in the top right-hand corner of the picture are all up – they have control *over* themselves and they can *rise above* their emotions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15, 17).

The woman's extended left hand paired with her retreating posture (realitybitesartblog 2023) is the symptom-for-cause metonymic gesture that commonly means keeping another person or thing at some distance. Because the gesture expresses the woman's rejection of any emotional and / or mental involvement with the outside world, it also acquires a more abstract sense. The opposition of physical closeness-distance (Jäkel 1995: 200, Kövecses 2002: 222) forms the basis of the metaphor which represents the emotional life in terms of a physical force – we sometimes *keep at bay*, *push* or *thrust away* unwanted emotions or experiences. The construal as a whole is thus a case of metaphor from metonymy (Goossens 2003: 361-363).

The part of the picture that shows the reclining woman and the interiors of the drawers is dark; the street scene in the top right-hand corner is well-lit. Because the subconscious layers of the mind are unknown, they are dark; they thus stand in sharp contrast to the rational and public world out there, which is bright. The metaphor of knowledge-as-vision (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 48, Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 53-54, Lakoff and Turner 1989: 94) is elaborated here in a novel way.

The reclining position of the woman and her nudity function as prompts that provide metonymic access to the scenario of a prototypical sexual contact, which involves such position and nudity. However, it is also possible to interpret the position as another indication of the woman's subjection to her libido. Following Cooper and Ross's (1975) study of the *me-first* orientation, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 132-133) argue that in Western culture "the canonical person forms a conceptual reference point" to which numerous other concepts are oriented. We are *up* rather than *down* and *active* rather than *passive* – the woman in the centre of Dalí's picture denies these standard cultural orientations. She is *down* and *passive* because she is

subject to the impact of the subconscious libido. The figures in the bright part of the picture are all *up* and *active* because they form a part of the canonical and rational public world.

Thanks to metaphorical understanding of importance in terms of positioning in space, what is normally hidden and peripheral – our inner world – is given prominence by being placed in the *centre* of the picture; what is normally public – the world out there – is shifted into the *margin* of the painting and its importance is thus diminished. The novelty of Dalí's message is that the less expected dimension now occupies the central position.

The internal / dark part of the picture is also much bigger than its external / bright part. The disproportion further emphasizes Dalí's Freud-inspired belief in the power of the subconscious libido via the pictorial use of two chained metaphors: the mapping of important-as-big (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 50) represents the scale of the influence of libido on human life; the mapping of strength-as-physical size (Corum 2016: 74) suggests that libido is a factor of great *intensity* and *power*.

Except for the two image metaphors, the conceptual patterns of the picture are anchored in their verbal counterparts. The latter are transferred to a visual medium in the process that involves *picta verbalis* or re-visualization of conventional linguistic content (Yus 2009: 166-167) effected in novel ways.

In most pictorial metaphors and metonymies, one term is visually depicted, but the second one is “to be inferred from the [...] context” (Forceville 2002b: 216). The woman's reclining position, the keyhole / vaginal orifice, the drawers / chest, the knobs / nipples, and the hand pushing away the public world all serve as prototypical visual referents. They facilitate the interpretation of the painting in terms of the following Freud-based scenario: the keyhole / vaginal orifice provides the sexuality-focused background → the knobs / nipples suggest tactile stimulation, hence sexual contact → the drawers / chest open one's inner world → the head oriented down means

subordination to the inner world → the extended hand means rejection of the public world.

The overall effect of Dalí's picture thus depends on a multi-level pattern of figurative multimodal construal expressed in terms of various visual referents and syntactic relations between them. Though most of the elements of the pattern function also in conventional communication, in the painting their source domains are elaborated in novel ways.

### **4.3. *Lobster Telephone (1938)***

The 15 × 30 × 17 assemblage, also known as aphrodisiac telephone, was made for Edward James (1907-1984), Dalí's English patron and a collector of Surrealist art. A property of Edward James Foundation, it is currently placed at Tate Gallery in London, UK (<https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/572590540093173544/>).

In the book *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, the painter himself makes the following statement:

I do not understand why, when I ask for a grilled lobster in a restaurant, I am never served a cooked telephone; I do not understand why champagne is always chilled and why on the other hand telephones, which are habitually so frightfully warm and disagreeably sticky to the touch, are not also put in silver buckets with crushed ice around them.

(Dalí, Chevalier 1942: 271)

The passage is another illustration of the Surrealist cancelling of all 'antitheses' between the seemingly irreconcilable opposites (Forceville 1988: 151).

The receiver-as-lobster image is based on the metaphorical mapping of oblong and curved shapes. The telephone, especially its mouthpiece, accesses communication by means of the metonymy the instrument-for-its-function – it is also used in the related conventional expression *pick up the phone* 'start conversation on the phone'. The mouthpiece corresponds to the tail of



the lobster, which contains the animal's sexual organs.<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition is a more complex case of construal based on a metonymic chain (Fass 1997: 73) – first, the tail provides access to the organs by means of the-whole-for-the-part relation; secondly, the metonymy the-body-part-for-its-function motivates the reference to sexuality. Whereas the receiver is hard and durable, the flesh of the lobster is soft. The juxtaposition is an allusion to erotic conversations (Dalí, Chevalier 1993), in which the quality of the voice is usually subdued or *soft*. It is thus the locus of the synesthetic metaphor not-loud-as-soft (Yu 2003: 21-23).

All the visual prompts and their target domains make it possible to interpret the assemblage in terms of a scenario of erotic conversation, courtship, and the potential sexual contact. The telephone is the source domain of the metonymy the-precondition-for-the-whole-event – the picking up of the receiver allows the user to start the conversation and use the quality of the voice that conveys clearly erotic associations. The precondition thus provides metonymic access to the whole of the event.

The image metaphor of the-receiver-as-lobster is novel. Though the metonymies and the synesthetic metaphor are conventional, the effect of novelty is achieved by means of the unexpected juxtapositions of the source and target domains, especially representing the mouthpiece as the lobster's tail and the residue of the property of softness.

The assemblage makes implicit references to sexuality by making a close analogy between food and sex. It is possibly motivated by the fact that both satisfy elementary human needs. The assemblage thus also reflects the conventional conceptualizations of lust-as-hunger and the object of lust-as-food. They are related to the common expressions “He is *sex-starved*”, “You have a remarkable *sexual appetite*”, “I *hunger* for your touch”, “She's quite a *dish*”, and “What a piece of *meat!*” (Lakoff 1987b:

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<sup>8</sup> Dalí also used lobsters to cover the sexual organs of his female models during photographic sessions (*Lobster Telephone* Salvador Dalí 1938 | Tate 2023).

409), all of which form a part of the verbal background for the interpretation of Dalí's work.

## 5. Conclusions

As Forceville discusses (1988: 151), "Surrealism attempted to subvert existing modes of looking at reality and to propose new ways of looking by introducing radically novel metaphors." In the above-discussed Surrealist representations of sexuality, Dalí employs metaphor-based construal that defies the Aristotelian idea of metaphorical "aptness" and "discovers" similarity or contiguity between the concepts that are not close to each other in terms of the genus and the species (Aristotle 1988: 242-243, 352-353). He does it by proposing original image metaphors and by elaborating more complex and well-established metaphors in novel ways. The artist's method is thus congruent with Max Black's claim "that metaphor does not so much reflect existing similarities; rather it creates the similarity"<sup>9</sup> (1979 cit. Forceville 1988: 151). The metonymies reflect conventional patterns. However, whenever they appear – metonymic source domains are used in novel ways thanks to the force of the strikingly original double images to which they are related.

By intermingling the physical, animal, plant, and food worlds (Ważyk 1976: 18), Dalí's works offer an extreme illustration of Victor Shklovsky's (1893-1984) Formalist idea of defamiliarization in art (1965). They interpret conventional objects and behaviours in highly original ways, thus providing novel perspectives on human sexuality. It is mainly in this sense that the artist questions the conventional social and cultural values in a Surrealist manner.

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<sup>9</sup> The cognitive view of metaphor has developed from Black's (1979) interaction view. See Miller (1979) and Ortony (1979) for similar ideas (Forceville 1988: 153).

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