The Surrealist movement was ostensibly a most avant-garde and liberal movement, which championed sexual liberation, revered the libido and the unconscious, and even called for relieving women of the burdens of household chores and the other traditional values of bourgeois society. In practice, however, Surrealist ideas as manifested in both artworks and writings, betray conservatism, male chauvinism and sexism. The key culprit is the movement "guru" André Breton. A conservative and homophobe, this professed revolutionary excluded from the movement anyone suspected of homosexuality. He criticized Giacometti for hanging out with gay friends and turned a cold shoulder to anyone who seemed to him too provocative sexually or in terms of gender identity, such as Pierre Molinier. He also excluded anyone who didn't following him in any other area, to the point where there were more Surrealist artists outside than within the movement.

Although not all group members were as sexist as Breton, clearly the female image in Surrealist art was highly problematic, and despite the fact what women accompanied and even exhibited with the group, most found their place in the movement only thanks to a personal relationship with one of its male members. They were not recognized or publicly credited as artists, neither in catalogues nor in other writings, and therefore were absent from the Surrealist discourse and were not researched until the mid-1980's: One of first to study them was Whitney Chadwick in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985). It could be said that Surrealist women artists were discovered thanks to Feminist research. In fact, Surrealism
itself, having been perceived as an overworked style for many years, gained renewed relevance thanks to Feminism and Postmodernism, mainly by virtue of its focus on gender and gender ambivalence.

The discourse of Surrealist women artists posed a problem: how should we resolve the inherent contradiction between the essentially misogynist male Surrealist ideas and Feminist discourse. In Belton's article "Speaking with Forked Tongues, 'Male' Discourse in 'Female' Surrealism" he argues that the discourse of Surrealists women artists requires speaking with a "forked tongue", or using two voices, due to the contradiction between male chauvinist ideas and their practicing, or lack thereof, by women artists, who often refused to play along with this discourse. On the other hand, how do we (feminists) treat the female artists who followed the male discourse? This is a complex problem that deserves another lecture. In my lecture I use the term "forked tongue" to attack the male Surrealist who used two voices to refer to the woman – admiring her on the one hand, but humiliating here on the other. This forked tongue preaches female liberation and sex revolution, but actually betrays conservatism and male chauvinism.

Although the woman in the 1920's is already a "New Woman" – liberated, rebellious and independent – one of the key female types in Surrealism is that of the Femme Enfant – pretty, naive, immature and frivolous, dependent on man and meant to serve, pleasure and humor him. On the other hand, Surrealism also describes a threatening type, presenting women as castrating and menacing the phallus with her toothed genitalia (vagina dentata), or as trapping man and choking him with her webs, like a spider, or even killing him like the Black Widow or female mantis, to which I will refer below. Because woman is a threat, she must be attacked, therfore she is often being threatened herself and manipulated in certain ways that make her physically distorted, dismembered or mutilated.
Woman as subject is hardly of any interest to Surrealists. She interests them primarily as an object – whether as a thing or as a reflection of their ideas. We could say that for the (male) Surrealists the woman is transparent. This is evident, for example, in René Magritte's work, *I Do Not See the [Woman] Hidden in the Forest* {1}, published in *La Révolution surréaliste, 12* (1929). This photomontage is composed of a painting of a standing woman made by Magritte during his visit to Paris, called *Femme Cachée* (Hiding [or Hidden] Woman), surrounded by portrait photos of the members of the Surrealist group, all with their eyes shut. Are they dreaming about her? Perhaps there is reference here to Breton's confession in *Nadja* (1928): "I have always, beyond belief, hoped to meet, at night and in a woods, a beautiful naked woman or rather, since such a wish once expressed means nothing, I regret, beyond belief, not having met her". The ideal woman remains nothing more than an idea, a fantasy or dream. In reality, she doesn't see them and they don't see her.

Woman seemingly occupies a key position in Surrealist art given her important role in Breton's ideas: she is the productive and creative element. Note that the association of femaleness with creation and productivity is far from being unique to surrealism – it is primordial, whether productivity is related to procreation or artistic endeavor, or in the ancient past, to the fruits of the earth. However, it reached its ideological apex in the Surrealist weltanschauung, which viewed the woman as a type of conduit connecting man to nature. By virtue of her affinity to nature and mother earth, the
woman mediates between the man and the mystery of nature and the beyond, a conduit which is essential to creativity – but to male creativity.

In order for man to become creative, he must attach himself to the woman in a type of love Breton called *L'Amour fou* (Mad Love – also the title of his 1937 book, part poetry part autobiography, describing his love to Jacqueline Lamba). In order for such love to ascend to heavenly heights, the woman herself had better be mad. Indeed, *Nadja* is about Breton's love to an insane woman. In fact, such matches between male Surrealist artists and neurotic women were quite common, and several female partners of the Surrealists suffered nervous breakdowns or were even committed. And perhaps this tells us something about the surrealist man as a partner, or about the type of women he was fond of.

As already mentioned, Breton seems to ascribe a key role to the woman, that of the muse, but in practice, as subsequently argued by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), woman herself does not interest him beyond her role as an essential mediator. Moreover, I argue that woman's affinity to nature – the inspiration for man's creativity – is also the source of here inferiority: she herself does not create; she is all body, all instinct. In fact, she is an Acephalos – headless (*Acéphale*, this is also the name of a journal published by Georges Bataille in 1936-7). As such – she lacks any intellect or ability for abstraction, and can only realize her creative potential through the man, who is equipped with all the abilities lacking in her.

2. René Magritte, *The Rape*, 1934
In *The Rape* (1934), Magritte depicts a woman who is all head, but actually headless and identity-less, because her head is her body. She is not a subject but a sex object, and her entire identity is derived of her sex, with her sexual parts representing her facial parts. To Magritte, such a view of woman constitutes rape. This painting is controversial, but I prefer to interpret it as criticism against Surrealist sexism, which perhaps also indicates that the previous montage we have seen is not necessarily sexist but rather a comment on the alienation between man and woman.

Deprived of identity, the woman is also voiceless. In *Mannequin by André Masson* (1938), a photograph by Denise Bellon, the woman's mouth is gagged by a muzzle made of a cloth decorated by a pansy. The original name of this piece was *Le baillon vert a bouche de penséée*. This is a pun: first, penséée (as 'pansy' in English) is a derogatory nickname to homosexual; second, and more importantly, the French word penséée also means "thought", so that the piece could be called "the green gag in the mouth of thought". Masson depicts the woman as mannequin, thus objectifying her. Not only does he gag her, but he also traps her head in a birdcage, as if it was a pet. Her genital area is covered with a cloth, above which is a circle made up of framed mirrors and decorated by feathers. Originally, this "woman" shed tears and soap bubbles floated out of her head – perhaps in allusion to her role as a housewife. Masson's mannequin was one of a series of mannequins treated by various artists positioned along the hallway leading to the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Paris in 1938.
Headless women appear in many photographs in the exhibition (The naked eye: surrealist photography). In Temptations in the House of Antonio (1970) {5}, Alvarez Bravo covers the woman's head with a sheet, thereby committing several sins. First, he further emphasizes her nudity by concealing her upper part and leaving her genitalia bare. Then, he directs the viewer's attention to her genitalia by the partial concealment of woman's hand. Not only does he turn her into a kind of Acephalos, but he also has her posing next to a clothesline, turning her from an Aphrodite into a housewife busy hanging the laundry – her natural role.

The female body becomes a headless and otherwise mutilated also in the next nudes. Ruth Bernhard's Sand Dune (1967) {6}, for example, also echoes the Surrealist association of woman and earth. This photo is reminiscent of Edward Weston's nude series, such as his two Nudes from 1925 {7+8}. Weston was no Surrealist, but was certainly aware of avant-garde photography on both sides of the Atlantic. Another example is Brassaï's Nude (1931-32) {9}, and Lee Miller's Nude Bent Forward (1931) {10}. The latter is highly enigmatic because at first glance: it is difficult to understand the angle of photography and what it is that we actually see. Since the result in all of these examples is highly esthetic, we tend to forget that what we are actually seeing is a person rather than an object – we do
not treat the model as an autonomous entity, we do not know her, we do not recognize her face, and we ignore her subjectivity. Another example of such objectification is *Intgres's Violin* by Man Ray (1923) {11}, a kind of homage to Ingres's *The Valpinçon Bather*. The name and the image of the woman as a violin allude to the painter's hobby as a violinist.

A different approach to the female body is evident in Pierre Molinier's *The Flower of Paradise* or the *Magic Girl* (1958) {12}. Only this is not the body of a woman but rather of a man – Molinier photographed himself as an erotic figure, dressed in sexy lingerie, as if in the process of disrobing, reminiscent of a striptease or even sadomasochistic games. Molinier creates a photomontage of the top half of his body, shot from the front, and of the bottom half which is shot from behind. He conceals his eyes but emphasizes his lips and other erotic parts of his body, such as the buttocks. In that, he momentarily challenges our perception, due to the contradictions between front or back, woman or man, etc. On the surface, there is no misogyny here, since it is a photo of a male, not female, and Molinier, as suggested by Tal Barel, is the object of his own desire. Molinier, however, reproduces female stereotypes and uses what feminist research calls the Master's Tools: he presents his seemingly
female body as patriarchal and phallocentric perception presents the seductive woman, with over-sexualized attributes. Conversely, though, it is arguable that by using the Master's Tools Molinier actually critiques common gender stereotypes, by turning the tables and creating a hybrid and ambivalent figure that offers the possibility of liquid, non-binary gender types.

Collage and photomontage works (such as those made by Molinier) were already done in Cubism and Dadaism, such as Hannah Höch's works {13}. But while Cubist or Dadaist collages say something about the world – this is particularly true of Höch's, which are usually political – Surrealist photographers use such techniques to cut up, disfigure and dismember the female figure. The artists mutilate the woman, deconstruct and reconstruct her image to create a new type of beauty – *convulsive beauty*. According to Breton, the distorted, the mysterious, the strange and the threatening – what Freud calls the Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) – is the most beautiful.

Dali, for one, argued that the woman's new sexual attractiveness derives from what he calls “the spectral capacity of women”… “their possible dissociation, their luminous carnal decomposition”. The disintegrating woman appears in many of Dali's works, as in *Spectre of Sex Appeal* (1934) {14}. Dali suggested that any part of the dismembered woman's body could be offered as food. Surrealist artist Méret Oppenheim indeed offered a woman as food by having a nude model lie on a table full of delicacies in her *Cannibal Feast* (1959) {15}. The disintegrating woman
appears in many Surrealist photographs, such as Erwin Blumenfeld's *Teddy Thurman* (late 1940s), and Val Telberg's *Untitled (female nude in double exposure)* (c. 1946) {16}.

The association between the *Femme Enfant* playing with dolls and dismembered women of "convulsive beauty" can be seen in the doll series created by Hans Bellmer. In 1932, Bellmer was inspired by Max Reinhardt's production the Offenbach opera *Tales of Hoffman*, particularly by the figure of the Sandman, who fell in love with a full-size doll called Olympia. Bellmer began creating his first dolls in 1933, just when Hitler rose to power in Germany. He claimed that his disfigured dolls were a protest against the Nazi ideal of the Arian race's perfection. He sent photographs of his dolls to Breton, who immediately published 18 of them in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* (6) (1934) {17}.

The Surrealists embraced the concept of twisted, disfigured dolls, which articulated Freud's uncanny as well as Breton's "convulsive beauty" {18}. Bellmer went on to create another series of photographed dolls in 1935 {19, 20, 21}, which were even more perverse. Some of these works
where photomontages. It is therefore not surprising that in 1938 the Nazis declared him a "degenerate artist", and he escaped to Paris. Bellmer's dolls represent manipulated, bound up, tortured and raped women. They seem to embody the perverse wet dreams of a serial rapist.

Rediscovered with the reemergence of Surrealism in the 1980s, Bellmer influenced other modern artists, including Cindy Sherman in her 1999 doll series {22+23}, and Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Tragic Anatomies* (1996) {24}, to name but a few.

Another kind of distorted woman can be seen in André Kertész's *Distortion #168* (1933) {25}. The woman's head is reminiscent of the praying mantis, a creature that appealed to the Surrealists as representing the castrating woman. Since the mantis' mystical (positive and negative) power is associated mainly with the female mantis, I will use the female tense from
here. The word "praying" was probably prefixed to the mantis due to her posture: when awaiting her pray, she brings her front legs up close to her chest in a way reminiscent of arms crossed in prayer.

![Praying Mantis](image)

25. André Kertész, *Distortion # 168*, 1933

The female mantis' most notable characteristic is her habit of devouring her mate after or even during copulation. Sometimes she decapitates the male right at the beginning of the act, and the headless body (Acephalos) continues performing automatically, like a sex machine. Some researchers even thing that the decapitation produces prolonged reflexive movements and spasms, thereby ensuring ovulation for the female. Others believe that the female needs extra food during copulation, hence the decapitation. Because of her questionable bed manners, the mantis is the most extreme embodiment of the negative female archetype, both in metaphor and in reality: a female who treats the male like a sex object and uses him strictly for reproductive purposes causes him to experience a castration complex. But a female who also devours the male during or after copulation really and truly castrates him, representing mutilation or even death.

But the mantis figure is more complex than that. It does not only signify the castrating woman, and in the many cultures in which it appears it is simultaneously emblematic of both divine and satanic powers. On the one hand, she represents creation, revival and fertility – of the womb as well as the earth – and on the other she stands for cannibalism, castration and death. It could be said that the mantis represents the two fundamental
Freudian instincts: Eros, or libido – the sexual drive, the motivation to survive and procreate; and Thanatos, or the destructive death instinct. It is precisely because death and new life coincide in her image, the mantis is symbolic of the cycle of being. Thus, she is also the Great Mother, the goddess of fertility, the symbol of regeneration.

The mantis appealed to the Surrealists because of these ambivalent meanings associated with her, but also because of its cruel sexual habits. Journals associated with the group often featured articles and photographs discussing and depicting mantis behaviors and associated myths. André Breton, Paul Éluard, and André Masson (who also painted mantises), raised mantises in their homes, studied their behaviors and invited other artists to observe their macabre mating rituals. Éluard even argued that these rituals are the epitome of sexual relations. The sexual act, he argued, emasculates the male and empowers the female, and it is therefore perfectly natural for the female to take advantage of her momentary superiority to devour the male, or at least kill him.

Since the mantis devours its mate, she is symbolic of both castration and cannibalism, because the fear of being devoured and the fear of being castrated are connected, as claimed by Roger Caillois. In various cultures, the mantis is related to teeth – both as toothache medicine and as a symbol of nutrition, eating and digestion. Thus, it is identified with a mouth filled with ominous teeth, as well as with the *vagina dentata*. In *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann argues that the teeth are associated with the negative archetypal image of the *terrible mother*: a mouth full of teeth is connotative of the devouring and carnivorous femininity. It also connects the fear of being swallowed and castration anxiety.

By virtue of the mantis' characteristics and her praying-like posture, Dali argued that the praying woman in Jean-François Millet's *Angelus* (1857-59) is a mantis awaiting her pray, but at the same time also a
sexually frustrated woman waiting to have sex with her mate (and devour him). Dali painted several versions of Millet's praying couple, with the woman portrayed as mantis-like in all. In this one, the mantis has already consumed part of the male's chest (or eaten his heart out).

Dali was one of the Surrealists invited to Éluard's home to observe the mantises' copulation ritual. But despite his fascination with them and writings about them, they did not feature in his paintings. Instead, he used grasshoppers or lobsters, members of the same Arthropod family, and loaded them with meanings associated with the mantis. In *The Great Masturbator* (1929) \{27\}, the grasshopper attaches itself to the lower part of Dali's head, in the mouth area. According to the artist, the most threatening aspect of this painting is the lack of mouth and the insect's menacing presence instead. Its location connects the mouth with food and sex, hence Cailllois' claim that Dali instinctively understood here the relationship between sexuality and nutrition, love and the desire to devour the other. Dali uses the mantis symbolism to describe the relationship between him and his lover Gala – whose head emerges out of an amorphous shape, which is actually Dali's self-portrait laying on his nose. Gala's mouth is close to the standing male's genitalia, but her lips are sealed. The phallus is neither exposed nor particularly salient and certainly not erect, perhaps due to the male's fear of the teeth hidden behind the closed lips. Dali and Gala got married that same year, but the painting was made before, and expresses Dali's fear of the future. The relationship between the two was complex and laden with conflicts. Gala had been
married to Éluard when they fell in love, and despite the latter’s understanding, Dali, who came from a devout Catholic home, probably felt ill-at-ease; he took his friend’s wife and was also afraid to be devoured by her, given his boundless love. To him, Gala was a Great Mother – she helped him overcome his stammering and impotence, but due to his mad love for her he feared being swallowed and losing his selfhood. The Great Masturbator is therefore Dali, afraid of his relationship with Gala, while Gala is both the loving and loved woman, but also the Terrible Mother.

The grasshopper evoked in Dali many associations with his childhood years, part realistic and part imaginary. It was related both to pleasant, colorful memories and to the fear of being devoured. According to his testimony, his fear of being swallowed was related to a deep fear of his father. His conservative, oppressive and menacing father was perceived as a father devouring his son. This carnivorous image was symbolized by the grasshopper. But in The Great Masturbator, it appears that Dali’s fear of being swallowed is more complex, and related both to Gala and to castration anxiety and it is thus clear that it is also laden with mantis symbolism.

This interpretation is further supported by the fact that a similar grasshopper appears in a different painting by Dali, Portrait of Paul Éluard (1929) {28}. The mantis is held by Éluard, behind which we can see Dali’s head. This unholy trinity – Éluard, Dali and the grasshopper – reinforces the idea that the latter represents Gala and that the painting is about the triangular relationship, and particularly Dali’s dread of adultery, boundless love for Gala and consequent fear of being devoured. By the way, Dali’s father is also related to the grasshopper-mantis here, because he rejected and denounced Dali’s relationship with Gala as adulterous.
In *Dream of Venus* (1939) {29}, performed at the New York World's Fair, we can see a different aspect of the artist's attitude towards woman. Instead of the female mantis, we have a phallic lobster, whose claws threaten the woman's genitals. The phallic threat to the vagina is also a recurring Surrealist theme, seen as counteracting the female threat – if the woman is menacing, the man should thwart her by threatening first. This can also be seen in Giacometti's *Unpleasant Object* (1933) {30}, photographed by Man Ray {31}. This time, it is the male phallus that is threatening, and instead of being castrated and mutilated by the *vagina dentata*, the penis has teeth of its own with which to threaten the vagina. In response to Giacometti, Louise Bourgeois created *Little Girl* (1968) {32}. Her penis is vulnerable, however, just like a little girl, and in homage to Man Ray's photo by Robert Mapplethorpe {33}, she carries it her arm like a baby in need of protection.

Giacometti is also preoccupied with the mantis, in *Woman with Her Throat Cut* (1932) {34}, but again, in a different and particularly violent way. At the time, Giacometti the Surrealist expresses violence against women in his art, and his mantis no longer threatens the man because it has been trampled like a cockroach.
The mantis body is dismembered and disfigured, her guts are out, and the pieces torn off her body are sharp as teeth and lay on both sides of her backbone. The sculpture is located on floor height, thus reinforcing the sense of violent trampling, but also disgust. This female-insect has a particularly elongated trachea cut in the middle, with a tiny head at the edge and a gaping mouth, as if attempting to capture the last gasp of air. This is no longer the menacing mantis, but one threatened by male violence. But violence, according to the Surrealists, is justified in that it is originally a reaction to castration anxiety, which produces the primitive male aggression hidden in men's collective and private subconscious. Since the Surrealists see the woman as a threat, she is a target of their sexual aggression, hence their tendency to dismember and disfigure it. Thus, the dismantled, distorted woman is a result of her menacing image.

Nevertheless, Giacometti also emphasized the positive female archetype in the in the form of concave shapes like vessels, as in a leaf-shaped plate containing an elongated pear-like shape, a kind of womb or ovary, or even phallus. According to Erich Neumann, the vessel is a fundamental archetype of the essence of femininity; it stands for the positive female archetype of containing, nurturing and giving birth. The open legs may be interpreted as both a negative and a positive symbol: on the one hand, the woman's willingness to have sex, and at the same time her availability for rape.
To conclude, it may be said that the woman in Surrealist art has many facets, both positive and negative, but even the positive aspect actually degrades her to an infantile level. A strong, independent and opinionated woman threatens men and awakes their aggression. In male Surrealist art, it is difficult to find a strong woman who is positive, creative and at the same time equal to man.

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