Triangulating the Surrealist Fetish

ROMY GOLAN

In May 1936 Charles Ratton, a prominent Parisian dealer in tribal art, turned over his gallery on 14 Rue de Marignan to André Breton and his cronies to mount A Surrealist Exhibition of Objects (fig. 1). Except for a brief yet favorable review in the fashionable (and right-wing!) Beaux-Arts, the show-up for just one week yet announced to the press by Breton in La Semaine de Paris—was virtually overlooked by mainstream art critics and art magazines. Yet it marked the culmination of a practice-object making and finding that had become central to Surrealism during the 1930s.

The questioning of objects had been on top of the Surrealist agenda ever since the beginnings of the movement. Drawing upon the notions of displacement and condensation operative in Freud’s dreamwork and upon Lautreamont’s literary search “for something as beautiful as the chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table,” the Surrealists aimed to rescue everyday objects—and, by extension, everyday language—from the stark impoverishment of their meaning and function in the routine of daily life. In his Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité, published shortly before the first Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, Breton had mused about the fabrication of “certains de ces objets que l’on aperçoit qu’en rêve”; objects with no discernible function that would nevertheless circulate in the real world like any old book or toothbrush.

Yet there would be no such objects to speak of until the next decade. Indeed, for all their commitment to the fusion of art and life, and their occasional calls for the demise of painting in favor of the spectacle of modern life (the cinema, the street, kiosks, automobiles, screeching doors), in the words of Pierre Naville in La Révolution Surréaliste, the Surrealists’ visual production remained confined in the 1920s to the traditional high art media of easel painting and drawing. Breton’s 1928 definition of the Surrealist image as a window opened onto a dreamscape in his book Surrealism and Painting further confirms that fact. Most representative of this period are the painted dream images of Max Ernst and, after 1925, Ernst’s, André Masson’s, and Juan Miró’s different pictorial experimentations with psychic automatism.

If the first Surrealist Manifesto was written under the aegis of Freud and Pierre Jannet, the second, published in 1929, was informed by a new imperative to bridge rêve (dream) and rêvement. Looking in the direction of Hegel and Marx, Breton now defined the Surrealist stance as a dialectical search for the point of synthesis between reality and dream. It is this desire for a “hands-on” connection with the material world—anticipated by the matter of fact paintings of René Magritte, who joined the movement in 1927, by the 1928-29 assemblages of Juan Miró, by the novelistic wanderings in the streets of Paris in Louis Aragon’s Le Paysan de Paris (1927) and Breton’s Nadja (1928), by the new importance of the indexical media of photography and film—that led, quite logically, to the actual fleshing out of the Surrealist object.

Its birth was announced with typical bombast by Salvador Dali, the most recent recruit to the movement, in the third issue of Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution in the spring of 1931. Following Dali’s
“Objets surréalistes: catalogue général” which included six categories for starters, came a set of seven black and white vignettes under the heading “Objets mobiles et muets,” five of which were eventually turned into sculptures, by the other major Surrealist newcomer, the sculptor Alberto Giacometti. These two interventions were given the necessary imprimitur by Breton himself in an essay entitled “L’objet fantôme,” in which he urged the Surrealists to take up Dali’s initiative and create actual objects whose true meaning could be discovered only through psychoanalytic interpretation. In the wake of this call came an avalanche of articles devoted to the object, among them: Dali’s “The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment” in This Quarter (1932), “Objets psycho-atmosphériques-anamorphiques” in Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution (1933), and “Sculptures involontaires” and “Apparitions aerodynamiques des etres-objets,” both in Minotaure (1933 and 1934-5); and Breton’s “L’équation de l’objet trouvé” in Documents (1934), “Rêve-objet” in Cahiers d’art (1935), and “La situation surréaliste de l’objet” delivered as a lecture in Prague in 1935 and incorporated in L’Amour Fou in 1937. Most important, published in conjunction with the exhibition at Charles Ratton, was a special issue devoted to the object in Christian Zervos’ magazine Cahiers d’art: it featured Breton’s “Crise de l’objet,” Claude Cahun’s “Prenez garde aux objets domestiques,” and Dali’s “Honneur à l’objet!”

Illustrating many of these texts in photographic form was an amazing proliferation of Surrealist objects identified by an increasingly elaborate nomenclature. Two years after Dali included a mere six categories of objects in his inaugural article, the catalogue of the Exposition Surréaliste: Sculptures-Objets-Peintures-Dessins at the Galerie Pierre Colle in 1933 already read like a long shopping list. The taxonomy of objects devised by the Surrealists for the Ratton show in 1936 appeared to be infinite. Two hundred items were on display, individually labeled by Breton and falling under such classifications and denominations as: Familiar objects, Natural objects, Interpreted natural objects, Incorporated natural objects, Perturbed objects, Found objects, Interpreted found objects, Molded objects, Wrapped objects, Disagreeable objects, Dream objects, Poem objects, Transubstantiated objects (fig. 2), Involuntary sculptures, Mathematical objects, Oneiric objects, Scatological objects (fig. 3), and Objects
of symbolic functioning, to name just a few. Intent on retracing the lineage of the sculpture-object in the short history of twentieth-century avant-garde art, Breton made sure to include a Picasso sheet metal Guitar and a version of his 1914 Absinthe Glass, Jean Arp’s Trousse de naufrage (or safety-kit) and, of course, a Duchamp readymade (in this case, a bottle drier). Finally - and significantly, as the Surrealists had explicitly chosen to exhibit at Charles Ratton’s - came Breton’s first inclusion of a selection of tribal objects from Africa, Alaska, New Guinea, and Oceania from the collections of Ratton, Breton, Ernst, the poet Paul Eluard, and the archaeologist Georges Salles, alongside the Surrealist objects.

Less than two weeks later many of the same objects were again on display in Surrealism’s official London debut at the second International Surrealist Exhibition in the New Burlington Galleries, along with tribal objects by new British Surrealists Eilen Agar, Rupert Lee, Paul Nash and Roland Penrose, and tribal art on loan from the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of Cambridge. They were again on display in December in Alfred Barr’s Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The following years they were again on show with a throng of new objects made specifically for the occasion at Surrealist Objects and Poems at the London Gallery in November 1937. And few months later they were among the three hundred items gathered for the third International Surrealist Exhibition which opened at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and traveled in an abbreviated version to the Gallery Robert in Amsterdam.¹¹

At the core of the Surrealists’ infatuation with the object lay - as is already well known - the notion of fetishism. And key to the Surrealist project was exposing the ideological triangulation between the sexual fetish (Freud), the commodity fetish (Marx) and the tribal fetish (ethnology).¹² At its best, as anthropology historian James Clifford argues a few years ago in “On Ethnographic Surrealism,”¹¹ this free play of objects, this great bouillabaisse - made and readymade, tribal

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and domestic - could be said to have functioned as deconstruction *avant la lettre*. For, using ethnography as its “wild card,” as Clifford puts it, the heterogeneity of the items assembled was ultimately aimed at privileging rupture over diachronicity, rapture over reason, as well as collapsing the hierarchical distinction between Western and tribal, art and non-art, science and paraphysics, artist (tribesman or Surrealist) and shamans, artists and laymen.

It has also become patently clear that, deconstructive as it may have been, even the Surrealist package had political strings attached. Tellingly enough, it took individuals outside of the conventional art historical discipline to bring home that point, as Thomas McEvilley and Clifford did in the wake of the famous/infamous *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984. Even more so than McEvilley in *Artforum,* it is Clifford, who had previously published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History, History and Theory, and Representations* - all somewhat obscure journals for most art historians, critics and artists, who came to the fore of the art community with “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” his review of the Museum of Modern Art show published as a feature article in *Art in America* in the spring of 1985. Taking the judgment-seat of anthropology, McEvilley and Clifford both condemned the show’s extreme decontextualization, its Eurocentrism, its excessive formalism, and its didactic undertones. Missing or, rather, elided from the story...
told by MOMA— including the two detailed catalogue essays that traced the arrival of tribal objects from Africa, Oceania, and North America to the West— was the discourse of power: colonialism, negrophilia (the 1920s infatuation for all things black), third world modernism, recent tribal production, etc. Taking their basic clues from these two articles, the chorus of art critics who reviewed the show in the following weeks voiced similar arguments. Likewise, with the exception of “La negrophilie et la critique de l’exotisme,” a chapter by Jean Laude in La Peinture Francaise et L’Art Negre published in the ideologically-sensitive year 1968, the colonial dimension of primitivism had been similarly elided in France. Only in 1988— twenty years after the publication of Laude’s book and four years after the Museum of Modern Art’s resounding failure— did an institution like the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris take it upon itself to confront the interface between the avant-garde (namely Surrealism) and imperialism, in the exhibition and catalogue Focus on Minotaure, The Animal-Headed Review.

But there is more to be said, I would argue, about the Surrealists’ fetishistic triangulation of the object. For this triangulation can be mapped onto a significant moment in French history: the year 1931. Dali’s proclamation of the Surrealist object as the ultimate embodiment of libidinal desire in Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution coincided first with the slightly belated blow of the 1929 Wall Street Crash on the French economy and the ensuing predicament of the commodity fetish, and secondly with the opening of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition, the most spectacular display of things tribal (and pseudo-tribal) ever staged in Europe. If we now bracket for a moment the impeccable avant-garde pedigree of the Surrealist movement, a new set of narratives begins to emerge. Narratives wherein the fabrication and circulation of Surrealist and colonial objects, supposedly divergent or at least impervious to one another during the 1930s, overlap and intersect instead.

At the Fair

With over eight million visitors in just 193 days, according to the report of its organizers, the 1931 Paris Exposition Coloniale was a major triumph surpassed only by the huge Paris World Fair of 1900. The main reason for this success at a time when interest in its colonies had been dwindling for over two decades - a situation the 1931 fair was quite pointedly meant to rectify - was its coincidence with France’s plunge into the Depression. By the end of the year, France’s economic output would collapse by 35%. Yet here on the outskirts of Paris was the perfect dream of escape from domestic gloom. Set in the Bois de Vincennes, which had been planted with palm and date trees to simulate a tropical environment, it offered scores of images of an Adamic Golden Age in pre-industrial locales. Visitors could take long promenades on grand boulevards flanked with pavilions built in every imaginable colonial vernacular, or admire the most elaborate ersatz reconstructions of African huts and Indochinese temples - mostly blown up completely out of proportion to fit the monumental layout of the exposition. All of this in a context blissfully dominated by a France unrivaled by Britain which, after much organizational bickering, had finally decided to withdraw from the fair.

That year, the Surrealists - in conjunction with the French Communist Party, the Communist workers’ union CGTU, and the Ligue Contre L’Oppression Coloniale - were alone in mounting a counter colonial exposition. Entitled La vérité sur les colonies and accompanied by a tract entitled Ne visitez pas l’exposition coloniale, it juxtaposed tribal objects from the collections of the writers Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard with placards bearing anti-imperialist quotes from Marx, complete with denunciatory numerical data on France’s ruthless exploitation of its colonies. Small and hardly publicized, even by the Surrealists themselves, La vérité sur les colonies managed to attract only five thousand visitors in the seven long months it stayed up, from July 1931 to February 1932.

At the Auctions

Yet as the Colonial Exposition’s advance publicity moved African art out of the flea markets and away from a handful of dealers into more elaborate commercial circuits, neither the Surrealists nor Charles Raton could afford to remain indifferent to it. In February 1931, Eluard wrote to his wife Gala: “We are in dire need of funds. I saw Raton yesterday who is offering a sale of my objects with those of Breton early May. He would lend me 10,000 francs right now. The colonial exhibit will be on then and he thinks that it could help.”
Accompanied by lavishly illustrated catalogues, the auction which finally took place at Drouot on July 2nd and 3rd, 1931, was a big success. Ironically enough, the Surrealists used some of their profits to finance Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution and put some toward the acquisition of yet more tribal art.\(^\text{21}\) The art from Oceania, the American Northwest Coast, and the South Seas, less commodified than their African counterpart, was now attracting the Surrealists’ attention. Meanwhile Raton accepted to be part of a panel of experts hired by Drouot to act as auctioneers and advisors for its tribal art sales. And he had apparently no qualms against lending objects from his personal collection to the Exposition Coloniale both in the Palais Permanent des Colonies and in the pendant Exposition Ethnographique des Colonies Françaises at the Musée du Trocadéro.\(^\text{22}\)

**PRENEZ GARDE AUX OBJETS DOMESTIQUES**\(^\text{23}\)

As the organizers of the 1931 Colonial Exposition and the Surrealists both well understood, it was the object - the everyday commodity - that functioned as the most loaded signifier of desire. The vertiginous accumulation of Surrealist objects and the artists’ frantic hopping from gallery to gallery throughout the 1930s constituted a perfect antidote for an art market and a quotidian urban life crippled by the economic Depression.\(^\text{24}\)

Tellingly enough in this respect, the most commanding building in the Colonial Exposition - larger than the Palais Permanent des Colonies (the only permanent building of the exhibit); larger than the colossal reconstruction of the temple of Angkor-Wat; larger even than the endless suites of rooms filled with numerical data at the Cité d’Information; its eighty-five meters tower in reinforced concrete dwarfing even that of the Monument des Forces d’Outre Mer (the building celebrating the victories of the French colonial armies) - stood the Palais de la Section Métropolitaine, as France was called in relation to its colonies (fig. 4). Predicated upon the smooth and timely transition of the French colonial saga from an era of conquest in the nineteenth century, to one of production in the 1920s,\(^\text{25}\) to one of consumption in the 1930s, the Palais de la Métropole dedicated a large section to one of the traditional sectors of the French economy, the so-called “Industries de Luxe.”\(^\text{26}\) Afforded short shrift by mainstream art magazines in their coverage of the fair, this section was highlighted in magazines dedicated to the so-called minor decorative and applied arts, such as Art et Décoration, Mobilier et Décoration, or La Renaissance des Arts Français et des Industries de Luxe. Remarkably inclusive, it featured every single French manufacture of some renown. Intent on fostering a style colonial no longer limited to such eccentric ventures as Pierre Legrain’s outlandish 1923 Africanizing furniture set in ebony and galuchat for fashion designer and major art collector Jacques Doucet (fig. 5) or Jean Dunand’s virtuoso lacquer pieces, it hoped to emulate the success of the 1925 International Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in launching a style as trendy and commercially profitable as Art Deco. Accordingly, the century-old bastions of France’s luxury
FIGURE FIVE. PIERRE LEGRAIN, FURNITURE SET. 1923. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

FIGURE SIX. RODIER STAND. 1931. COLONIAL EXPOSITION.

FIGURE SEVEN. JACQUES-EMILE RUHLMANN. ELEPHANT ARMCHAIR. 1926. REPRODUCED IN 1931 FOR THE OFFICE OF GENERAL LYAUTY, PALAIS PERMANENT DES COLONIES. 1931 COLONIAL EXPOSITION.
industry - the porcelain and ceramics manufactures of Limoges and Sévres, the glass manufactures of Baccarat and Daum, the tapestry manufactures of Beauvais and the Gobelins - as well as mass-production oriented firms like the furniture manufactures of Le Bûcheron, Aux Trois Quarts, the Maison des Galeries Lafayette, Saddier & Fils, and accessories makers like Rodier (fig. 6), Rouard, and Louis Vuitton were all summoned to think and sell colonial at the fair.

Assuming success in advance, the author of the catalogue of Les colonies et la vie française pendant huits siècles at the Exposition's Palais des Colonies would boast that:

As far as the decorative arts are concerned such as tapestries, textiles, leather goods, jewelry, ceramics, by essence more adaptable than other media, prompted to vary their forms and to launch fashions, it is only too clear that tribal arts, ever better known, represent a huge source of inspiration. All our stores now have an art section with Berber carpets next to Annamite bronzes, and there isn't one living room, modest as may be, where this contribution doesn't transpire through an object either imported or imitated.27

Hence, the fair's core meaning did not rest in the inflated rhetoric of the mock-up colonial architecture, the sculptured reliefs and painted murals, or the alignments of showcase after showcase of utensils and artifacts gathered during the many French ethnographic missions. Rather it was the domestic objects and furniture exhibited in the Palais de la Section Métropolitaine that functioned as the most subliminal yet constant reminder to the French that out there in their distant dominions lay, as the slogans went, "l'empire, remède à la crise", and "la plus grande France: bouclier contre la crise": in short, the site of desire.

If we take it, in line with Freud's famous definition of (male) fetishism, that shoes, legs, textured surfaces such as velvet and fur, pieces of (female) underclothing, stand as the prime sites of displacement for the fetishist's castration complex and his resulting fear of female genitalia28, then nowhere was the affinity between the libidinal charge of the Surrealist object and the erotics of the commodity more evident than in the products designed in the style colonial. Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann's plush and womb-like grey leather Elephant armchairs (fig. 7), Eugène Printz's coarsely grained palmwood desks, Michel Duffet's python-skin armchairs (marketed by Le Bûcheron) (fig. 8), and his

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**Figure Eight. Michel Duffet. Desk and Armchairs. 1931. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.**
furry hide commodes (fig. 9), Eileen Gray’s shoe-shaped Piroque chaise-longue, and Marcel Coard’s canoe-shaped settees - all on display at the Colonial Exposition and at the Salons des Artistes Décoratifs in the following years - relied on the same fetishistic principle of displacement, as well as the same whimsy and “surprise-effect” as did the Surrealist Natural, Interpreted, Transubstantiated, or Symbolically Functioning Object.39 And with the fashion houses of Chéruit, Dupouy-Magin, Worth, Jeanne Lanvin, at the Palais de la Section Métropolitaine, hats, gloves, shoes, fur coats, jewelry, and corsets - the whole paraphernalia of Freudian fetishistic so-called “penis substitutes” was equally on display. Surrealism itself often flirted with the world of fashion. One finds the same mix of sexual and tribal at work in photographs like Man Ray’s Black and White reproduced in French Vogue in 1926, and his series La Mode au Congo (fig. 10), commissioned for the September, 1937 issue of Harper’s Bazaar along with an article by Paul Eluard to publicize an exhibition of African hats at Charles Ratton’s gallery.30

OPTIC/HAPTIC

Most evocative when apprehended at night or fiddled with in the bottom of one’s pockets, the Surrealist object was better understood - according to Claude Cahun - by manual workers than by intellectuals, something that would have been even more the case, she added, if everything in capitalist society, including Communist propaganda, had not contributed to alienate craftsmen from their manual work.31 More accessible to sense of touch than to that of sight, it was more efficient according to both Dali and Marcel Jean when kept invisible and examined by touch alone.32 The Surrealist object (fig. 11) definitely belongs thus to the currently much debated crisis of ocularcentrism in Western and, more specifically, in French modern thought as discussed namely by Martin Jay and Rosalind Krauss.33 Yet, taking a more pointedly political and economic stance, this shift from the hegemony of the optic regime to the haptic in the Surrealist object can also be situated in the anti-technological climate of the Great Depression. The decade would begin with figures as diverse as Georges Duhamel in Scènes de la vie future (1929),

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Henri Daniel-Rops in *Le monde sans âme* (The Soulless World, 1932), Roger Aron and Albert Dandieu in *Décadence de la nation française* (1931), and Henri Bergson in *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (The Two Sources of Morality and Religion: 1932) dismissing the over-mechanized, over-Taylorized, over-intellectualized twenties in favor of an organic, neo-corporatist, anti-modernist solution to crisis. The Surrealist object together with the *style colonial* thus pertain to a period when even Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, and Amédée Ozenfant - the three nominal champions of the so-called “machine aesthetic” in France - were abandoning their optical distancing from and their regimentation of the utopian cityscape during the twenties and calling instead for a "return to man". Tellingly, this shift was symbolized in their writings and paintings by the ubiquitous presence of the hand (fig. 12). The Surrealist object and the *style colonial* both belong, moreover, to a regime where the reflective (specular) surfaces of highly polished and lacquered don’t any longer have any regional crafts. In these works, both hand made and inspired by nature, we will find respite form the mechanical attitudes and the geometrical schemes of contemporary art. As the Depression persisted in France, this link remained in place throughout the decade including even the years of the Socialist Front Populaire. So that a visitor to the colonial section at the 1937 Paris World Fair could declare that: “Our provinces from the five continents complement, most naturally, the arts and crafts of our metropolitan provinces.”

**Radical chic**

Willy-nilly, the Surrealist and the colonial object landed within the same crowd. If the Surrealists took critical stance vis-à-vis Marx's idealization of use value by producing dysfunctional objects useful only as "machines a penser" (food for thought), their celebration of the erotics of the commodity through these objects ultimately extolled just as much as it critiqued the notion of exchange value. Indeed, if many of the objects shown at Ratton’s was not for sale and were subsequently destroyed, the New Burlington Galleries in Mayfair where the 2nd International Surrealist Exhibition was held in 1936 and the Georges Wildenstein Galerie des Beaux-Arts at 140 Faubourg Saint Honoré where the third such exhibition was held in 1938 were, after all, among the poshest galleries...
around in either London or Paris at the time. Turned into society events on their opening nights, these two exhibitions were reported in magazines like Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar. After years of maintaining a low profile vis-a-vis the avant-garde, moneyed aristocrats and socialites reemerged during the politically conservative Roaring Twenties and even more during the Depression Thirties as arbiters of taste and major patrons of the avant-garde. And it is thus the likes of the Viconte and Vicontesse Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles (fig. 14), the Viconte de Lyrot, English heiress Nancy Cunard, fashion designers Jacques Doucet and Elsa Schiaparelli, milliner Suzanne Talbot, and Art

![Figure Thirteen. Maurice Dufrene. Dining Room, Salon des Artistes Decoratifs. 1935. Contemporary Photograph.](image)

![Figure Fourteen. Man Ray. Marie-Laure Vicontesse de Noailles at Fancy Dress Ball. 1927.](image)
Deco furniture designer Marcel Coard who ended up collecting both Surrealist objects and items in the style colonial.12

THE PARANOIAC OBJECT

I would like to conclude by introducing another concept, aside from fetishism, in relation to the Surrealists’ triangulation of the object: that of paranoia. In the third (1931) issue of Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution, just a few pages after his introduction of reproduction of a face by Picasso. Suddenly the face faded away, he writes, and he became aware of the illusion. When he was shown the image, Dali continues, Breton interpreted it as the face of Sade, reflecting, according to Dali, the former’s personal obsession with the eighteenth century Marquis. What Dali did not mention—although he stipulated that his analysis of the paranoiac image would allow one to retrieve, through symbolic interpretation, all of the ideas that led to it—is the fact that the image under consideration mistaken

![Image](image_url)

**Figure Fifteen. Communication: Visage paranoiaque. LSASDLR, No. 3, 1931.**

the Surrealist object, came Dali’s first attempt at illustrating his so-called “paranoiac-critical method” in Communication: le visage paranoiaque. In the long caption below the image (fig. 15), Dali tells his reader how, following a research during which he had become obsessed by the faces of Picasso’s so-called “negro period,” he chanced upon an image that, seen accidentally tilted vertically in a heap of papers, struck him as the for a face is in fact a colonial postcard of members of an African tribe sitting in front of their hut.

The paranoiac condition as defined namely by the German Emil Kraepelin in his Lectures on Clinical Psychiatry of 1906 was characterized by delirium of interpretation, delusions of grandeur, and sometimes but not always by a persecution complex, violence, and erotomania. In contrast to the escapism and absolute
unreality of dreams, hysteria, and hallucinations, paranoia was based on the actual perception of things out there in the world. It had a phenomenological dimension. Moreover, as opposed to other psychotic dispositions, there was no such thing as a “paranoid constitution” and the paranoid could thus well comply with everyday social conventions. It was its seamless link with the outside world that made paranoia the ideal paradigm for the Surrealists’ search for a more dialectical approach to the world during the 1930s, and this seamlessness that had initially fascinated Dali upon reading Kraepelin and Freud’s The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (the first of his books to be translated into French, in 1927), as he tells us in “L’Ane Pourri” (The Rotten Ass) published in Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution in 1930.42

This aspect was subsequently theorized by a young and then unknown Jacques Lacan in “Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l’expérience” (The Problem of Style and the Psychiatric Conception of the Paranoiac Forms of Experience,) published in the first issue of the Surrealist-affiliated Minotaure in 1933.43 Although the paranoiac’s perceptual distortion shifted the seen to the condition of re-presentation (and thus of “style” for Lacan), both Dali and Lacan insisted that this distortion or delirium in paranoia took place not after perception but at the very moment of perception (thus rejecting the two phase operation described by Sérieux and Capgras in Les folies raisonnantes: le désir d’interprétation of 1909). As opposed to the passivity of dreams and psychic automatism, paranoia was thus active. Finally (and in retrospect most interesting for Lacan), was the fact that paranoia’s spatio-temporal distortions had a systematic quality: they had a syntax, a language so to speak. These distortions were characterized by the fusion, enlargement, ubiquitous multiplication, doubling, and tripling of forms.

There being no such thing as meaningless “chance encounters,” as both we and the Surrealists have learned from Freud, Dali’s superimposition of a colonial tribe and a human face in his attempt at first visualizing paranoia in the year 1931 is certainly revealing. For we may establish in fact a one-to-one correspondence between the system of representation of paranoia elaborated upon by Dali and Lacan circa 1931 and the mechanisms of colonialism as they were exposed at precisely that time at the Colonial Exposition:

-Delirium of interpretation: the phantasmagoria of the Colonial Exposition set in the Bois de Vincennes, which has been planted with palms and date trees to simulate a tropical environment in Paris.
-Delusion of grandeur: “La plus grande France.” “La France de cent millions d’habitants.” In the absence of England, France reigning alone at the 1931 Colonial Exposition as the world’s no. 1 imperial power.
-Persecution complex: The colonies viewed as a shield against Germany, France’s perennial enemy, both as a reservoir of material goods and as a reservoir of workers and warriors in the face of a German nation nearly twice as populated as France.
-Fusion: “La France d’outre-mer.” Algeria celebrated in 1930 on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of its conquest by France as “une province de l’art français” i.e. a mere extension of the body of France.
-Doubling: “La France des deux cotés de la Méditerranée.”
-Ubiquitous multiplication: Pierre Unik’s “La France des cinq parties du monde,” published in the same issue of Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution (p. 28) as both of Dali’s articles, its title pointedly appropriated from Octave Homberg’s pro-colonial book of 1927.

Indeed, in view of the central role played by the colonial in both the French imaginary and the realpolitics during the Great Depression, and in view of the ideological fluidity of objects once unleashed into the commodity circuit of capital, the politics of the Surrealist object were in fact far more ambiguous than any of the Surrealists would have it.

Notes
4. “Certain objects one perceives only in dreams.” André Breton, “Introduction au discours sur le peu de
8. These were listed as follows: I. objects of symbolic functioning; II. the substantiated objects; III. objects to project; IV. wrapped objects; V. machine objects; VI. molded objects.
11. The first International Surrealist Exhibition, that included a number of Surrealist objects, was held in Copenhagen in 1935.
16. The focus being the way in which Minotaure, the Surrealist affiliated review founded in 1933 by Christian Zervos, devoted its entire second issue to a celebration of the Dakar-Djibouti ethnographic mission of 1932, the largest such mission to date, cutting across France's colonies from Western to Eastern Africa. See "The Human Condition of Minotaure" by Jean Jamin (head of the archival department at the Musée de l'Homme) and "Dakar-Djibouti: Minotaure and Marcel Griaule" by Jean Guiart (professor at the Museum of Natural History and director of the ethnological laboratory at the Musée de l'Homme) in Focus on Minotaure, *The Animal-headed Review*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1988).
20. Except for a short piece by Pierre Unik, "La France des cinq parties du monde," describing 1931 France as the most solid bastion of oppression on earth, and a photograph of the show in the third and fourth issues of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, as well as an article, as one would expect, in the Communist daily *L'Humanité*. The counter-exposition was held in the
19th arrondissement in the ex-Soviet pavilion of the 1900 World’s Fair. For more details see Helena Lewis,
The Politics of Surrealism (New York: Paragon House,
1988).
22. See Jean-Louis Paudrat, “The Arrival of Tribal
Objects in the West: From Africa,” Primitivism in 20th
Century Art, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of
23. Title of Claude Cahun’s article in the special issue
of Cahiers d’art (1936).
24. On the market during those years, see Raymond
Moulin, The French Art Market: A Sociological View
25. A time when the colonialists’ bible was a book by
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27. Georges Hardy, Les colonies et la vie française
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30. See Richard Marin, Fashion and Surrealism, exh.
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34. On the crisis of the Machine Aesthetic during the
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35. See, for instance, Le Corbusier, La ville radieuse
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36. See, for instance, Waldemar George, “Constantes
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37. André Véra in response to “Les enquêtes de la revue
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38. Paul Dupays, Voyage autour du monde; pavillons
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39. Breton, in “Introduction au discours de le peu de
réalité.”
40. Indeed in Marx’s Capital, it is the erosion of the “use
value” that leads to exchange value and thus to
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41. Wildenstein was also the owner of the right-wing
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42. Research on French art patronage during this period
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