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Against Cartography: Decoloniality in the Lacanian Account of Transference in Seminar XI

Summary:

This paper considers the decolonial potential in the Lacanian account of transference through revisiting how Lacan accounts for the deceptiveness of the visual field in Seminar XI by historicising the imaginary. Of particular significance is his reference to the anamorphosis in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* to describe the gaze, a reference which brings the early modern rivalry among European empires and their global pursuit of colonies into Lacan's view. In doing so it renders the gaze, and the lack in the subject's desire to see, as the essence of empire. My argument stresses this by showing how Lacan also uses his reading of the painting as an occasion to discuss the Cartesian subject's cartographic quality, wherein geometrical visual domination, which underlies Western visual culture and civilization and their imperial implications, functions through the subsumption of sight into space. My conclusion briefly reflects on what this means for the relationship between Lacan and coloniality.

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to elucidate the decolonial potential underlying Lacan's (1998) account of transference, as it is elaborated in Seminar XI, and to consider its implications for current discussions on Lacan and coloniality. This potential centres on the history that informs Lacan's claim that the transference is liquidated through dismantling imaginary love. Seminar XI explains this particularly through narrating the Western history of painting as the history of the scopic fields the subject has had to construct to sustain its misrecognition. The deceptive nature of the visual field, which the clinic brings out to undo, is thus given a historical basis. Most significant here is Lacan's use of *The Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533) to show how anamorphosis recognises a limit to the subject's scopic reach. The painting's evocation of European intra-imperial rivalry amidst the awareness of various non-Western territories "awaiting" invasion brings colonialism into Lacan's view. But more than that its anamorphic effect reveals the lack in the desire to see in the failure inherent to conquest. Given that this is the outline of treatment that we must practice, the Lacanian clinic is actually anti-imperial in form.

But what makes it particularly decolonial, in the sense of undoing the colonial way of knowing, is how Lacan (1998) alludes to the availability of an alternative scopic field. He doesn't detail its features, but he does speak on a few occasions of a vision that isn't constricted by the imperial attitude. In fact, it immediately follows the liquidation of the transference. Thus, it is the central presumption of my argument that Lacan's account of subjective sight and vision in Seminar XI is rooted in his concern about the imaginary's occlusion of alterity. This is the basis of his claim that the analyst's desire is "a desire to obtain absolute difference" (Lacan, 1998, p. 276). With this we can differentiate the deceptive love in the

transference, wherein the unconscious closes, and “the signification of a limitless love” which is “outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live” (Lacan, 1998, p. 276).

My argument links the clinical, the historical and the decolonial by way of what, to my knowledge, is an overlooked notion in Lacan, namely, “mapping”. This accounts for how the imaginary proceeds geometrically by subsuming sight into space. This territorialises the object by reducing it to its most abstract features to situate it within a two-dimensional plane, thereby producing a remainder outside the subject’s vision. More importantly Lacan (1998) explains this by way of showing how *The Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533), whose historical and cultural relevance he was very much aware of, enacts anamorphosis to usher lack in the subject’s embeddedness in imperial modernity. This attests to the imaginary’s equally imperial quality while also explaining its immanent limits. It expands but not without also intensifying lack. This is the trajectory out of which the analysand speaks, which analysis is designed to arrest. It is with this same notion of mapping that we shall see Lacan describe desire, identification and love in spatial terms throughout Seminar XI.

My argument resonates with various attempts to historicise psychoanalysis (Brennan, 2002; Khanna, 2003; Anderson, Jensen & Keller, 2011) as it shows Lacan’s unique way of situating psychoanalysis as a distinctly Western and imperial construct. Indeed, while Lacan speaks of transference in various occasions throughout his works, Seminar XI is where he situates it most consistently within a very specific view of history. The transference, or more particularly the scopic field that structures it, is given a world-historical account in which the history of painting is rendered as a history of lack-refusal. The notion of mapping, however, produces an implication that takes us beyond merely historicising psychoanalysis. If the subject that maps is the subject that produces an imperial scopic regime then we must make a careful distinction. What is actually Western are the imaginary and symbolic, construed broadly as the civilisation produced by the subject of misrecognition. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, insofar as it is fundamentally concerned about the disruptive possibility of Real lack, is global. So rather than to speak of “exporting”, or modifying Lacan, or believing that psychoanalysis should work anywhere, we should engage with responses to lack constructed in different geo-temporal circumstances.

As we shall see, Lacan’s (1998) concerns about the dominance of the scopic imaginary, and its cartographic logic, resonates with Walter Mignolo’s (2007) call to delink thought and praxis from the pretensions of European universality. It is curious indeed that it is in the discussion of the gaze that Lacan, unfortunately in a merely passing remark, says that the unconscious functions as a “reserve,” that should be “understood in the sense of an Indian reserve within the social network” (p. 68). Lacan mentions this to discuss “the nucleus of speech”, that governs the path of signification that will direct the analysand’s speech (p. 68). This nucleus is the traumatic Real where “the identity of perception is its rule” (p. 68). In other words, if perception governs the social network it is occurring at the forceful exclusion of something else. As we shall see, it is with the excluded Real as the basis of sameness in perception, that Lacan will organise his discussion of the gaze and the dominance presumed in the subject’s scopic regime in historical terms. This to be sure is not enough to harmonize Lacan with decolonial precepts but it does nonetheless make for a fruitful point of departure.

The immediate challenge however is the mounting, though I believe inaccurate, allegations of Lacan’s indifference to colonialism.^[1] My analysis then has the more basic task of showing how he thought about transference by embedding psychoanalysis’ constitution within an imperial outlook. I organise my argument through summarising the clinical and historical resonances of the gaze, from its tychic instantiation in the transference, to how it is produced in separation wherein the impetus for the subject’s scopic reproduction emerges. This culminates in Lacan’s reading of *The Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533) where the subject’s cartographical attitude is discussed. Through mapping we are able to see how the gaze is produced by a subject with a certain historical and imperial trajectory. I shall conclude with some implications for what this means for Lacan’s relationship to colonialism.

Transference and the Tychic Gaze

Lacan (1998) defines transference in Seminar XI as the “enactment of the reality of the unconscious” (p. 149). This refers to the reality of the subject’s identification with the subject supposed to know, that is to say, the figure of knowledge who can enlighten the subject on the enigma of his suffering.

While transference accounts for the subject’s investment in the subject supposed to know, Lacan (1998) is also clear that it isn’t unique to the clinic. Projections occur across a wide range of situations: “Whenever this function [of the subject supposed to know] may be, for the subject, embodied in some individual, whether or not an analyst, the transference, according to the definition I have given you of it, is established” (Lacan, 1998, p. 233). What analysis offers is the possibility of dismantling the transference. The subject’s dependence on the subject supposed to know is recast in the analyst and analysand’s relationship as analysis takes imaginary identification, the field of specular relations between the two as individuals, to “the field of the Other,” as in the lack concealed in the analysand’s very need for the analyst to be the subject supposed to know (p. 268). Lacan calls this process “crossing the plane of identification” (p. 273). This occurs when the analysand, upon realising that the Other lacks and never existed to begin with, no longer identifies with the Other’s desire and eventually relinquishes the identity he constructed around it. Consequently the analyst, having stood for the analysand’s Other throughout the sessions, also loses his aura of knowledge and the analysand’s investment in it. This is the point when the analyst as the subject supposed to know is, to use Lacan’s term “liquidated,” (p. 267) as in emptied of any substance.

Arriving to the reality of the Other entails handling the deception in identification. This requires discerning “the dimension of love” in the pursuit of the Other’s knowledge as the dimension that sustains the analyst’s commitment to the sessions (Lacan, 1998, p. 133). Lacan calls love the “transference effect” for this reason, as the bond formed in the clinical dyad conjures the analysand’s unconscious relational projections, projections that will eventually colour his attachment towards the analyst (p. 253). This is what Lacan means when he says that “the unconscious may operate in the direction of the deception” (p. 37). For the analysand’s transferential expectations emerge in light of the lack he cannot confront: “In persuading the other that he has that which may complement us, we assure ourselves of being able to continue to misunderstand precisely what we lack” (p. 133). In conjuring that which resists the reality of the Other, the deceptive love in the transference conditions the possibility for the transference’s eventual liquidation. For it is in “establishing itself in, and even by, a certain lie, that we see set up the dimension of truth” (p. 138).

The essential lack in the deceptive love also explains the fragility of the transferential relationship. Lacan stresses its generally suspicious undertones given that the analyst is expected to conform to the analysand’s desire. For while the analyst’s knowledge is sought, it is not always the case that it is believed immediately at the outset: “Experience shows us that when the subject enters analysis, he is far from giving the analyst this place” (Lacan, 1998, p. 233). Thus, the subject may also doubt the truth of what he shares for the analyst’s approval: what “most limits the confidence of the patient ... is the threat that the psychoanalyst may be deceived by him” (p. 233). The analyst then must tread a fine line between encouraging the analysand to speak while also being mindful of the lie that must happen for the transference. In this, the analyst’s desire is crucial: “In so far as the analyst is supposed to know, he is also supposed to set out in search of unconscious desire” (p. 235). In other words, insofar as unconscious desire emerges in the transference, the analyst too must work from within the deception.

It is in this sense, of the analyst’s embeddedness in the transference, that “the presence of the analyst is itself a manifestation of the unconscious” (Lacan, 1998, p. 125). The direction of the analysand’s speech will depend on the nature of his demands on the analyst and the extent to which they are or are not “successful” in sustaining that deception. This will produce the speech effects the analysis will work with while also attesting to the unconscious’ fundamentally elusive quality. For being situated in the mire of the transferential relationship means that the unconscious will be encountered not as a revelation but as a tendency towards closure, “the means by which the communication of the unconscious is interrupted, by which the unconscious closes up again” (p. 130). It is “syncopated” and off-beat, functioning like a slip

would, as we only meet it when something of the ignorance in the transferenceal deception is disturbed (p. 143). In another instance, Lacan characterises it as a “temporal pulsation” (p. 125). Roberto Harari (2004) explains that while the pulsation attests to the gap in the chain of signification, he prefers the Spanish translation of the French *beance* for gap as *hiancia* meaning hiatus. This stresses that the gap is a break in the sequence of signification, as in a pause in the established flow of perception. This pause disturbs the moment of concluding by inserting the Real into the transferenceal deception.

The gap as hiatus more importantly accounts for the traumatic quality of the unconscious. It attests to the impact of a preceding shock event that was repressed, and consequently propelled, by the analysand’s search for completion, couched as it often is in terms of love and knowledge. This search accounts for the “closing” in the pulsation, as he will only encounter the shock of the event indirectly from thereon in the slippages, as in the opening, of his speech. Thus, Lacan (1998) describes how the unconscious disrupts the transferenceal deception as a “missed encounter” (p. 55). It can only be known in the trail of signification, that is, in light of the moment of closure that passed. To stress how subjectivity is formed in this pulsation of opening and closure, Lacan distinguishes two types of subjective causes respectively in *tuche* and *automaton*. As cause, *tuche* is the gap that triggers the Real. It is the traumatic excess, that which does not belong, in the *automaton*, the subject’s subsequent play of signification wherein “meaning” is produced.

In the hiatus where *tuche* is known, where meaning slips into non-meaning, something happens to the analysand’s relationship to the cause of his suffering. Where before he was burdened by the inability to understand what ails him, he now stumbles into the Real cause of this burden, the traumatic impossibility of meaning that moves his speech that he must be accountable to. Thus, *tuche* is “essential” in “rectifying what is the duty of the analyst in the interpretation of the transference” (Lacan, 1998, p. 63). Interpretation – the analyst’s questions and interventions in the sessions – is to be aimed at the gap rather than the closure of the transference, as in the *tychic* kernel of difference in the analysand’s repetition of his familiar memories and thought patterns where the subject hides. This is the difference that will dismantle the deception in the transference. As hiatus, the unconscious is not about “restoring” a forgotten history, but producing a change in subject-position through liquidating the deception which sealed the subject’s trauma.

When we ask how the *tuche* is able to do this, Lacan (1998) points to how the dissolution of the transference occurs not to simply disrupt the analysand’s investment in the subject-supposed-to-know, it takes the deception inherent to the visual field along with it. *Tuche* occurs through disrupting the subject’s imaginary, namely, by forcing a split between the eye and the gaze, the latter being the point of lack or “stain” in the subject’s scopic field. An analogy can be drawn here. Where the eye sustains the *automaton*, in the stabilisation of meaning reproduced in the scopic field, the stain is where “the *tychic* point in the scopic function is found” (Lacan, 1998, p. 77). Lacan calls for the clinic to be set up for the transference to enact this split. Just as the analyst stands for the subject’s unconscious, so too is he to assume the position of the gaze, that is to say, the lack in the analysand’s imaginary and therefore the opening of the unconscious: “In the structure of the analytic setting, when the analyst is placed behind the analysand who is lying on the couch, the analyst is abstracted from the subject’s field of vision and therefore can become the gaze or blind spot for the analysand” (Samuels, 1995, p. 184). This way, the agreeability between analyst and analysand as two egos is attenuated, with the gap between them enabling the eventuality of lack to surface in the analysand’s speech.

The Gaze

One can think of the split between the eye and the gaze as a disruption against the idea of pure perception, the assumption that the subject has direct access to the field of vision before him. Thus, the gaze is *tychic* for how it also alters the viewer’s visual field through decentering his perspective. It is noteworthy, however, that Lacan (1998) describes this through an extra-clinical example in which he recalls a brief visit, set some forty years before the seminar, to a fishing village in Brittany. It was narrated very much as an escape of sorts. He

speaks of being a young intellectual wanting to get away to the countryside to do something more physical, when Petit-Jean, a fisherman, pointed to a small glittering can floating in the waves to say “You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn’t see you!” (Lacan, 1998, p. 95). This moment disrupts Lacan’s view of his trip where, from surveying the landscape to suit his getaway narrative, he suddenly stands out as the ‘stain,’ the ejected excess, in the situation. His imaginary seamlessness with the village is consequently erased, taking his ego with it: “The picture is certainly in my eye. But I am not in the picture” (p. 96).

In the anecdote, Lacan was not strolling innocently in the country. He was in search for “something different” in a place chosen specifically for its pre-industrial state (Lacan, 1998, p. 95). In doing so he imposed his perspective on “those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature” (p. 96). The split between the eye and the gaze disrupts this narrative to also disrupt his sense of place. It is important to note where this happened. The split is situated neither in Petit-Jean’s vision nor the glimmering tin can. The split is tychic where it surfaces in the threshold of the visual field. The deceptive difference constructed by Lacan’s narrative is overturned for the real difference that erases it altogether. With this, the deceptive nature of the scopic field is also revealed. If the subject does not perceive the world directly, it is because his perception is constituted in the image of his lack. The split erases the mastery the subject assumes through the scopic field he constructs. Consequently, we can also see how the gaze emerges through the *tuche* of the analysand’s speech. The analysand’s subjectivity, as a lacking being, appears where he realises the deception in the reciprocity he expected from the analyst. The gap between where they are in the clinic anticipates the subject when the deception falls.

The gaze then is the point of lack that compels the constitution of the scopic field. It is the cause of the world the subject envisions through he could address the Other’s desire, “of the fact that there is already in the world something that looks before there is a view for it to see” (Lacan, 1998, p. 273). But it is a “cause” in the more fundamental sense for revealing how the subject is constituted in misrecognition, that is to say, the lack for which the imaginary compensates. Lacan therefore defines the gaze as “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (p. 74). Subjectivity is objectified (is made into “the seen”) when the imaginary is upheld as a response to the desire of the Other (the given-to-be-seen’s “recipient”, as it were). This explains why Lacan likens perception to a mediating screen.^[2] As screen, the visual field stabilises the fiction that links the subject with the Other. But because this link is premised on desire it must necessarily remain opaque. The screen conjures the self and other while sustaining the separation between them. With the screen, the dynamic between subject and other, is constitutively visual, and this is what we shall now discuss.

Separation

We know the signifier grants the subject sense at the price of the nonsense that is the desire of the Other, the nonsense that constitutes the unconscious. Sense in other words enables the subject to regard the desire of the Other as a separate entity it can try to decipher. But sense was needed to begin with due to the alienation at the crossroads of an ontological “either-or” between meaning and being (Lacan, 1998, p. 210). This is the prelude to subjectivity, as it is a false choice that ‘condemns’ the subject to a constitutive loss. To choose meaning is to choose failure as the subject survives only to re-encounter the lack it was trying to overcome. The subject chooses being, on the other hand, to disappear altogether. Separation is in many ways the compromise with this impasse but with a “twist” (p. 213). The subject chooses meaning and delays its erasure through *the objet petit a*. This is a persistent piece of the Real that resists meaning which will be screened as the gap that is symbolised as the enigma of the Other’s desire, the desire the subject will misrecognise as his own and aim to fulfil. Thus with “the function of the objet a, the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation” (p. 258).

Separation therefore “objectifies” by rendering ontological lack into objectal loss. Alienation is bifurcated to sustain a differentiated subject with an object to “discover,” for a “self” that finds resolution via the Other.

Lacan (1998) therefore qualifies that the unconscious should be more accurately understood as “a sort of desire *on the part of the Other*,” mediated through the object (p. 115). The priority of the Other’s desire explains why for the subject “there is already in the world something that looks before there is a view for it to see,” that is to say, why the imaginary is constitutively for the Other (p. 273). Consequently, “The objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze” as both are the Real “anchors” of the subject’s reality (p. 105). Both are situated in the irrevocable lack around which the subject sustains its objectal intrigue. Lacan (1998) describes separation as a means “to dress oneself” (p. 214) with for this reason, as the separated subject’s defence is intricately bound to what it can offer to the Other (p. 214). Separation is not a defence that withdraws from the Real. It is a defence through the gap in the Real that has to be maintained, in which the subject must constantly produce an object that addresses the Other’s lack.

Lacan describes how this occurs at the price of mutilation. The ejection of the Real is self-mutilation because separation requires that the subject transposes its loss onto the other. The encounter with this Real also mutilates where the subject must reproduce this loss in order to then retrieve it from the Other. Just as the separated subject is necessarily dissatisfied, so too must the Other be sustained through constantly sacrificing a piece of the Real: “The objet a is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself; has separated itself off as organ” (Lacan, 1998, p. 103). Consequently, this enables us to see the partial drives’ distinct trajectory. Mutilation is why the subject is able to identify a piece of itself in the other as a discovery of a prior loss. This in turn accounts for how the subject’s embodiment is constituted in the fantasy of consuming another body in order to address the loss. Herein lies the violence inherent to lack-refusal. It leaves “our fundamental being,” as Maire Jaanus (1995) describes it “ever dispersed into parts,” as “drive becomes a fetishistic search for what was once ourselves but is now an extra-bodily, alienated otherness that can ‘appear’ almost anywhere, or in anyone or anything” (p. 125).

The subject produces the objet a to refuse the nothingness of alienation. The desire produced therein gives him a semblance of agency. But that this is fantasized as a recovery of a loss means that separation also holds the subject captive to the fantasy object. Thus, the subject “survives” alienation only insofar as it is also objectified and moved by the Other’s lack. Given that the lacking subject is so “dissolved” into the Other, it is important that his survival is “screened.” This indeed is why Lacan (1998) defines consciousness as the “illusion of seeing itself seeing itself” (p. 82). For it is not enough that the subject merely constructs a world in the image of his lack. It is equally crucial that the lack is concealed through this very capacity to see, a witnessing it transposes to the Other: “it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space” (p. 144). Thus, the scopic drive is singled out among all the partial drives for its constitutive significance, namely how the separated subject can only sustain as fantasy: “The subject is strictly speaking determined by the very separation that determines the break of the *a*, that is to say, the fascinatory element introduced by the gaze” (p. 118). The subject is displaced into the object, and thereby belongs to the Other, for as long as its salience depends on being the object of the Other’s gaze. In the field of the visible, “everything is a trap” (p. 93).

Lacan’s disparaging comments about the eye – as voracious, desperate and being endowed with a fatal function – is to be understood in this light, as corresponding to the subject’s ‘death’ as it survives at the price of being the Other’s object.^[3] Thus, the defence of its identity necessitates continuously feeding the eye with pictures. Painting is Lacan’s paradigmatic example this process as it turns spectator into subject by rendering the *objet petit a* into a form which could be “upheld”, thereby crystallising the desire to see. Given that the desire to see is enabled only by the represented object insofar as it lacks, in light of the supposedly “real” thing it is meant to mimic, painting stabilises the lacking object as a lure of presence and absence. It feeds the eye with a specular object in a way that produces the Real to reinforce the subject’s separation from it. In sustaining loss as lure – providing a form with which it could be regulated – the picture enables “the institution of the subject in the visible” as the subject is situated in a space of lack without being erased (Lacan, 1998, p. 106). Lacan speaks of how the painter divides surfaces through “lines of forces” which produces the space of absence that feeds the desire to see (p. 108). The eye’s “power to separate” is crystallised in painting (p. 115).

The Ambassadors

Lacan (1998) turns to painting for how the scopic-centred subject, so constituted by the Other's desire, must unconsciously include the other's lack in his vision. The notion of taming the gaze is to be understood in this sense, for how the Other is produced in light of the subject's desire at a given time. Consequently, the history of painting reveals the vicissitudes of the gaze's location, once in the divine, then to the communal, and now in the contemporary artist. Holbein's (1533) *The Ambassadors*, however, will be singled out for being situated at a significant point of this development. It exemplifies how painting tames the gaze to produce lack via a visual field. But in doing so it will also question the truth of vision and art itself. It does so through a lure: the fascination of the picture is paired with the 'death' in the desire to see. The six-by-six portrait is of two men representing the landowning class and the clergy respectively, posing beside a collection of artefacts – two globes, a lute, four sundials and a carpet among other things – that mark the high point of the Renaissance. What Lacan points out lurking amidst the painting's realistic reproduction of things is the ominous skull that is painted at the bottom centre where the two men stand. The heights of civilisation and culture are grounded by the uncanny presence of the skull.

The skull is positioned obliquely such that it would not be visible if one were to look straight at the painting. In fact, there is no direct view. In order to see the skull, the viewer has to move to the side of the canvas, which precludes any possibility seeing the painting's two figures directly. *The Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533) allure is that the viewer will constantly move across the canvas trying to capture a total view. However, upon arriving to this point there is also no longer a painting to look at. What the viewer gets instead is a split. On one hand, there is the full canvas ostensibly waiting for the viewer's eye. On the other, the painting does not correspond to the space in which it is situated as the viewer must continue to reposition himself in order to see, during which it will encounter the skull and be reminded of death. This is quintessential anamorphosis: an image is presented as a distortion that can only be corrected when viewed from a different viewpoint.

It is important to note that the skull is not the gaze. The gaze is the moment which reveals the failure of perception. It emerges where the viewer is left dissatisfied as his desire to see undulates between frustration and intrigue. This is the point at which "desire is caught, fixed in the picture" and the subject – the artist or viewer in this example – is "urged to put something into operation" in order to continue desiring for the gaze (Lacan, 1998, p. 92-93). The tychic quality of this encounter – wherein the otherness in vision is felt – can only be experienced as a missed encounter as it is realised only after perspective is deemed impossible. This failure furthermore is tychic as the of death, the subject's erasure, that compels separation. It is in the trauma of lack in the visual field – when the subject is unable to objectify himself – that he proceeds "to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar (trait) in the illusion of the consciousness of seeing oneself see oneself, in which the gaze is elided" (Lacan, 1998, p. 83). With *The Ambassadors*, Lacan (1998) is able to describe how "the need to disappear" inherent to the unconscious, structures the subject's emergence where the gaze is tamed (p. 43).

The mark of death bears a historical point. Lacan draws from Jurgis Baltrušaitis's (1977) history of anamorphosis to regard *The Ambassadors* as a prime testament of Vanitas, a popular European Christian genre of art in the 16th century, in which skulls are painted alongside the artefacts of scientific progress at the time to remind the viewer of the transitoriness of life. Its popularity emerged at a high point of polemics regarding the 'truth' of vision in the wake of the scientific revolution. The difference between appearance and reality became a concern as modern technology expands to afford the assumption, or hubris according to its religious detractors, that human vision now has unprecedented access into being. The Ambassador's anamorphic distortion of 'straightforward' vision criticises this assumption with the looming figure of the skull insisting on the weight of mortality against European modernity's emergent worldliness.

Against the Cartographic Subject

Lacan references this debate throughout Seminar XI for the subject's historicity. If the subject is shaped out of the ever-intensifying desire to tame the gaze, it is because this desire responded to a historical event, namely the point when the world transformed beyond recognition. The subject consequently must construct the screen through which it could identify with something of the external world at a time when all hitherto cosmological paths of identification had waned in salience amidst the rise of the modern scientific worldview. This is what separates the human sciences, as opposed to primitive and religious sciences, in how it is moved by a "*hermeneutic demand*," which "seeks the ever new and the never exhausted signification" in lieu of medieval metaphysics (Lacan, 1998, p. 7-8). Thus, if anamorphosis could point out the inherent defect in vision it could only do so because a fragmenting world. This informs *The Ambassadors* key motif. It showcases the key scientific artefacts of the time to mark "a mounting shift away from the divinity of religion as the predominant *episteme* and towards the rationality of scientific inquiry and humanism" (Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2015, p. 3).

But what is important to note is the cartographic features of the objects as *The Ambassadors* showcases two globes placed amidst Eastern, Southern and Western artefacts. Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton (2005) find it notable that Brazil (Brasilici R.) stands out in the globe at the bottom shelf for the date of the painting coincides with key treaties which saw Spain and Portugal delineate their respective spheres of influence, in a conflict that stretched all the way to the Moluccas Islands in present-day Indonesia. They stress how this was undoubtedly at the front and centre of Holbein's attention, given how the painting was commissioned by Jean de Dinteville, France's ambassador to England, at a time when France had its own imperial competition with Portugal in Africa. Thus, it is notable that AFRICA and names of various African territories including Senega (Senegal), Barbaria (present day Algeria) and Ethiopia are also featured on the globe. The Turkish rug, in turn, marks the rivalry between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires: "The presence of this 'Eastern' commodity indicates that the numerous changes taking place in Europe in this period were often undergirded by processes emanating from non-European sources" (Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2015, p. 3-4). This tension is symbolised by the broken string on the Mediterranean lute. The upper shelf, meanwhile, has a celestial globe alongside key scientific instruments, indicating a new spatio-temporal sensibility to match the emergent international world: "The objects on the upper shelf figure a vigorously exploratory and expansionist version of the pursuit of knowledge (astronomy, calendars and calculations of time and space were vital components of navigation and travel)" (Jardine & Brotton, 2005, p. 53).

With the painting's rich geographical detail, Tom Conley (2013) suggests that Lacan was not simply interested in the formal methodical use of anamorphosis: "Also evoked are the same artists' emblems, historiated alphabets and marginalia in cartographical images" (p. 50). One way to understand this is the fact that a world was being mapped, a globe was literally being produced, was very much a part of the sciences Lacan spoke of. Conversely, if *The Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533) demonstrates how the gaze constitutes the failure at the heart of the desire to see, the failure is to be confronted in the visualisation of this 'world' itself. But we can also find something more integral at work, for Lacan also refers to *The Ambassadors* to explain how mapping is inherent to subjectivity. Indeed, it is around his presentation of Holbein that he speaks of the "empire of misrecognition" wherein the gaze – "its track, its thread" – could be traced "at every stage of the constitution of the world, in the scopic field" (Lacan, 1998, p. 74). Here Lacan would bring the picture together with the map to explain what the subject actually does: "It is obviously not for nothing that we have referred to as picture the function in which the subject has to map himself as such" (p. 100).

This definition is instructive for differentiating between the picture and the map. It specifies that the picture is what the subject produces for his more prior need to map. In other words, if the picture allows the subject to maintain his separation from the Other, it is in order to map. But if separation already enables the subject to desire the Other, what does mapping do? This brings us to the subject's intrinsically territorial quality as Lacan characterises mapping as "the optical structuring of space" (Lacan, 1998, p. 93). Where the screen establishes the gap between the subject and Other, mapping is how the basic co-ordinates of the screen are

laid out. Where the screen presents the scenes of desire, mapping outlines the mental framing of the screen. With mapping we are taken to the necessary metaphysical precondition for separation as it presumes the ability to reduce objects to their most abstract features. It is with this notion of “mapping” that Lacan describes the subject’s imperial quality. It does not ‘find’ or name already-existing objects. It ‘removes’ them from vision to be apprehended in thought. It inserts lack into vision.

For a sense of why mapping removes sight from space we should consider the geometral foundation of the Cartesian cogito. Lacan takes this to express not only a subjectivity that is apprehended purely in thought, but one that is also essentially lacking, given that it can only know itself by doubting every claim it knows. Consequently, vision too is subjected through the very same abstractive processes demanded for certainty as the visual field is constituted by lines that are drawn across separate points to see the world in terms of geometrical units. This is notable for its eventually reductive quality, as it “always, in the end, amounts to situating two points on a single thread” (Lacan, 1998, p. 93). The key implication here is that in doing so the cogito itself is defined in effect as a geometric event. For Lacan the Cartesian subject is “itself a sort of geometral point, a point of perspective” (p. 86). Consequently, it can only ‘be,’ that is to say acquire a form, insofar as it can extend into a space construed through the rigour of its methodical doubt. Thus, geometral vision makes sight secondary. It is only “vision in so far as it is situated in a space that is not in its essence the visual” (p. 94). All painting, in fact all forms of visualisation, can be traced to this basic distinction.

Far from harmonising the subject, the gap between sight and space produces an antagonistic relationship between subject and world. Lacan (1998) describes how the Cartesian subject’s geometric outlook sets it on a path of annihilation. For as long as the cogito is defined by the refusal of immediate knowledge in search of certainty, it is constantly doubting and rendering everything it encounters into lack: “The mode of my presence in the world is the subject in so far as by reducing itself solely to this certainty of being a subject, it becomes active annihilation” (p. 81). And for as long as this is the basis of the Cartesian scopic field, visualisation also presumes a clearing of already-existing phenomenon. This resonates with what Lacan describes the bellicose nature of scopic production. For while it sutures the subject by placing him in an image he could encounter, the process is a necessarily antagonistic one. Lacan is categorical about this: “All action represented in a picture appears to us as a battle scene, that is to say, as something theatrical necessarily created for the gesture” (p. 115). He describes that the painter’s gestures “have the value of weapons” because how a soldier is perceived by its threat will determine the course of a battle (Lacan, 1998, p. 117). Lacan even references actual wars to make this point. Even when dance or opera are mentioned as examples of visualisation qua masquerades, it is to indicate their essentially confrontational form.

It is through the gaze that Lacan (1998) could speak of the “taming, civilizing and fascinating power of the function of the picture” (p. 116). And it is through the *Ambassadors* (Holbein, 1533), which Lacan regards precisely as a statement of civilisation, that Lacan could describe how anamorphosis reveals the lack in the construction of scopic fields. Thus, the anamorphosis in *The Ambassadors* is not simply a Real intervention against the imaginary or the rules of perspective, but more importantly a testament of mapping, how the subject can only imagine an identity where he imposes a space through which it can see itself see itself. Conversely, *The Ambassadors* achieves its anamorphic effect by displacing its viewer. The secret of the picture – the emptiness of desire – “is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies” (Lacan, 1998, p. 92). By that point the point-by-point geometral arrangement of the space, where the painting and the viewer were expected meet as a symmetrical encounter, is upset. If *The Ambassadors* heralds a world of imperial triumphs, the gaze materialises against this to force an opening for lack.

Towards a Decolonial Lacan

If the liquidation of the transference depends on undoing the deception inherent to the visual field, the very field of the analysand’s projections upon the analysand, then the possibility of the subject-supposed-to-

know's liquidation cannot be accounted for without the geo-historical politics presumed in Lacan's (1998) critique of Cartesian vision. We may actually have to contend with the possibility of a similarly anti-colonial potential in the analyst's desire, especially as the transference requires his acceptance, however provisionally, of the analyst's projections. This is all the more crucial given that the analyst's involvement where the subject encounters his lack, where the former's aura of authority gives way: "It is from this idealization that the analyst has to fail in order to be the support of the separating a" (p. 273). Lacan stresses that "what is there, behind the love known as transference, is the affirmation of the link between the desire of the analyst and the desire of the patient" (p. 254). We are now in a better position to appreciate the historical theatre that shapes this link.

My assertion however must contend with how, to my limited knowledge at least, none of Lacan's twenty-eight seminars, which spanned across twenty-three years from 1953-1980, reference the wars of decolonisation that occurred across the Francophone world in the same period. This is harder to overlook given how vocal his contemporaries were on this score. Rightly or wrongly, one will not find Lacan "invested" in a decolonial cause in the way that Sartre (2005) was for the Cuban Revolution and Algerian Independence, Kristeva (1977) for the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Foucault for the Iranian Revolution or to a lesser extent Deleuze (1998) and Palestine.^[4] The French psy-sciences of his time, whom Lacan constantly addressed, were also not removed from the colonial question. Lacan knew Francesc Tousquelles and Felix Guattari, key figures who brought decolonial politics into French psychiatry, personally.^[5] The implication here could be quite unsettling. Being so steeped in this climate means that the absence of anti-colonial politics in Lacan's work could have only been a deliberate choice to remain silent.

But my analysis should also show that Lacan's absence from the anti-colonial activism of his time should not be taken to mean that he was not thinking of a different imperial challenge. Seminar XI ends with him anticipating the "planetaryization of desire" in an emergent world of media not unlike the late capitalist one we inhabit today, "whose ever-encroaching character is no less suggestive, for, by so many spectacles, so many phantasies" (Lacan, 1998, p. 274). Lacan foresaw how the civilising power in the history of painting will expand into a global-technological hegemony. Thus, when Lacan (1998) says that "it is not, after all, for nothing, that analysis is not carried face to face" (p. 78) he is not referring simply to how the clinic should anticipate the gaze in the gap within the transference, he is also positioning the clinic in the historical development, and impending future, of Cartesian dominance.

We could read this as Lacan preparing analysts for the inevitability of globalization. Indeed, this would be in line with current assumptions. Ilan Kapoor (2018), for example, believes "the Western symbolic order has become the de facto symbolic order" (p. xxviii). According to Kapoor, Lacan's usefulness in evaluating Western capital should be similarly globalised "because of the history of globalisation/colonialism, which has ended up imposing a Western(ised), and increasingly capitalistic, symbolic order" (p. xxviii). But the notion of mapping, in which space colonises sight, enables us to think beyond the inevitability of Cartesian vision. For Lacan (1998) also stresses that mapping does not occur without at the same time excluding an entire sphere of sight: "The geometrical dimension of vision does not exhaust, therefore, far from it, what the field of vision as such offers us as the original subjectifying relation" (p. 87). What this offering might be, he does not explain. Lacan prefers to emphasise its ambiguity. He describes the gaze as "a play of light and opacity" likening it to the "ambiguity of the jewel" (p. 96). He also speaks of a "depth of field" – "a field of vision with all its ambiguity and variability" – that the geometrical relation obscures (p. 96).

We may have a better sense of the outside Lacan (1998) means by contrasting it with what is "beyond the enclosure" (p. 131). Lacan refers to the former to describe the idealist problematic, where the subject who is trapped within the confines of geometrical vision is left to question if anything real exists beyond representation. The Kantian division between noumenal and phenomenal realms is symptomatic of the enclosed subject who cannot disassociate thought from perception. The "outside," on the other hand, refers to the extimacy outside the screen, the familiar lack to which the subject topologically returns once his screen fails. This is the outside signalled by the gaze's intervention, "which prevents me, at each point, from being a screen" (p. 96). This is also what Lacan concludes by describing as the realm "outside the limits of

the law” where a similarly “limitless love” may emerge (p. 276). Put in cartographical terms, it is love where sight and light are no longer spatialised.

What this means is that rather than to think of Western modernity as an inevitable global fate, Lacan points to ambiguity on which this conviction rests, for possible articulations of attachments and dare one say “belonging” that are not enveloped by rationalised geometrical relations. The Western symbolic order then, however far-reaching it may appear is only ever just one dimension of history that is unfolding. If globalization is not the full story, Lacanians should position themselves best where they can listen to the alterity therein. It so happens that this is precisely the ethical questions raised in the globalising clinic. The psychosciences are taking shape in the former colonies to take the Western clinic’s historical and biopolitical imprints with it. Lacanian psychoanalysis will be sure to trail this development and so should be careful to contribute further to the closure of symbolic and subjective possibilities that has already occurred along the way. Harry Yi Jui Wu and Wen-Ji wang’s (2016) claim that to understand the growth of the psy-sciences in the non-West is to consider “cross-cultural interactions of dissimilar knowledge systems and the complexities of colonialism and globalisation during the process” (p. 110). I believe the notion of mapping presented is useful to critique the bifurcation between space and perspective that is already happening as a result.

This may be an occasion to wonder if there is some wisdom after all to Lacan’s (2016) claim that the Japanese are unanalysable. Dany Nobus (2019) recently presented it as an example of how not to think of psychoanalysis’ universality. But to this one can also ask what is behind the desire for their analysability? From which discourse then are we to bring Japan into speech and ‘knowledge?’ A truly non-Eurocentric Lacan is waiting to be mainstreamed but meanwhile we could begin with not treating ‘the rest of the world’ as if a mirror. [6]

With this in mind, temporal and historical “interactions,” “ambiguities” and “crossings” may serve, however provisionally, more fruitful signifiers than the charged, and now clearly limited, polarities of east and west, colonial and decolonial, and black and white. It is not the ‘truth’ of these binaries that is the problem but how they reduce the possibilities of subjectivity to the necessary mastery of an object. We are after all, writing upon the failure of the third world project, in the ruins of the Bandung conference, the Tricontinental and the rise of China as a rival hegemon. If the decolonial spirit is to survive an ever more complexifying world, it must begin by undoing the limits of the modern scopic regime.

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Notes:

[1] Recent texts on Lacan and race (George & Hook, 2022) generally concur that while Lacan was careful enough not to internalise Freud's Eurocentrism, he does not provide the sufficient conceptual relevance for an anti-colonial politics. Wayne Wapeemukwa (2022) makes this the basis to claim that "Neither Lacan nor Freud can be counted as allies in decolonization" (p. 95). Similarly, David S. Marriott (2021) makes the inaccurate claim that "nowhere does Lacan ever indicate that he is speaking to black people" (p. 1). In Seminar XVII Lacan (2007) specifically mentions his Togolese analysands to critique how analytic training subsumes their identity "to the good old rule of Oedipus" in a moment where Lacan clearly indicates that the Oedipus complex is a Western construct (p. 92). A history of Lacan's engagement with the African analysts, analysands and trainees in France at the time remains to be written.

[2] "The screen here is the locus of mediation" (Lacan, 1998, p. 107).

[3] See pages 115 – 116 of Lacan, 1998 for this discussion.

[4] Foucault's translated writings on the Iranian Revolution are compiled in Afary & Anderson (2010).

[5] As explained by Robcis (2020) Lacan, Guattari and Tosquelle's work and insights were influential in the critical politicisation of psychiatry at the Saint Alban hospital.

[6] Some notable attempts to extend Lacan's concepts beyond Europe include Pandolfo for Morocco (2019), Ahmad Fuad for the Malay Archipelago (2020) and GAREFP (2014) for the French West Indies.

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