
Psychoanalysis, Politics, Oppression and Resistance

Lacanian Perspectives

Edited by Chris Vanderwees
and Kristen Hennessy

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Can We Decolonize Lacan? Indigenous Origins of the Split Subject

Clint Burnham

What does it mean to ask if we can decolonize Lacan? Is this to argue we should think about psychoanalysis in the context of decolonial thought, or does it mean to search through the Lacanian archive and root out either problematic utterances *or* points of possible conjunction? Does it mean to ask if we *ought* to decolonize Lacan, or does it mean to ask if it is possible to decolonize Lacan? Does it mean to ask who is the “we” in the sentence – clinicians or theorists, colonized peoples or settlers? Perhaps asking “can we decolonize Lacan” means not so much providing an *answer* but, in a reflexive or “meta” fashion, speculating on what it means to ask that question, why we are asking it now, and how or whether decolonizing Lacan also means Lacanizing or psychoanalyzing the decolonial struggle. In what follows, I propose that decolonizing Lacan entails, first, exploring how to think psychoanalytically about the geospatial (from Freud’s narcissism of small differences to Said’s “travelling theory”) in terms of the “decolonial turn” that draws on Fanon’s theoretical readings as well as Enrique Dussell and Walter Dignolo’s critiques of modernity. How, for instance, are we to *read* Lacan in relation to Algeria, or to bring Freud’s notion of the neighbor to bear on Indigenous or Black feminist thought? To answer this requires a spatial logic that abjures the holistic or substantial for a *Spaltung* or splitting of the subject, which theory, in Lacan, both derives from Kwakwakā’wakw or Pacific Northwest Coast masks and traditions, and in turn, via such formalizations as the L-schema, suggests a scaling up and back to contemporary Indigenous theorizations as found in the Haida-Québécois artist Raymond Boisjoly.

Put in a more concise way, this chapter reads Lacan in terms of some of the spatial questions that have been developed in decolonial theory, moving from spatiality thought at a geopolitical level down to that of the subject (and back again). Anne Anlin Cheng argued in 2000 that the politics of race has always spoken in the language of psychoanalysis, pointing out that “*intrasubjectivity exists as a form of intersubjectivity and that intersubjectivity often speaks in the voice of intrasubjectivity*” (28). So, in exploring some global questions of decolonizing psychoanalysis, I mean *global* in two senses: both the spatial geographies of Lacanian and decolonial theory, and the master

DOI: 10.4324/9781003212072-4

signifiers or concepts of those theories, how they can be read together. For just as we can think of *geographies of decolonization*, as a shift away from the historical narrative of post–World War II or post–Cold War decolonial struggles, so too we can think of the *geographies* of Lacanian thought but also the spatial dimensions of that thought itself, such as when Derrida (1998), in his contribution to *Psychoanalysis and Race*, engages in a “geops psychoanalysis” by way of critiquing the IPA’s Euro–provincialism. This is what Ranjana Khanna (2003), commenting on Derrida but drawing on Heidegger and Spivak, calls “worlding psychoanalysis,” or determining, through a critical reading practice, not only how psychoanalysis comes into being with others as its underside, “primitive beings against which the modern European self, in need of psychoanalysis, was situated,” but also the conundrum that such a provincialization or parochialism of European psychoanalysis (she also draws on Dipesh Chakrabarty) “does not explain adequately why [psychoanalysis] has persisted, or indeed why it was used by theorists of decolonization” (2–3, 100). These geographies of psychoanalysis mean that when we turn to the trajectories and genealogies of Lacanian concepts – here, the split subject – we find what Cedric Robinson (1993, 86) has called “radical anticipations” of Lacan among *les damnées* which in turn incite a rethinking of the spatial.

Given the topic of this chapter – the split subject, the mask, and the decolonial – it would be remiss not to discuss Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. I will restrict myself to the question of a split, as it were, in the reception of *BSWM* at two historical junctures: first, the post–structuralist hegemony of the 1980s and 1990s (epitomized in the discussions by Bhabha [1986, 1996], Gates [1991], Robinson [1993], Parry [1987], and Hall [1996]); and second, the decolonial debates of the 2010s (Zabala [2012], Dabashi [2013/2016], Mignolo [2013], Žižek [2016], Beshara [2018]). In that first moment, we very much see a willingness, on the part of Bhabha and Hall in particular, to read Fanon through a Lacanian lens (albeit not “our Lacan,” as I said to Gautam Basu Thakur in an email – not the Lacan that has been periodized into early [Imaginary], middle [Symbolic] and late [Real] Lacan, but the Lacan of the 1980s reception, of the mirror stage and the look). For this reading, Bhabha especially (and his 1986 introduction to the Pluto edition of *BSWM* in particular) is excoriated by Robinson, Parry, and Gates, because of his recruiting Fanon to the post–structuralist discourses (“pre–mature post–structuralism,” as Parry puts it [1987, 31], “turning Fanon into *le Lacan noir*,” as Gates says [1991, 462]) of anti–foundationalism, refusal of an unproblematic native voice, and, what is perhaps most symptomatic in Robinson’s *foreclosure* of Bhabha, Fanon’s analysis of bourgeois intellectuals’ romanticization of the colonized – the “black abyss” (Fanon, 1986, 7; Robinson, 1993, 80). But Robinson is also critical of any attempt to read Fanon as a psychoanalyst, and so when Gates (1991) compares Freudian “analysis interminable” to Fanonian “decolonization interminable” (466), for Robinson this “compounds his negligence of Fanon, erases the

contradictions and radical anticipations in Fanon . . . a metaphorical displacement of colonialist oppression by a therapeutic paradigm” (86). The predictable aversion, in Marxism, to psychoanalysis qua the “therapeutic” should not distract us, however, from Robinson’s perspicacious remarks on Fanon’s “contradictions and radical *anticipations*,” which last we can see Robinson already formulating in his discussion, in *Black Marxism*, of the “strikes” (which is to say, desertion) of 100,000 poor whites from Confederate armies and half a million slaves from plantations as anticipating a revolution fifty years later: “it was the same pattern, indeed, which came to fruition in Russia” (2000, 271).¹

Like my discussion, below, of how NWC Indigenous masks anticipate the Lacanian split subject, the Bhabha/Robinson debate anticipates the Mignolo/Žižek debate of the past decade. Now the argument is over whether European critics – on the basis of their geographic origin – should be read in the Global South: Dabashi takes issue with Zabala’s list of European philosophers (including Žižek), and then Mignolo, citing Sartre, says “listen, pay attention. Fanon is no longer talking to us [that is, to Europeans]” (2013, n.p.). But this move of Mignolo’s is rhetorically complex, to say the least, and not only for how he bases his argument that the South need not listen to the West on a thinker, Fanon, who evidently was very much drawing on such European thinkers as Hegel, Lacan, and Mannoni. The split, then, in 1980s and 1990s readings of Fanon – on whether he was a revolutionary or a post-structuralist – has been transformed into the question of a global split: spatiality scaled up from the subject to decolonial geographies.²

And so, while the engagement of psychoanalysis and race/decolonization goes back decades (see, in addition to Cheng, Khanna, and Derrida, Frantz Fanon [1986], Edward Said [2003], Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks [2000]), much work remains in two key areas. First, we need a reading of psychoanalysis, qua its canonical texts but also a genealogy of its concepts, in terms of both its colonial conditions (as Said [2003], Jacqueline Rose [1996], and Dušan Bjelić [2016] essay for Freud) and its racialized or colonizing tropologies and significations (as Ian Almond [2012], Robert Beshara [2018], Ilan Kapoor, Jamil Khader [2013], and Zahia Zalloua [2019] argue, in different ways, with respect to Žižek). In terms of the colonial underside of Lacan, what is the Algerian context for his discussion of *Antigone* in *Seminar VII* (1959–60), or the Paul Claduel’s *Cotfontaine* trilogy in *Seminar VIII* (1960–61), for example? Roudinesco tells us that Lacan smuggled copies of his notes on *Antigone* to his step-daughter, Laurence Bataille, when she was incarcerated, in May 1960, at Prison de la Roquette on charges of raising funds for the FLN, Algerian freedom fighters (187). Is there an anti-colonial connection to be made between the heroine and the step-daughter? Certainly Sophocles’ play, which is not to say Lacan’s interpretation, has been an important source for anti-colonial drama in African, Palestinian, and Indigenous North American contexts.³

And, in *Seminar VIII*, Lacan's description of the Algerian colonial context in Claudel's *Coûfontaine* is clear, if fleeting: a character "has just returned from Algeria – a country that has taken on a certain importance since the time at which the play came out [1911]" (Lacan 2015, 285), and, what's more, another character "got his education in a place where land was being cleared, but where one did not acquire the land – this is clearly indicated in the text – without rather roughly dispossessing other people" (Lacan 2015, 290). Then, to anticipate the second half of this chapter, in what way does Lacan's "split subject," for instance, extract from Lévi-Strauss' accounts of Northwest Coast (Kwakwā'wakw) transformer masks? Finally, we need to *not* shy away from drawing on psychoanalytic theory to think in a decolonial way.

This last is because geographies of decolonization entail thinking not merely of an obscene underside or unconscious of the West in terms of colonialism or imperialism, but also that, as Walter D. Mignolo puts it repeatedly, in *On Decoloniality* and elsewhere, "*coloniality* is a decolonial concept," its purpose "to illuminate the darker side of modernity," and that "coloniality emerges as a constitutive, rather than as a derivative dimension of modernity" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 111). That is, we can think of the distortion of thought, what it owes to the non-West, of solidarity and phobias but also a shaking off of dominance, and engaging with the non-West that thinks colonialism versus imperialism, or, to use Indigenous theory, reconciliation versus resurgence, and how all of these are thought of in terms of psychoanalysis (what is a decolonial interpretation of dreams, for instance?). Mignolo's relation to psychoanalysis is fraught: on the one hand, he often compares coloniality by reference to Freud or Lacan's unconscious,⁴ but his account of the psychoanalytic cure – which, as he puts it, seeks to "help the analysand to come to terms with the psychological disturbances of modern society and be integrated into it," for example – is in full agreement, perhaps without being aware, with the Lacanian critique of ego psychology (as Fanon well knew). To this chapter's engagement with the Lacan of the 1950s, of the split subject and the L-schema, might be added, were there time, inquiries into the Lacan of the 1960s and 1970s, asking about the role of *jouissance*, the non-relation, the *sinthome*, of spatial and algebraic theories of knots and mathemes and algorithms (should we re-Arabicize the algorithm, as Ed Finn gestures towards in *What Algorithms Want*, for instance).⁵

But Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Beshara can also help us to understand how, in a Lacanian spatial fashion, "decolonization" itself has different registers in different regional struggles. In Canada, the tension between decolonization and its relation to Indigenization has been articulated, not in unproblematic fashion, by Eve Tuck and L. Wayne Yang (2012, 2014), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014), Audra Simpson (2014), and Glenn Coulthard (2014) that are coded as either identity politics or land and sovereignty in a way resistant to a decolonial cosmopolitanism. But in the Global

South, the decolonial, as Mignolo and Dussel argue with respect to “darker sides” and “transmodernity,” denotes a shrugging off – but also perhaps an orientation towards the colonial heritage – or what in other very different contexts (Gilroy 2006; Žižek 2000) is called postcolonial melancholy. Then, in the Maghreb and the West, “decolonization” is also a signifier of a critical reading that, following Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) and *Cultural and Imperialism* (1993), seeks out non-Western inflections in the Eurocentric canon. Beshara (2018) thus adopts Laura Marks’ (2012) contention that in order to decolonize European philosophy, one must “rediscover its Islamic . . . origins,” for example, “in order to decolonize psychoanalysis and psychoanalyze Islam” (Beshara 2018, 104–105).

Here we can also trace two trajectories in social and decolonial psychoanalytic thinking: first, Edward Said’s argument, in *Freud and the Non-European* (2003), that “Freud was an explorer of the mind, of course, but also, in the philosophical sense, an overturner and a re-mapper of accepted or settled geographies and genealogies” (27). Freud’s overturning and re-mapping is not about some sunny optimism, as is made clear in the well-known passage on “the narcissism of minor differences,” from *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), where he “scales up” from the couple-form to the family and then “when men come together in larger units,” and so:

Of two neighbouring towns each is the other’s most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon the others with contempt. Closely related races keep one another at arm’s length; the South German cannot endure the North German, the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scot, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese. We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the white races for the coloured.

(SE XVIII 101)

This is of course a strong tradition in psychoanalysis – especially the themes of the neighbor and the narcissism of small differences, and Said’s melancholy reminder elsewhere that “anti-Semitism” should include Arab-phobia, or debates in Canadian contexts over Indigeneity, the Métis nation, and Kwakwaka’wakw totems on Coast Salish lands remind us that it is not only in Freud’s (mostly) European examples that we can find such problematics.⁶

The *geographies* of Lacanian thought, then, connect its production in the metropolitan center, and how it was informed, and taken up, in however distorted a fashion by anti-colonial movements and cultures, but also the spatial dimensions of that thought itself. If we are accustomed to think of the “other” as a negative category of subjectivity, a decolonial psychoanalysis helps us to think of the other in a properly spatial way. And we can see how the “other” as demarcated in decolonial discourses is quite

different from the various others of psychoanalysis in Enrique Dussel and Alessandro Fornazzari's 2002 essay "World-System and Trans-Modernity," where "exteriority" is seen as the transmodern or world system "other" to postmodernism qua totality:

the metacategory "exteriority" can illuminate an analysis of the cultural "positivity" not included by modernity, an analysis based not on postmodernity's suppositions but rather on those of what I have called "trans"-modernity. That is to say, exteriority is a process that takes off, originates, and mobilizes itself from an "other" place . . . than European and North American modernity.

(234)

Evidently what Dussel and Fornazzari are working out here is a dialectical critique of the negative "othering," a critique that returns by demarcating a decolonial exteriority that, as they argue, "takes off, originates, and mobilizes itself from an 'other' place" that is exterior to "European and North American modernity." For the Argentinian-Mexican Dussel, then, the other is both marked by the metropole, by the colonizer, and a space that marks *other than*: the decolonial subject is both othered and othering, a *de*-colonial subject that is spatially different from the postcolonial (in some ways to do with Latin American versus African/South Asian demarcations of postcolonialism); but can, thanks to the work of Tuck and Yang (2012), be connected to current debates in decolonial theory with respect to, on the one hand, "Indigenization" and, on the other, "reconciliation." In a North American context, or what is called Turtle Island, if "always indigenize" has come to seem as impossible an injunction as Freud argued was the biblical demand that we love our neighbor, so too the putatively more radical "decolonize," which, as Tuck and Yang (2012) have argued, is *not a metaphor*. Decolonizing is not simply a matter of changing the curriculum, or hiring more Indigenous scholars, of changing structures and credentializing, nor – and this is germane to our discussion of how Northwest Coast masks end up informing Lacanian theory – thinking about research protocols.⁷

Here I want to make a nod to questions of methodology or historiography, drawing first on David Pavón-Cuéllar and Ian Parker's (2013) argument that Lacanian discourse analysis does not regard material "as analyzable discourses to be analysed by us, but as *analysing discourses*," which is to say that they "do not adopt a position outside the material in order to 'apply' the analysis to it," but instead pay attention to how "the narrative reflects and makes sense of itself" – just as "in Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is the 'analysand' who analyses," they treat their narratives "as reflexive, self-critical discourses that return on themselves and 'analyse' themselves" (315–316).⁸ I want to continue this intervention by paying more attention to *the split or barred subject* and tracing its genealogy to specific Indigenous cultural objects. I do so by reading two

specific moments in Lacan's *Écrits*, from the 1958/60 talk "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation" and the 1958 review "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire." The question I am asking here, then, is in what way does Lacan's "split subject" extract specifically from Claude Lévi-Strauss' accounts of Northwest Coast (Kwakiutl, or what are now called Kwakwā'wakw) transformer masks and, generally, from his anthropological approach to form? In "Remarks," Lacan describes how a "figure joins together two profiles whose unity is tenable only if the mask remains closed" (2006, 562), and in "Youth," after referring to Freud on the "*Spaltung* or splitting of the ego," he asks "Must I . . . show them how to handle a mask that unmask the face it represents only by splitting in two" (2006, 633). Footnotes to these passages, from both Lacan (for "Youth") and Bruce Fink (for his translation of "Remarks"), direct the reader to two texts by Lévi-Strauss: his 1943 essay on "The Art of the Northwest Coast," and "Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America," which first appeared in book form in 1958. Reading Lacan with Lévi-Strauss, then, allows us to trace a genealogy of the split subject, from mask to anthropologist to psychoanalyst – but to what end? In what way can or should we read the theory of the split subject – which evidently owes much, on the one hand, to a structuralist theory of the sign, and the *barre* between signifier and signified, and, on the other, to Freud's *Spaltung* and to Lacan's heterodox splitting of the Ideal-Ego and Ego-Ideal, or the *sujet d'énoncé* and *sujet d'énonciation* – as originating in mask making or colonial anthropology? Am I arguing that Lacan has colonized Indigenous artefacts for his European theory? Or does this reading demonstrate how Kwakiutl art works turn out to anticipate a key tenet of structuralism? Or, finally, does my method here – tracing influence via Lacan and Lévi-Strauss – argue for a textual decolonization of psychoanalysis?

We can see this by turning to colonial (nineteenth-century) and decolonial (contemporary) iterations of the split subject, exploring how the turn to formalization in Lacan is both a spatial algorithm and a conceptual decolonization.⁹ That is, formalization, whether the split subject or the matheme, is a matter of an *already-existing* formalization among *les damnées*. We can see this in the historical and contemporary transformer masks by Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakwā'wakw, and Nuxalk artists. Lévi-Strauss (1982) describes the masks' machinic mechanisms as a "system of ropes, pulleys, and hinges [that] can cause mouths to mock a novice's terrors, eyes to mourn his death, beaks to devour him" (7).¹⁰ And Franz Boas describes how in a Kwakwā'wakw "representation of a killer whale (*Orca sp.*), the animal has been split along its whole back towards the front," adding that the "two profiles of the head have been joined."¹¹ Lévi-Strauss also notes in a passage Lacan points us to in a note to "Jeunesse de Gide,"

They hold at the same time the function of masking and unmasking. But when it comes to unmasking, it is the mask which, by a kind of

reverse splitting, opens up into two halves, while the actor himself is dissociated in the split representation, which aims, as we saw, at flattening out as well as displaying the mask.

(Lévi-Strauss 1967, 256–257)

Lacan stresses how the artifact “joins together two profiles whose unity is tenable only if the mask remains closed,” and “the ambiguity of the process” whereby the fantasy of the unity of the subject is established (“la figure du masque, pour être dimidiée, n’est pas symétrique . . . qu’elle conjoint deux profils dont l’unité ne se soutient que de ce que le masque reste fermé”) (Lacan 2006, 562).

The dynamics of the masks, then, are paradoxically unstable, both machine-like in their mechanics, but also a *reverse splitting* that is joined, three dimensions that, to meet a graphic requirement, are flattened. How do these plastic descriptions (masks are also ceremonial) accord with Lacan’s theory of the split subject? Lacan paraphrases Lagache on the Ego-Ideal and Ideal-Ego in ways that also hew closely to Freud in the *Spaltung* of the Ego essay, and indeed Fink, in his translator’s note, argues that Lacan’s word *dimidiée* as split denotes “each side being treated or behaving differently.”¹² Lacan’s discussion in the Gide essay is more metatheoretical, discussing how psychoanalysts mistake the splitting of the ego for a weakness (a colonial notion *in nuce*) and making more explicit reference to masks as discussed by Lévi-Strauss.

Here we have, appropriately enough, two contradictory ideas. First, the orthodox Freudian notion, developed in his late essay on the *Spaltung* of the ego, of entertaining two contradictory thoughts at the same time (the child “responds to the conflict with two contrary reactions, both of which are valid and effective” – Freud SE XXIII 275), which is then exemplified by the masks that split open, or the split artistic representations, described by Lévi-Strauss. A face that splits to reveal another face: so, two faces. Thus, a model for the split subject, which is to be metastasized by Lacan via not only the unconscious, language, and the signifying *barre*, but also (later) by the barred other. Second, we have that spatial splitting also evident in the geographic unconscious, or the question of how those masks and representations make their way into Lacanian theory. The geographic unconscious is always a repression:¹³ as noted earlier, it is due to a colonial disavowal (I know very well that the masks and other ceremonial regalia of Indigenous peoples have immense cultural value, if only because they have been so described by my anthropologists and I can sell them to museums, but nonetheless I will ban their use and production). It is the spatiality of that split, or the scaling down from the global to the matheme, that I argue accounts for a connection via the geographic unconscious, between the decolonial other, or *les damnées*, and Lacan’s turn to formalization. What these descriptions, and the objects, convey, then, is not a static model; instead we have to ask, as Said puts it, *how does theory travel?*

I want to argue that a formalization of Lacan's that is quite contemporary to his introduction of the split subject, the so-called L-schema, helps us here, for the L-schema stages that very split in a visual and graphic form. That is, the L-schema demonstrates how the split in the subject, first theorized by the Kwakwāka'wakw, is both dynamic and constitutive. How does this work? It means that one way in which to decolonize Lacan's theory is to see his mathemes, algorithms, and graphs as the intrusion of *les damnées* onto the metropolitan scene. This may seem to be a claim with very little evidence, based on a selective reading of a few paragraphs and footnotes to "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation" and "The Youth of Gide." (Although Lacan is notorious for introducing ideas once – like *das Ding* in *Seminar VII*, and then never returning to it – a casualty of his improvisatory/free associational ways.) But if we read the split subject, the L-schema, globally (or what in *Seminar XIX* is called the "rift in the real," where the transformer masks can be read as "dismantling the machine for the hole that passes thru you," so that "our *not-all* is discordance" – Lacan 2018, 14), the L-schema maps the political via a spatial discordance, as a way of thinking, say, the Kwakwāka'wakw with Lacan. Here the true leap of faith is not to connect the split subject to Indigenous theory but rather to make the move of an *après-coup*, to move backwards in Lacan's theoretical formation, to see the Kwakwāka'wakw mask as an example of what Robinson called Fanon's radical anticipations. The L-schema is one of Lacan's earliest formalizations, from May 1955, just a month after the Bandung Conference (a key moment in the decolonial struggle),¹⁴ and three years before the Lagache paper (see Figure 3.1).

There are any number of excellent readings of the L-schema, including those of Bruce Fink in his *Clinical Introduction* (1997), Derek Hook (2018), and Darian Leader (2000). Leader situates his genealogy of the L-schema in the development of formalizations in philosophy and mathematics in the mid-twentieth century. Crucially, he convincingly shows that Lacan's L-schema originates in both cybernetics and anthropology, in both Shannon Weaver's 1949 diagram of transmitted and received symbols and Lévi-Strauss'

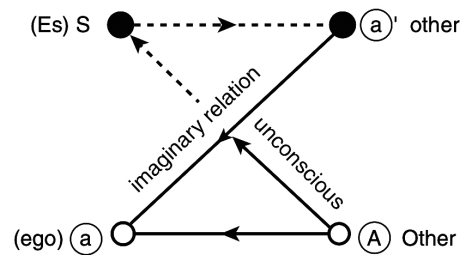


Figure 3.1 L-schema, in Lacan (1991, 243)

model for kinship.¹⁵ Fink, in a comment that recalls Anne Anlin Cheng's argument that "intrasubjectivity exists as a form of intersubjectivity and that intersubjectivity often speaks in the voice of intrasubjectivity" (Cheng 2000, 28), notes that the four places of the L-schema, "ego, alter-ego, subject, and Other," can be found within the individual and also "used to understand the imaginary and symbolic components of the analytic relationship" (Fink 1997, 252 n. 64).

I want to quickly sketch out how to read the L-schema in two different ways: first, its orthodox Lacanian meaning, and second, a decolonial reading. Lacan argues that our subjectivity is constituted by the imaginary versus symbolic/unconscious, but what is key to the schema is that they are not just different axes but that they also cross. In the 1950s, when the role of the clinic is to move the analysand from the imaginary to the symbolic, Lacan is still positing a constitutive antagonism. That is, the imaginary is the noise effecting the message of the big Other. And if the L-schema is, in Lacanian terms, essentially about the Lacan of the imaginary, of recognition, and is not properly speaking the Lacan of the signifier, of the symbolic, let alone the real, then we cannot neglect the shame that Lacanians have when they return to early Lacan, to the mirror stage (we sneer at our colleagues who only ever teach the mirror stage essay) – a shame that is, properly speaking, every bit as colonial as those Lévi-Strauss castigated for their "archaic illusions" – theories of the mirror stage and the imaginary are a "primitivism" for Lacanians. I propose that we move beyond respecting such a stage-ism of Lacan, precisely in favor of a narrativization of his work, which simultaneously proposes a historicist approach (the 1950s are the imaginary, and so on. – J-A. Miller, Žižek) and a Whiggish theory of Lacan (he gets more difficult, the real Lacan is that of the 1970s, the *semblant*, knots, Sade-like dissolution – Edelman). Such a move would resist the tendency in Lacanian theory towards university discourse and, too, respect the reality that *we do not read Lacan in chronological order* – such a historical narrative is always constituted *après-coup*, after the fact, in the same way that the L-schema, invented contemporaneously with the Bandung Conference, contains the germs of earlier Kwakwāka'wakw masks *before* they make their citational appearance in the Lagache and Gide essays.¹⁶

The L-schema proposes *two splits* – the split between the speaking subject (S) and the ego, and the split between the ego and the little other: these we can return to the global split, to the geographic unconscious, that "rift in the real" or the axes of imaginary and symbolic as what Dolar (2009) notes is "variously named as conflictuality, antagonism, rift, a crack in the social tissue, an excess, the point of ambivalence, untying of social bonds, negativity" in the mask, in the formalization, in the global real. This second split, this second spatiality, one of the global, I propose we call a matter of discordance (to cite an important term in the later Lacan [2018] – in *Seminar XIX*), after an artwork spelling out the word "DISCORDANCY," by the



Figure 3.2 Raymond Boisjoly, *newer figures of another fleeting (non) relation* (photocopies, staples, dimensions variable, 2017)

Indigenous (Québécois-Haida) artist Raymond Boisjoly, to see how well Lacan's algorithm or formalization maps the political via a spatial discordance. Boisjoly's artwork (Figure 3.2) is titled *newer figures of another fleeting (non) relation* (2017) and renders the sign or letter of the signifier "DISCORDANCY" into an image that refuses meaning, refuses to coalesce, marking on the space of the gallery wall (rendering the institutional space into the picture plane of the aesthetic).

The 160 fragments of the Lacanian letter (spelling out "DISCORDANCY") that make up Boisjoly's work also posit a spatiality, an illusion of three dimensions, that does two things. One, Boisjoly's spatiality reaches back to and reverses the flattening of three dimensions that Boas and Lévi-Strauss find constitutive of the split representations; two, that spatiality also anticipates the turn from two dimensions to three in the later Lacan's topologies. This spatiality also inscribes the geographic decolonial, and so with the help of Boisjoly's non-relation/discordancy, we can decolonize the L-schema (Figure 3.3).

Now the ego = colonizer, caught up in an imaginary relation with the colonized: this is the politics of recognition, of the spectacle. Decoloniality, then, is the big Other, the insistence on a politics of revolt and resurgence, which interpellates the split subject qua discordancy. This is hardly a triumphalist reading, however, as Boisjoly's notes on the artworks' material ("photocopies, staples, dimensions variable") suggest – no heroic masterpiece here; this is not canvas and oil or marble, but is made of far humbler

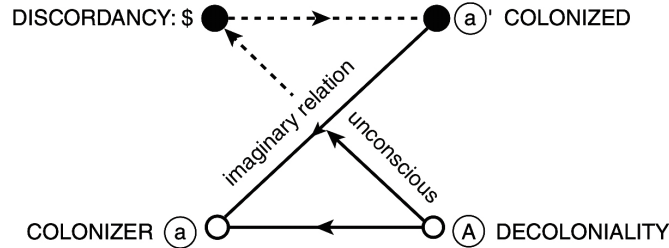


Figure 3.3 Decolonial L-schema

stuff. And, as Derek Hook (2018) reminds us in his comments on the original L-schema, this is to be expected “given the psychoanalytic emphasis on the split nature of the subject and upon the fleeting quality of unconscious events which suddenly emerge and then disappear” (35). Determining that Lacan’s split subject has Indigenous origins will not satisfy radicals who see psychoanalysis as merely therapy, but it may help us to understand why that which we do not anticipate is more welcome than that which we do.

Notes

- 1 Lewis Gordon (1995) also discusses Fanon and Robinson on Fanon in his chapter “Fanon’s Continued Relevance” (85–103).
- 2 To this survey of Fanon criticism should also be added the recent work of David Marriott (2018, 2021) and Gautam Basu Thakur (2021).
- 3 See, for one discussion, James Gibb’s article “*Antigone* and her African Sisters: West African Versions of a Greek Original” in Gillespie (2007).
- 4 Mignolo often juxtaposes Freud’s unconscious alongside Marx’s surplus value: *On Decoloniality* 10, 140, 142, 252.
- 5 “An algorithm is a recipe, an instruction set, a sequence of tasks to achieve a particular calculation or result, like the steps required to calculate a square root or tabulate the Fibonacci sequence. The word itself derives from Abū ‘Abdallāh Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, the famed ninth-century CE mathematician (from whose name algebra is also derived). *Algorismus* was originally the process for calculating Hindu-Arabic numerals. Via al-Kwārizmī, the algorithm was associate with the revolutionary concepts of positional notation, the decimal point, and zero.” Ed Finn, 2017 (kindle loc. 358). Beshara (2019) engages with the later Lacan, citing Lacan on how repetition engenders *jouissance*, how “the endless repetition of the master signifier . . . produces the interpellated (\$) who has no choice but to keep endlessly *desiring* for freedom (*a*), while indulging in *jouissance* ($J\Phi$)” (54).
- 6 Said in *Orientalism*: “‘Semites’ were not only the Jews but the Muslims as well” (Said, 1979, 99) and his more poetic, “by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism” (Said, 1979, 27). See also Beshara (2021). For discussions of *métissage* in Canadian contexts, see Chris Anderson’s *Métis: race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (2014) and Jordan Abel’s *Nishga* (2021). In Vancouver, historian Jean Barman (2007)

writes that the “erasure of Indigeneity” from the city in the early twentieth century was accompanied by a compromise formation, as it were: “the replacement of indigenous Indigeneity with a sanitized Indigeneity from elsewhere,” so Kwakwāka’wakw totem poles replace the Squamish settlements of Xwáýxway (26).

- 7 Indeed, I was making remarks along these lines at a Critical Psychology Congress (Northern New Mexico College, 2019) when I was reminded of Audre Lorde’s imperative that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” to which I answered that I thought of the “master” in that context not as European theorists but rather the forces of capital. Of course, for some interlocutors, this will not satisfy, since in Lorde’s original context (a 1979 intervention at the NYU Institute for the Humanities *Second Sex* Conference) she was critiquing white feminists for their lack of knowledge of poor, lesbian, women of color; furthermore, Lacan easily fits into what have variously been called *les maitres de penseur* or even Ricouer’s “masters of suspicion.” (Note that Lorde was remarking on the need for Black voices in a conference on de Beauvoir; further, she also makes the following very Lacan-friendly comment: “what about interracial cooperation between feminists who don’t love each other?”) And, too, I would argue that Lacanian theory holds much for the emancipatory project, for the decolonizing project, *precisely* because of his theories of the *master* signifier and their role in our unconscious, as well as his four discourses, including the *master’s* discourse. Beshara notes that he “works with the question of the master not as a person but as a signifier, and this is the psychoanalytic question, of course, because regardless of where we come from certain master signifiers are dominant in our unconscious, which forms our subjectivity in certain ways” (personal communication).
- 8 While this notion of discourses analyzing themselves is not without controversy, I suggest that it is similar to Marxist, and especially Adorno’s, notions of immanent critique. Derek Hook has remarked (in a personal communication): “Frankly, while I like the idea on paper, it doesn’t really seem feasible to me. Sure, an analysis can, in the context of the clinic, offer analyzing comments on their own speech and process, but this doesn’t really seem viable in the context of written discourse.”
- 9 It is worth reminding the reader unfamiliar with the colonial history (and present) of Canada that from 1885 to 1951, the Canadian government forbade Indigenous people from performing sacred rituals, including the potlatch. The irony is that it was precisely the potlatch that would, via Marcel Mauss’ description in *Le Don*, come to so fascinate French intellectuals (including André Breton, the Situationists, who named their 1950s newsletter *Potlatch*, and Bataille). Masks and other ceremonial regalia were seized by the federal government and then sold to museums around the world; and so because of these colonial strictures the masks came to be in New York museums, and hence seen by Claude Lévi-Strauss. For a novelization of these proceedings by an Indigenous writer, see Clutesi (1969). Knight (2018) argues that Clutesi’s novel is a literary refusal to reveal. See also Bracken (1997).
- 10 *The Way of the Masks*, citing his “The Art of the Northwest Coast at the Museum of Natural History,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1943, 175–182.
- 11 Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*. Instituttet for *Sammenlignende Kulturforskning*, series B, Vol III (Oslo: 1927), 239, in Lévi-Strauss (1967, 248).
- 12 I also hear “mi-dis” or what is half-said at mid-day – the later Lacan of *Encore* (1998), as in the truth “of the half-telling [*mi-dire*]” (93).
- 13 I discuss the concept of the “geographic unconscious” in my chapter “Always Geographize! Fredric Jameson and Political Space.” Forthcoming in Friederike Landau et al. (eds.), *(Un)Grounding: Post-Foundational Interventions in Space*. Frankfurt: transcript.

- 14 Richard Wright's *The Color Curtain* (1956), a journalistic account of the Bandung Conference, is notable not only for its range of reference, from the legacy of 350 years of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, where the conference was held, to the sense of foreboding with which Western media viewed this unprecedented gathering of newly decolonized Asian and African countries, and such gems as a list of Malay phrases for Dutch overseers: "Sweep up the front first," "All my stolen property has been returned," "You are stupid" (Wright, 1956, 180–181). Wright also recounts explaining to a white American woman why her Black roommate was using skin-lightening chemicals, in terms reminiscent of Fanon: "Negroes have been made ashamed of being black. Dark Hindus feel the same way. White people have made them feel like that. The American Negroes are black and they live in a white country. Almost every picture and image they see is white. . . . Every day that woman commits psychological suicide" (186–187).
- 15 All three diagrams, shown in Leader (177–178), are squares, crossing in the middle. Markos Zafiroopoulos, in his volume on Lacan and Lévi-Strauss (2010), makes the connection even stronger, citing Lacan's 2 May 1956 address to the *Société française de Philosophie* in which he discussed trying to "apply this grid to the symptom in obsessional neurosis" (Zafiroopoulos 168: see also 170, where Zafiroopoulos shows a Lévi-Strauss grid side by side with the L-schema).
- 16 Just as Lacan (2006) draws on the seven years (1788–1795) between Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, to argue the latter "yields the truth of the Critique" (646), so we can note that the contemporaneity of Bandung and the L-schema *anticipates* the arrival of the Kwakwā'wakw masks, via the potlatch ban, Boas, and Lévi-Strauss. One reviewer of an earlier draft of this chapter suggested that the point of the L-schema is precisely to provide a map of communicative interaction, and a guide to how the imaginary intersubjectivity of everyday conversation should be avoided in the clinical domain where precisely the axis of Other-*Es* is to be prioritized. But this a priori would miss the argument, in this paragraph, for a constitutive antagonism and, indeed, an argument for the dialectics of the imaginary as the noise effecting the message of the big Other.

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