

# **Empires of mind: postcolonial cartographies of ‘The Empire’ in Melanie Klein’s Narrative of a Child Analysis**

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This article analyzes the extensive archive of artwork produced by Melanie Klein’s child-patient “Richard” in *Narrative of a Child Analysis*. Focusing specifically on Richard’s drawings of what he called “The Empire,” I explore the geopolitical significance of these images by using postcolonial theory to show how they bring the midcentury politics of imperial expansion into the clinical relation. Throughout this article, I consider how the Empire drawings speak to the entanglement of psychic life with social history and contend that their abstract, non-representational aesthetic engages in a nuanced critique of imperialism. Taking Richard’s drawings as more than mere child’s play, I read them as providing an opening through which to visualize the decolonial political potentiality of the clinic.

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# Empires of mind: postcolonial cartographies of '*The Empire*' in Melanie Klein's *Narrative of a Child Analysis*

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**Abstract** This article analyzes the extensive archive of artwork produced by Melanie Klein's child-patient "Richard" in *Narrative of a Child Analysis*. Focusing specifically on Richard's drawings of what he called "*The Empire*," I explore the geopolitical significance of these images by using postcolonial theory to show how they bring the mid century politics of imperial expansion into the clinical relation. Throughout this article, I consider how the *Empire* drawings speak to the entanglement of psychic life with social history and contend that their abstract, non-representational aesthetic engages in a nuanced critique of imperialism. Taking Richard's drawings as more than mere child's play, I read them as providing an opening through which to visualize the decolonial political potentiality of the clinic.

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It was May in Scotland, 1941. Like many other London-based psychoanalysts, Melanie Klein had fled the daily *Blitzkrieg* in the capital by moving north to Pitlochry. While there, Klein began the analysis of a "very unusual boy of ten" whom she would come to call "Richard" (Klein, cited in Grosskurth, 1986, p. 262). Klein saw Richard six times a week, for a total of 93 sessions, from April 28th to August 23rd, 1941.<sup>1</sup> As she wrote to fellow child analyst D.W. Winnicott on May 30th, "I have started the analysis of a

very unusual boy of ten a month ago & keep full notes including my interpretations from this case. It takes me 1½-2 hours a day to make these notes, – a drag but well worth while [...] It really gives me pleasure to think what a good paper this should make” (p. 262). Klein worked on this “good paper” from 1956 until her death in 1960 and *Narrative of a Child Analysis* was published posthumously a year later. At just shy of 500 pages, it is one of the longest single case histories ever recorded.

Renowned for more than its length, *Narrative* remains a well-known text among clinicians and psychoanalytic historians alike. As clinicians such as Donald Meltzer (1978) and Hanna Segal (1963) have established, it provides one of the most textured looks at Klein’s “controversial” clinical technique. At the same time, historians like Mike Roper (2016) and Michal Shapira (2013) have shown how it offers a fascinating look at the way that twentieth-century mind sciences responded to the exigencies of war. However, what is frequently overlooked in most clinical *and* critical treatments of this case is the extensive archive of artwork that Richard produced alongside – and typically during – his analysis. In his 90-some analytic sessions, he created no fewer than 74 images, which (in typically Kleinian fashion) detail scenes of attack, invasion, bombardment, war, and – especially pertinent to my discussion here – empire. For Klein, Richard’s zealous production of military images was indispensable for her work of mapping her then emergent theories of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, which would find their full articulation shortly thereafter in 1946. Yet at no point in the case does Klein (or any of the scholars following her) engage with the geopolitical contours of these art images, which bring the midcentury politics of imperial expansion into the clinical relation.

This article examines the political significance of the image in the clinic, looking specifically at the dozen or so drawings Richard created of what he forebodingly christened “*The Empire*.” In the first half of the article, I contribute to a recent revitalization of interest in the intersection between psychoanalytic history and politics (Danto, 2005; Shapira, 2013; Pick, 2014; Zaretsky, 2015; ffytche and Pick, 2016; Herzog, 2017) by considering how these art images reveal the entanglement of psychic life with social history, thereby visualizing how the political organization of empire lives in the mind. I claim that these images speak to the existence of a latent *political* unconscious, a concept that names how the unconscious is shaped and populated by geopolitical as much as private familial structures and events.<sup>2</sup> Through this theory of the political unconscious, I turn in the second half of the article to a close reading of Richard’s drawings themselves to explore how these abstract, non-representational visualizations of empire participate in a broader geopolitical conversation about the viability – and desirability – of empire in the twentieth century. Examining how these images subvert and deconstruct the cartographic genre (which has long been a visual tool of imperial domination), I explore how they mount a nuanced critique of European empire-building.

Combining postcolonial critical theory with clinical material, I suggest that such a reading usefully reframes the political-symbolic capacity of aesthetics in the clinic, allowing us to think, critically and clinically, with empire in mind. As Richard's *Empires* show, aesthetics functions as one of the key sites through which the politicality of the clinical encounter becomes, quite literally, visible.

## **Empires of mind**

According to Klein, when Richard first came for treatment he had been struggling with severe anxieties and phobias for two years since the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He was terrified of other children, unable to attend school, hypochondriacal, inhibited in learning, and frequently subject to depression (Klein, 1998 [1961], p. 15). His clear love of nature and music were subordinated to his obsessive concern with the war. Every day he read four newspapers, listened to the radio for updates about the war, and fervently tracked Hitler's advance across the continent. From the very first session to the very last, the politics of war would be the routine vernacular of Richard's clinical encounter.

During their first session, for instance, Klein asked Richard to discuss some of the "difficulties" that caused him to be brought in for analysis. Klein observed that, in response, what Richard gave was an expansive description of national conflict:

He [Richard] also thought much about the war. Of course he knew that the Allies were going to win and was not particularly worried, but was it not awful what Hitler did to people, particularly the terrible things he did to the Poles? Did he mean to do the same over here? But he, Richard, felt confident that Hitler would be beaten. (When speaking about Hitler he went to have a look at the large map hanging on the wall.) (pp. 19–20)

In a move that would become emblematic of the whole analysis, Richard responds to Klein's request that he map his psychological difficulties by instead providing a cartography of war. In his drawings, in his play, and in his speech, Richard would continue to bring the political events occurring throughout Europe into his daily psychoanalytic sessions, drawing everything from the Battle of Crete and the naval expeditions of the warships *Bismarck* and *Nelson* to Switzerland's precarious neutrality and Germany's gluttonous expansion. He brought his own set of toy battleships with him to most sessions and used the art supplies that Klein provided to create dozens of drawings that depicted air, sea, and railway attack, as well as the constantly shifting national borders of what he called "*The Empire*."<sup>3</sup> Unlike most of Klein's other child analyses in which her famous play-technique focused primarily on children's embodied

81 enactments, Richard's case notably included numerous drawings, which visually  
82 laminate the psychological to the political. As seen even in Richard's initial  
83 recourse to look at the physical map hanging on the wall of Klein's consulting  
84 room – a map to which he would return often – the image would come to  
85 function as a key medium of communication throughout his analysis.

86 The first drawings that Richard produced were completed in his 12th session,  
87 roughly two weeks into his analysis (Fig. 1). At the start of this session, Richard  
88 noticed that Klein had brought with her a range of art supplies. Eagerly taking  
89 up a pencil, he began two drawings, both featuring an assortment of German  
90 U-boats along with the real British battleships the *Salmon*, the *Truant*, and the  
91 *Sunfish*. From his 12th–15th session, Richard expanded on the themes laid out  
92 in these preliminary sketches, creating a full-color series in which a fleet of black  
93 British and German warships engaged in combat around (and sometimes with)  
94 various yellow sea creatures, including fish, starfish, and octopi, all set against a  
95 blue-penciled backdrop of sea and sky (Fig. 2).

96 When Richard finished the first two images, he explained to Klein that “there  
97 was an attack going on, but he did not know who would attack first, the *Salmon*  
98 or the [German] U-boat” (p. 56). Interpreting these images became the focus of  
99 this analytic session as Klein encouraged Richard to associate the geopolitical  
100 conflict depicted in the drawings with a principally familial conflict that, she  
101 suggested, they unconsciously expressed. “Mrs. K interpreted that the British  
102 represented his own family [whom] he not only loved and wanted to protect but  
103 also wished to attack” (p. 57). For Richard, such an interpretation was deeply  
104 offensive *not* because it dealt a blow to family affections but rather because it  
105 was an affront to his patriotism. Throughout the analysis, Richard and Klein  
106 debated the representational capacity of the images he created, with Richard

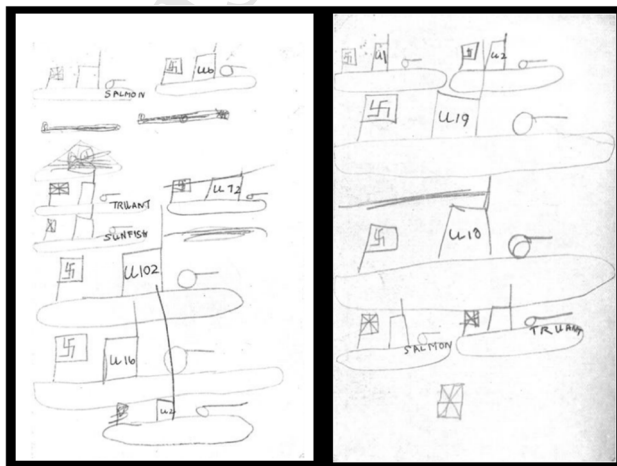


Figure 1: Drawings 1 and 2 from session 12. (Klein Archives, Wellcome Library).

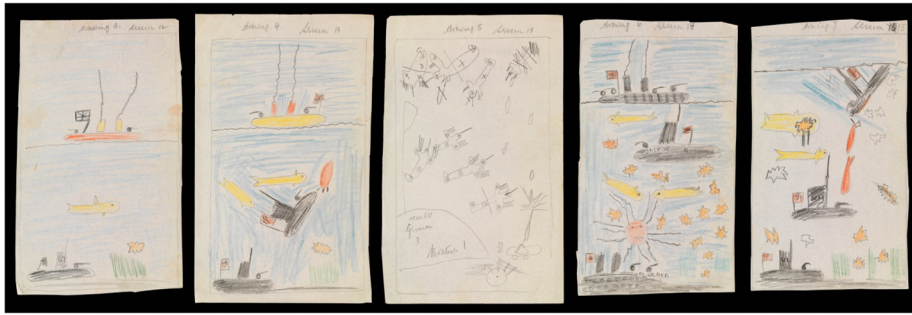


Figure 2: Compiled drawings from sessions 12–15. (Klein Archives, Wellcome Library).

alternately resisting and adopting the symbolic meanings that Klein assigned to his drawings. With the image as a focal point, Richard's analysis steadily blurred the line between the internal and the external, the personal and the political, the psychological and the world-historical.

For many it might seem hardly surprising that a child in 1941 whose brother was enlisted in the British Army and whose house in London had already been bombed would be preoccupied by world events. However, for Klein this persistent interest in conflict, destruction, attack, and Hitler himself bespoke the internal – rather than external – dynamics of attack and repair. Klein interpreted Richard's keen interest in international political conflict as a symptomatic symbolization of a deeper and more fundamental psychic conflict. While Richard drew battleships, bombs, and scenes of naval assault, Klein rejoined by highlighting the threat posed by Daddy's "bad Hitler-penis," the endangered terrain of Mummy's positioned body, and Richard's own phantasied attacks on the combined parent figure.<sup>4</sup> For Klein, Richard's drawings acted as a seamless substitute for his verbal free-associations; she interpreted the psychodynamics of the image through the same kind of symbolic register as the word or the gesture, routing them back to what she understood to be a deeper level of unconscious phantasy.

In Klein's thinking, the world of unconscious phantasy was organized according to universal key terms derived primarily from sexual anatomy and the nuclear family. Consequently, many of Klein's interpretations throughout this analysis are surprising not only for their blunt, forceful, and rather abrupt delivery, but also because of how they continually read Richard's speech and drawings through a very direct form of unconscious symbolism. For Klein, a toy battleship was never *just* a battleship. To take but a few representative examples of her interpretive method, a car collision was a symbol of parental intercourse; a lamppost, a penis; and the couch, the mother's womb. This was a method that garnered Klein much criticism since, to the uninitiated, it seemed there was little evidence to justify Klein's psychosexually explicit interpretations.<sup>5</sup> In a

137 retrospective interview with Klein's biographer, Phyllis Grosskurth (1986), in  
138 the 1980s, the adult Richard (then in his 50s) aptly summarized this clinical  
139 dynamic himself, saying that he did not remember much from the analysis.  
140 However, what he did remember was

141 going on about the fact that we [the British] were going to bomb the  
142 Germans, seize Berlin, and so on and so on and then Brest. Melanie seized  
143 on b-r-e-a-s-t, which of course was very much her angle. She would often  
144 talk about the 'big Mummy genital' and the 'big Daddy genital' or the  
145 'good Mummy genital' and the 'bad Daddy genital.' I can't remember  
146 what other things she had to say. It was very much a strong interest in  
147 genitalia. (p. 273).

148 Richard's images were thus meaningful for Klein, because they charted his  
149 internal familial conflict, the war *inside*.

150 But there are, of course, two sides to the coin here. Even as it would appear  
151 that Klein was, time and again, ahistorically returning Richard's political  
152 anxieties to a universalizing "Mommy-Daddy-Me" triangulation that privi-  
153 leged the European middle-class nuclear family as the seat of all psychic life, in  
154 this very gesture she actually remobilized much of the historically specific war  
155 vocabulary that saturated 1940s discourse in Britain. As Richard rehearsed the  
156 dynamics of World War II in his play and drawings, Klein theorized that  
157 children as young as two are plagued by unconscious phantasies about "killing,"  
158 "blowing up," "ambushing," "bombing," "invading," and "attacking" the  
159 "hostile" persecutors who appear allied against them. Klein does not date each  
160 of the sessions in *Narrative*, but her pocketbook records that the span of  
161 Richard's analysis witnessed the continued bombing of Northern Ireland, the  
162 fall of Greece, the sinking of the *Bismarck*, the invasion of the Soviet Union, and  
163 the bizarre arrival of Rudolf Hess, who bailed out over Glasgow less than 100  
164 miles from Klein (Pick, 2014). From a historical perspective, then, Klein  
165 constructs her instinctual, phylogenetic unconscious on and through modern  
166 European conflict narratives, emblemized by the swing between aggressive  
167 "attack" and ameliorative "reparation." During a time of attacks, bombings,  
168 and invasions, followed by transnational monetary reparations, Klein's interest  
169 is not in the purchase of these phenomena in the external world but rather in the  
170 way they organize the psychic life of children. As both Adam Phillips (2001) and  
171 Michal Shapira (2013) have persuasively shown, Klein takes the political  
172 discourse of World War II and maps it onto – and into – the mind of the child.<sup>6</sup>

173 It is here that I want to turn to the series of drawings of "*The Empire*" that  
174 Richard began making in his 23rd session. Having previously drawn a  
175 militarized marine tableau replete with submarines, battleships, fish, octopi,  
176 and starfish (Fig. 2), Richard then zooms in on the craggy, irregular shape of the  
177 starfish, expanding it to become the full-sized subject of no fewer than twenty-



178 two individual drawings. Although all the drawings in this series are slightly  
179 different, each features a single large, star-like shape divided into bright, multi-  
180 colored, irregular sections traversed by crisscrossing black lines. These subsec-  
181 tions are typically filled with four colors – red, blue, black, and purple – and  
182 are encircled by sharp, shard-like triangles, which protrude from around *The*  
183 *Empire*'s edges. According to Klein's narration, the first of these drawings  
184 (Fig. 3)

185 started off as the usual big starfish shape, which he [Richard] filled in with  
186 colours. He said that this was an empire and the various colours  
187 represented different countries. There was no fighting. 'They come in but  
188 the smaller countries don't mind being taken'.

189 Mrs. K asked who 'they' were.

190 Richard did not reply, but said that the black people were horrid and  
191 nasty. The light blue and the red were very nice people and were the ones  
192 the smaller countries did not mind having there.

193 Mrs. K suggested [...] that this empire again represented the family. (Klein,  
194 1998 [1961], p. 107)

195 Klein found Richard's rendering of empire significant not because it presciently  
196 indexed the rapidly expanding Nazi Empire – the harrowing Third Reich that  
197 had, merely days before, successfully invaded Crete – but rather because it  
198 symbolized the nuclear family, figured here by distinctly colored and rigidly  
199 boundaried territorializations. On Klein's reading, which Richard alternately  
200 resists and adopts, the quadra-color partitioning of these images hails the

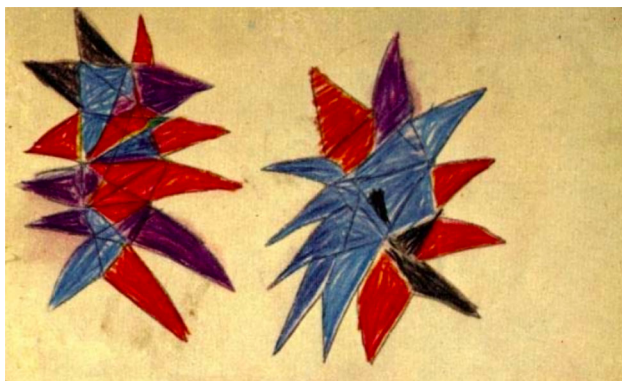


Figure 3: "The Empire" from session 23. (Klein Archives, Wellcome Library).



201 Oedipal schema, with “good mummy” Britain symbolized by the light blue,  
202 Richard himself represented by the red, brother Paul denoted by the periphery  
203 purple, and “bad Hitler-daddy” signified by the threatening color black.

204 There is clearly much to say here about what Klein implies by so quickly  
205 associating these images of empire with the heterosexual family form since, as  
206 Ann Stoler (2002) has compellingly shown, the reproduction of racialized  
207 imperial power hinges on the vigilant organization of sexual relations. But, in an  
208 admittedly psychoanalytic move, I want to focus on what is *absented* from this  
209 reading when Klein’s analysis of what Richard himself names “*The Empire*”  
210 veers so quickly to the pre-established coordinates of the nuclear family. For,  
211 however apt Klein’s reading of the psychosexual dynamics of Richard’s family  
212 may be, it is worth pointing out that such an interpretation avoids considering  
213 the possibility that a rapidly expanding genocidal empire could ever be housed  
214 as a primal phantasy in the unconscious. If Richard’s own preoccupations have  
215 to do with Nazi expansion, invasion, and racialized violence, then in Klein’s  
216 symbolic equation such concerns do not stand principally for themselves but  
217 instead are read as representative of what she considers the primary (internal)  
218 anxiety objects: unconscious phantasies of the breast, the penis, the mother, the  
219 father, unborn children, and the copulating, combined parent.<sup>7</sup> To be clear, my  
220 point here is more than just a quibble about the specific sexual anatomization of  
221 the terms Klein chooses – privileging the penis over the clitoris or vagina, for  
222 instance. What is actually at stake, I am suggesting, is an entirely different  
223 theory of subject-formation that, if approached socially and historically, would  
224 allow us to consider how the *political* organization of empire was – and is –  
225 anything but secondary and merely symbolic for psychic life. In other words,  
226 Klein’s interpretative method elides the idea that empires may have a mind of  
227 their own – that is, that the prototypically patriarchal, racist ordering and  
228 management of imperial power might have a primary structuring effect on the  
229 mind not exactly separate from that to do with the heterosexual family form but  
230 nevertheless recognizably distinct from it. What, I ask, becomes visible if we  
231 expand the interpretive lens for reading these images to incorporate the social  
232 and historical, if we approach them through an idea of a *political* unconscious?

233 In considering this same image (Fig. 3), one of the things that emerges through  
234 this expanded focus is the subtle racialization at play in Richard’s representation  
235 and narration of *The Empire*. Put in the context of the Nazi glorification of the  
236 Germanic Aryan race, Richard’s comments about how, in his drawing, “the  
237 black people were horrid and nasty” seem clearly to extend a racist discourse  
238 characteristic of the project of empire-building generally, and German National  
239 Socialism specifically. Although the Jewish, Romani, and Slavic peoples were  
240 the primary targets of the Nazi’s genocidal “Final Solution,” recent research by  
241 German historians and critical race scholars like Robert Kesting (1998), Tina  
242 Campt (2005), and Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft (2013) has highlighted

the pervasiveness of accompanying forms of anti-Black racism throughout the Third Reich.<sup>8</sup> This is seen perhaps most famously in the German moral panic that ballooned throughout the interwar period, targeting Allied French-African (principally Senegalese) soldiers stationed in the Rhineland during WWI. Operating under the Weimar tabloid-slogan “Black Horror on the Rhine,” this racial panic represented colonial Black-French soldiers as war criminals and rapists, imagining Black masculinity (in a discourse all too familiar in a contemporary US context) as a violent sexual threat to white-German femininity. In spite of the fact that German locals in the Rhineland often had a distinctly favorable opinion of the Black-French soldiers, these sensationalized stories continued to spread throughout Germany well into the interwar period, where they became explicitly focused on the status of the so-called “Rhineland Bastards,” or those 400–600 mixed race children that resulted from the relationships between colonial soldiers and local German women.<sup>9</sup> Although small in number, these children were the objects of intense racial vitriol as the Nazi party gained power because they represented a tangible embodiment of the threat to the eugenics-fueled Nazi obsession with Aryan racial purity.<sup>10</sup> As a result, these children and adolescents were persecuted throughout the 1930s and, in line with Hitler’s decree, forcibly sterilized (and in some cases disappeared) in 1937. Such research echoes Sander Gilman’s (1993) foundational insight, in his illustration of how the intersection of race and gender impacted Freud’s conception of femininity, that Blackness was a powerful racial category throughout twentieth-century Europe used in the racialization of many minoritized ethnicities, Jews among them. Therefore, even as the minority Black populations in Germany were not subject to the same kinds of racist mass murder as the Jewish, Romani, or Slavic peoples, the ideology of anti-Blackness was nevertheless discursively and materially pervasive throughout midcentury Europe.

Returning to Richard’s drawing with this historical context in mind, his description of the Black people-qua-countries as “horrid and nasty” echoes something of the specific “Black Horror” panic in both language and content. Through this invocation, Richard’s fantasy-narrative about his art is arguably metabolizing something of the racist National Socialist *zeitgeist*. Yet this is a complicated image since, at the same time as Richard ventriloquizes the tropes of anti-Black racism, he paradoxically assigns these descriptors to the German territories themselves. One way to make sense of this seeming paradox is to read the signifier “Black” as intensely overdetermined – that is, as a potential site of condensation – which I would contend it invariably is in the case of most twentieth-century racialized discourse. The black sections of these images can thus be seen to simultaneously knit together a racialized, white supremacist logic with the Nazis’ infamous militarized aesthetic, which made liberal use of black leather as a signifier of masculinist imperial power. Indeed, Richard himself pays direct homage to the symbolic power that black military leather

286 has for metonymically representing the Third Reich when he directly incorpo-  
287 rates the “big black boot” (which Klein re-describes as “the Hitler boot”) into his  
288 games, even going so far as to goose-step around the consulting room in a  
289 mimetic display of Nazi allegiance (Klein, 1998 [1961], p. 187). In this way, the  
290 representation of the expanding Nazi empire through the jagged fractal planes  
291 of black evokes not only the racism Richard narrates, but also the militarized  
292 aesthetics of fascism and even the swastika-emblazoned Nazi flag, which  
293 Richard often drew. Through the over-determined signifier black, Richard’s art  
294 displays a subtle collapse of the discourse of anti-Blackness into the very  
295 signifiers of Nazism itself.

296 Yet, when presented with these *Empire* images and Richard’s accompanying  
297 narration, Klein shows little interest in their racial and political entanglements.  
298 The important yield of the black Hitler boot, for her, is that it leads her back to  
299 the “the black Hitler-father,” which she proposes is likewise represented in the  
300 empire drawings by the black territories (p. 187). Her relative focus on  
301 unconscious phantasies to do with the family means that she never deals directly  
302 with the complex racial and political connotations of these images – just as, ten  
303 years earlier, in her paper on art and infantile anxiety, Klein sidestepped race  
304 when tying reparation to a painting of a “naked negress”; or just as, ten years  
305 later, Winnicott, in his famous “Piggle” case, did not interrogate the racial  
306 dimensions of the Piggle’s nocturnal antagonist “Black Mummy.” As critical  
307 race scholars like Jean Walton (1995), Celia Brickman (2003), and Antonio  
308 Viegó (2007) have rightly shown, race is often either ignored outright or  
309 positioned as a secondary appurtenance in much clinical and theoretical  
310 psychoanalytic work. When it comes to Klein specifically, this is a particularly  
311 complex elision since, as a Jewish-Austrian living in midcentury England, Klein  
312 herself was a racialized subject not afforded the privileges of metropole  
313 whiteness, either Germanic or British. Read biographically in connection with  
314 her own racial identity, it would hardly be a stretch to consider that Klein’s  
315 affinity for a universalizing psychology was a strategic, if not necessarily  
316 intentional, anti-racist bid to reject the kind of desubjectivizing racist discourses  
317 with which she herself was threatened. Therefore, even as her clinical practice  
318 and theoretical work refuse to consider the psycho-political significance of race,  
319 the overall political import of her work is complex and (as postcolonial critics  
320 like Edward Said (2003) have shown in relation to Freud’s work) potentially  
321 contradictory.

322 Thinking with this critique – but not, for all its explanatory force, necessarily  
323 *against* psychoanalysis as a field of potential – part of my proposition here is  
324 that, if psychoanalysis is thought together with social history, then one of the  
325 ideas made available is that these images index a distinctly political uncon-  
326 scious. They register how political formations of imperialism, racism, and  
327 colonialism are inextricable from those more private psychological operations  
328 of family, gender, and sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Approaching any unconscious content

329 manifested in these images entails both the imperial and the family form, insofar  
330 as that “wider social stage” necessarily impacts and organizes subjectivity.  
331 While this is perhaps a well-established point in academic treatments of  
332 psychoanalysis in the humanities and critical social sciences, it remains highly  
333 contested in much clinical work. In the next section, I turn my attention from  
334 Klein’s analysis of Richard’s drawings to the images themselves, taking them up  
335 as meaningful examples of visual culture. In so doing, I consider in greater depth  
336 the cartographic dimensions of these abstract, non-representational *Empires*,  
337 proposing that they issue a precocious critique of empire that addresses itself  
338 simultaneously to the empires abroad as well as to those at home. If interpreted  
339 as a potent intersection between the psychoanalytic and the geopolitical, then  
340 what potential do these images have for gesturing to the anti-imperial capacity  
341 of aesthetics in the clinic?

342 **“With these I could kill Hitler”: drawing “*The Empire*,” and other anti-**  
343 **imperial aspirations**

344 Throughout the course of Richard’s analysis, the shape of *The Empire* would  
345 shift, transforming to include either greater or fewer individual segments (which  
346 Richard typically referred to as “countries”); different ratios of color; and  
347 various kinds of marginalia, such as words, lines, and numbers. Although Klein  
348 notes that from session 24 onwards the colored segments of *The Empire*  
349 continued to have a stable familial referent, other aspects of *The Empire*’s  
350 symbolic capacity evolved as the analysis progressed, with both Richard and  
351 Klein deriving new meanings from his serial reproduction of shapes.

352 One of the most important things to note about these serial images – little  
353 commented on by either Klein or Richard – is that they function as abstract,  
354 non-representational maps. Consciously or not, Richard produced these  
355 drawings as a continuation of his earlier fascination with a world map that  
356 he had found hanging on the wall of the consulting room. While Klein  
357 frequently made a technical point to include various objects in her child analytic  
358 consulting room in London (like small toys, paper and pencils, and water), this  
359 particular clinical space in Scotland was only a temporary provision, organized  
360 specifically to accommodate her two child-analyses while displaced. Klein  
361 rented the room for four days a week, but it was also used by the Girl Guides  
362 who had furnished it with their own décor, including the large map of pre-  
363 WWII nations on the wall. Upon entering the improvised consulting room for  
364 the first time, Richard was immediately attracted to this world map and he  
365 would, throughout his analysis, frequently stand in front of it, gazing at the  
366 geopolitical consolidation of space while talking with Klein. Indeed, it was  
367 through the map that Richard developed one of his first clinical “games,” which  
368 included approaching the map and “picking” a country to discuss. Alternately

369 taking up Greece, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria, he would typically explain  
370 their status in the war, sometimes even singing their national anthems, drawing  
371 their national flags, or acting out some part of their recent military encounters.  
372 Unsurprisingly, many of Richard's earliest clinical associations were thus made  
373 in relation to a literal cartography of midcentury imperialism, since any official  
374 UK interwar map would necessarily include a depiction of the way that  
375 European colonial empires had transformed the geographies of their then  
376 dominions. With the world map hanging over the space of the analysis, Richard  
377 invariably had empire in mind when he began his psychoanalytic sessions.

378 More, though, than just a conversation piece, the world map also played a  
379 key role in Richard's *Empire* drawings. As I mentioned, Richard began the  
380 *Empire* series in his 23rd session (Fig. 3), having evolved these images out of his  
381 previous Oceanic battle scenes (Figs. 1 & 2).<sup>12</sup> Yet, as Richard created these  
382 images, he also actively engaged with the world map on the wall, which he used  
383 to track the expansion of the Third Reich. Having finished his first two *Empire*  
384 drawings in the 23rd session, Richard turns, pencil in hand, to the map,  
385 intending to re-color it himself so that it better indexed the distended borders of  
386 the Nazi Empire as it engulfed neighboring countries.

387 Richard had been sharpening a pencil with his penknife and [...] he  
388 violently blackened the second drawing he had made during this session  
389 [Fig. 3] and pricked it all over with his pencil. He walked up and down the  
390 room, stamping his feet, discovered a Union Jack on a shelf and unfolded  
391 it. He sang 'God Save the King' noisily, looked at the map (which he had  
392 not done for some days), and asked if he could shade in all the countries  
393 which Germany had already taken (the map on the wall dated from the  
394 beginning of the war), but he did not do so when Mrs. K reminded him  
395 that it was not her map. (Klein, 1998 [1961], p. 109)

396 As Richard draws his *Empire*, "violently blacken[ing]" it with the color that  
397 would become emblematic of the symbolic links between racism and Third  
398 Reich, he suddenly apprehends this image's kinship with the world map, turning  
399 to it in an attempt to update its inaccurate imperial cartography. While Richard  
400 did not consciously elaborate the meaning of this transition, the sequence of  
401 events suggests that, having drawn a world map of his own – one that was  
402 incontrovertibly governed by the geographies of empire – he grew frustrated by  
403 the official map's outdated representation of the German empire, which he tried  
404 to correct with his own art practice. By moving from one form of imperial  
405 cartography to another, Richard highlights the geopolitical significance of his  
406 *Empire* drawings, indicating how they function as visual alternatives to the  
407 official colonial cartography of Europe and its "Others." As the Third Reich  
408 gained ground, Richard formed and re-formed the boundaries of his imperial

maps, implicitly drawing attention to the multiplicitous ways of visualizing the cartography of empire.

One might be tempted to think that, given this cartographical investment, Richard's *Empire* maps run the risk of extending imperial violence. As many postcolonial scholars have rightly argued (Said, 1978; McClintock, 1995; Jay and Ramaswamy, 2004), the modern practice of cartography has been thoroughly enmeshed with the geopolitics of imperial land management, which has long used visual representations of land to assert and codify European dominance. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's (1985) observation that the work of art emerges from the violent conflict between earth and world – that is, from the imposed European “worlding” of an earth assumed to be previously uninscribed – art historian Deborah Cherry (2002) explains that “it was in ‘the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project’ that earth was transformed into world, land into landscape,” a remark that picks up on W.J.T. Mitchell's (1994) formative contention that landscape painting was a material manifestation of imperial power (Spivak, cited in Cherry, 2002, p. 107). Beginning with the so-called cartographic revolution in the fifteenth century, European maps were produced as material, political tools designed to extend colonial power by giving visual form to what Edward Said (1978) calls the “imaginative geography” of empire, in which mapmaking convened a visual regime of power by materializing artificial political boundaries that were subsequently imposed on land and indigenous populations alike. In other words, rather than serving merely descriptive or functionalist ends, maps shape, define, and (as Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) has famously said) effectively “produce” space, dividing and enclosing land to construct new politically significant, spatialized territorialities. Without maps, for instance, the division of Africa that took place at the Berlin conference in 1884–1885 would have been all but unimaginable, since the content of that imperial contestation was a brokering of visual, cartographic lines by the major European powers. The borders and boundaries created by maps are thus not objective or benign; rather, they are often – and have been historically – an extension of colonial power whose explicit imperative is to manage physically distant territory in the service of the metropole. As Anne McClintock (1995) puts it in *Imperial Leather*, cartography is “the servant of colonial plunder, for the knowledge constituted by the map both preceded and legitimized the conquest of territory” (p. 27). To the extent, then, that Richard becomes a civilian mapmaker through his analysis, he joins in a well-established colonial tradition.

Yet, however much Richard's *Empires* may implicitly cite a history of colonial cartography, my wager here is that their particular content ultimately disrupts any reading of them as unilaterally extending imperial itineraries in the service of the metropole. For, while Richard may hail each of his drawings as “THE *Empire*,” (emphasis added), all of the individual images importantly

451 depict a multi-national conglomerate. Each drawing demarcates the “bad” Black  
452 German father as much as the “good” light-blue Mummy Britain, the red  
453 Russian Empire (Klein, 1998 [1961], pp. 198–203), and the purple Belgian  
454 Empire (p. 143). By taking four major European metropolises, abstracting them,  
455 and using crisscrossing black lines to fracture them internally, Richard’s  
456 *Empires* visually disrupt and deconstruct the shape of metropolitan dominion.  
457 Moreover, their construction of the periphery through sharp, shrapnel-like  
458 triangles which encircle the edges of each *Empire* suggests the latent violence of  
459 imperial formation, thereby critiquing fantasies of the self-contained and self-  
460 sustaining empire form and inviting a perspectival shift on imperial world-  
461 building. In other words, by taking aim at the metropole – objectified, splayed,  
462 divided, and parceled out – Richard’s artwork does not simply reify extant  
463 colonial holdings or imperial imaginaries; instead, it visually rearranges them. If  
464 the non-representational abstractness of the drawings is what makes them  
465 difficult to immediately read in relation to cartography and empire, then my  
466 claim here is that it is paradoxically this very abstractness that allows them to  
467 function contrapuntally as an internal, deconstructive critique of metropole  
468 coherence, durability, and desirability.

469 Indeed, this was a point Richard himself suggested in his sessions. In a striking  
470 enunciation, he declares that part of his intention in producing these images is as  
471 a form of political activism *against* fascist incursion – which is to say, *against*  
472 the latest iteration of European imperial political economy. He announces this  
473 in his 47th session when – after making one of the last drawings in his *The*  
474 *Empire* series – he rather dramatically turns his attention to his colored pencils,  
475 “compar[ing] them with each other by putting them side by side on the table.  
476 Then, taking them all together in his hands, he waved them in the air saying,  
477 ‘With these I could kill Hitler[!]’” (p. 227). A noteworthy assertion, this  
478 optimistic political pronouncement speaks to how Richard understood his art as  
479 a direct challenge to fascist imperial expansion, a political articulation not  
480 dissimilar to coeval Frankfurt school demands for the politicization of aesthetics  
481 as a response to what members like Walter Benjamin diagnosed as the rampant  
482 fascist aestheticization of politics. As Richard and Klein discuss throughout the  
483 analysis, the black territories stand for Richard’s prototypical “bad object” and  
484 his representation of them in his *Empires* corresponds, politically, with his  
485 avowed anti-fascist ideology. Through the black sections, Richard’s drawings  
486 thus visually schematize the emerging consolidation of a newly forming empire,  
487 the Third Reich, which itself had explicit intentions of colonizing land on both  
488 the European and African continents. Insofar as they were tracking and  
489 critiquing militant German expansionism, Richard’s *Empires* were therefore not  
490 simply functioning to reproduce and stabilize imperial power – far from it.

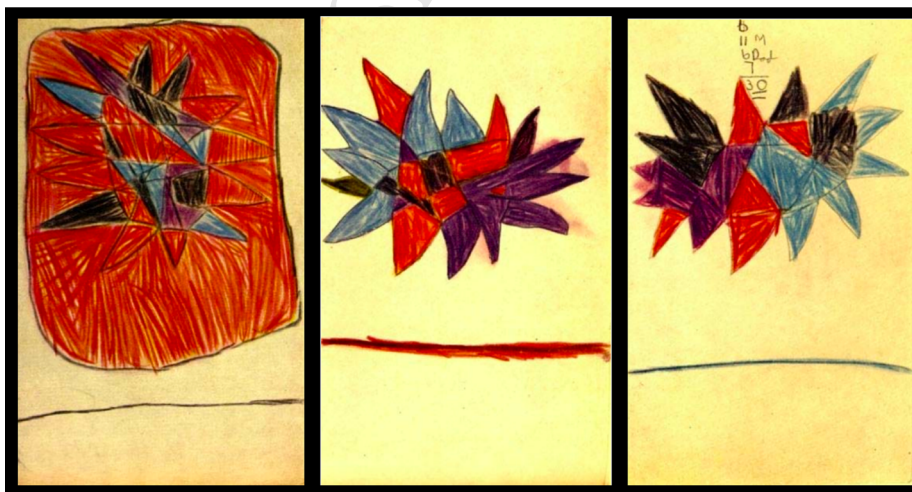
491 But while Richard’s avowed and conscious intentionality with regard to his  
492 drawings may stop at the water’s edge of anti-fascism – he never speaks of  
493 imperialism *per se* – my broader and more tendentious suggestion is that, if we



494 read the images closely and allow for the possibility of a political unconscious  
495 operating in advance of political consciousness, then these drawings offer a  
496 critique of the British, as well as the Nazi, Empire. Through their representation  
497 of various empires dominating an entire world, Richard's drawings engage in a  
498 social commentary on imperialism that encompasses more than just a specific,  
499 anti-fascist critique of the Third Reich. The non-representational nature of the  
500 images constructs parallels between fascist Germany and many of the other  
501 dominant European imperial powers, Britain among them. Thought formally,  
502 this representation of Britain and Germany together, visually paired under the  
503 banner *Empire*, implicates Britain in the critiques of violent militarized and  
504 racialized imperial expansionism that Richard at least might have consciously  
505 intended for Germany alone. In other words, if there is an interrogation of  
506 empire being enacted through Richard's drawings in the clinic, then my  
507 proposal here is that it is an interrogation that refers not just to the Nazi  
508 Empire – but to the British Empire as well.

509 Readers can see this throughout Richard's drawings, since he frequently  
510 makes a point of putting "Daddy" Germany and "Mummy" Great Britain in  
511 direct competition with one another. Following his frustration with not being  
512 allowed to draw on the world map, Richard began drawing yet another *Empire*  
513 in session 24 (Fig. 4).

514 He began to draw speaking at the same time of the possibility of an  
515 invasion by Germany [...] He had been drawing the usual big starfish and  
516 then divided it into sections. He said Daddy was coming, made the black



**Figure 4:** Compilation of "*The Empire*" from session 24; session 30; session 32. (Klein Archives, Wellcome Library).

517 pencil march towards the drawing, at the same time humming a marching  
518 tune which was meant to be sinister, and he filled in some sections with  
519 black. [...] Then he coloured some sections light blue, and while doing so  
520 he looked up at Mrs. K and said, 'I feel happy.' [...] A moment later,  
521 having finished the blue sections, he said, 'Can you see how Mummy has  
522 spread herself. She has got much more of the empire.' (p. 111).

523 While this aesthetic development may soothe Richard – Mummy's expansion-  
524 ism thwarts the invading Third Reich – the paralleled competition for territorial  
525 conquest makes visible the fact that even if Germany was unequivocally the  
526 most dangerous imperial threat in the 1940s, Britain was also still itself an  
527 empire – and the world's largest empire at that. By rendering rivalrous  
528 topographies of empire in black and in blue, Richard's drawings call attention  
529 time and again to the imperial itineraries that structured both German fascism  
530 and midcentury British liberal democracy. For instance, as Richard waffles  
531 about the "niceness" of the expanding black territories he was in the process of  
532 partitioning out in session 32, he ultimately concludes that "it does not matter  
533 because Mummy was going to have most of the countries [anyway]. She  
534 [already] had a lot of them in the centre and also a good part of the coast" (p.  
535 153). Richard's *Empires* bundle into one the mother and the motherland,  
536 representing them together through the alternately expanding and contracting  
537 blue sections which stand, however abstractly, for the variable size of the British  
538 Empire. Although Richard may judge the expansion of the blue British sections  
539 favorably, his very ability to compare them to the Third Reich registers how  
540 naturalized conquest and domination were to the British political system. In this  
541 way, his *Empires* precociously appraise the expansiveness of the British Empire  
542 as it already existed, with dominion over many countries, inland and coastal  
543 alike. Through Richard's anxiety about the spreading German black, the  
544 *Empires* therefore evoke the threat posed to Britain by the Nazi Empire; but, by  
545 visually paralleling the British Empire with the Third Reich, they also remind  
546 the viewer that Britain too was an empire with a global, multinational  
547 dominion.

548 Put in this context, Richard's images of *Empire* – which thus speak as much  
549 to the British colonial empire as they do to the National Socialist Reich – raise  
550 prescient ethico-political questions about the status of Britain's own imperial  
551 project, questions that Britain itself would have to confront in the years of  
552 decolonization following the war. Even as Richard never himself articulated a  
553 conscious critique of empire as a political form, and even as he remained  
554 unwaveringly identified with Britain's imperial mission throughout the analysis,  
555 as a cultural, symbolic object his art can be understood as operating with more  
556 potential polyvocality than his conscious intention, subtly subverting and  
557 deconstructing European imperial hegemony. By mapping the fractured

558 metropole, Richard's *Empires* provide an alternative cartography – even a  
559 cartography of alterity – whose aesthetic intervention serves, however uncon-  
560 sciously, as an anti-imperialist critique of empire enabled by the space of the  
561 clinic.

## 562 **"The Empire" strikes back: psychoanalysis, anti-imperialism, and the clinic**

563 In taking up Richard's *Empires* and mining them for their political engagement  
564 with (anti-)imperialism, this article participates in a well-established trend  
565 within postcolonial theory that both relies on and critiques psychoanalysis.  
566 With just cause, many prominent postcolonial theorists – from Frantz Fanon  
567 and Aimé Césaire, to Hommi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak – have  
568 exposed psychoanalysis's euro-centric model of mind, even as they source  
569 aspects of its theory to deconstruct the psychic life of colonial oppression.  
570 Klein's thinking is no exception here. As I have discussed, her model of mind is,  
571 in many ways, an echo of the political landscape of twentieth-century Europe.  
572 This is clear not just in her deployment of war vocabulary when naming the  
573 topography of infantile psychic life, but also in her occasional use of explicitly  
574 colonial logics when describing the infant's invasive, aggressive, and expro-  
575 priative relation to the mother's body. In one particularly memorable example,  
576 taken from a lecture Klein delivered at Caxton Hall in London five years before  
577 her analysis of Richard began, she even went so far as to cite British practices of  
578 settler-colonialism as a political exemplification of infantile reparative pro-  
579 cesses. Stating that the "ruthless cruelty against native populations" was  
580 tantamount to the infant's "phantasied attacks against the imaginary babies in  
581 the mother's body," Klein (1975 [1937]) rather incredibly surmised that this  
582 violence was satisfactorily ameliorated by the colonial resettlement and  
583 "repopulat[ion]" of the country by settler-citizens from the metropole (p.  
584 334). A baffling claim given its insensitivity to the violence of colonial genocide  
585 and extermination, Klein's example effectively showcases how empire was  
586 central to her meta-psychological theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depres-  
587 sive positions, even as she simultaneously elided the politicality of this very  
588 centrality by recourse to a universalized, private psychology.

589 In light of this, I want to conclude by thinking, however speculatively, about  
590 how Richard's *Empires*, produced in and through the clinical relation,  
591 productively resist such neo-colonial scriptings of human psychology. The  
592 rubrics that we use to narrate human psychology have substantial political  
593 effects on what we, socially, consider to be natural – and thus implicitly moral  
594 or ethical – feeling and behavior. By reading Richard's art as a site of an anti-  
595 imperial aesthetics, part of what I am pursuing in this article is an understanding  
596 of the clinic as a space of *necessarily* political engagement, one in which both  
597 patient and analyst are grappling with and through a political unconscious. The

598 impact of this reorientation is, in the first instance, a transformation of  
599 established credos about clinical psychoanalysis's neutrality, apoliticality, and  
600 impartiality, one that encourages a reconsideration of the clinic as not just a  
601 political, but also a potentially politically progressive, space (Danto, 2005;  
602 Layton *et al.*, 2006; Dimen, 2011). But, in the second instance, this  
603 reorientation also calls for a more politicized understanding of the analyst's  
604 aspirations, aims, and interpretations. For, if Klein was (in)famously rigorous in  
605 her interpretations of unconscious material in the clinic, then one of the  
606 considerations with which she refused to engage was to do with the very  
607 different ethico-political meanings that ostensibly universal psychic processes –  
608 such as “splitting” or “projection” – take on when applied to different objects.  
609 For instance, the absolute and unequivocal rejection of racist neo-Nazism has a  
610 different value than the idealization of a lover or friend – even as both of these  
611 phenomena could equally be described as splitting. Close attention to the ethico-  
612 political status of the content of psychic life, in other words, is vital for any  
613 decolonial, anti-racist psychological practice.

614 This is hardly a new observation since it is the same conclusion Fanon reached  
615 when, in working clinically with a Black man who dreamt of being white, he  
616 insisted on the necessity of a “combined action” in psychoanalytic practice.  
617 Writes Fanon (2008 [1952]):

618       What emerges is the need for a combined action on the individual *and* the  
619       group. As a psychoanalyst I must help my patient to “*consciousnessize*” his  
620       unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, *but*  
621       *also* to act along the lines of a change in social structure. (p. 80, emphasis  
622       mine)

623 While Fanon never outlined a specific clinical program to match this call – for  
624 all the better, really, since no such single program could ever do justice to the  
625 diversity and particularity of individual subjectivity – his aspirational convoca-  
626 tion of a “combined action” stems from his recognition of the political  
627 valuation – the subjective violence – manifested through his patient's dream.  
628 When understood through the lens Fanon provides, Richard's case constitutes a  
629 rich site for viewing the role of politics in the clinic and for reflecting on the  
630 inevitable politicality of the analyst's own interpretations and silences. By  
631 bringing postcolonial theory together with clinical practice, Richard's drawings  
632 create for readers and for viewers, decades on, an opening through which to  
633 visualize the anti-imperial, decolonial potentiality of the clinic.

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## 641 Declarations

642 Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states  
643 that there is no conflict of interest.

644

645

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654 *of the Clinic*, draws on an archive of clinical psychoanalytic encounters from  
655 mid century Britain and its (post)colonies to theorize how the clinic constitutes  
656 an innovative realm of political action.

## 657 Notes

658

- 661 1. The published version of *Narrative of a Child Analysis* records 93 official sessions; however, Klein's  
662 pocketbook lists 96.
- 663 2. This idea of a political unconscious draws on the substantial tradition of politically minded  
664 psychoanalytic theorizing begun with first-generation analysts like Otto Fenichel and Wilhelm  
665 Reich, and continued more contemporarily by Frosh (1987), Samuels (1993), and Jacoby (1996).  
666 However, my theorization of the concept differs quite significantly from Frederic Jameson's (1981)  
667 famous treatise of the same name, since not only does Jameson concern himself primarily with  
668 narrative (while I am here interested in visual culture), but more significantly the main contribution  
669 of his work is to offer a methodological guide for reading the political content of creative works  
670 rather than a speculative theory of subjectivity.
- 671 3. Modified portions of the previous two paragraphs were published elsewhere (Laubender, 2019).
- 672 4. Modified versions of the last four sentences were previously published elsewhere (Laubender, 2019).
- 673 5. In a representative critique, Elisabeth Geleerd (1963) charges that "Klein's random way of  
674 interpreting does not reflect the material but, rather, her preconceived theoretical assumptions  
675

- 679 regarding child development” (p. 506). This was a common critique of Klein, echoed even by some  
680 of her main supporters and acolytes like Donald Meltzer and Hanna Segal.
- 681 6. A modified version of this paragraph was previously published elsewhere (Laubender 2019).
- 682 7. For further reading on how Klein’s view of phantasy derives from her reliance on a theory of  
683 instinctual phylogenesis, see Isaacs (1948 [1943]) and Hinshelwood (1998, p. 34).
- 684 8. Annegret Ehmann (1998) explains the specificity of German racism, which (unlike its post-  
685 revolution French or American counterparts) was particularly invested in the maintenance and  
686 reproduction of an originally Germanic race. As Ehmann argues, “Antisemitism was [therefore ...]  
687 only part of a more extensive concept of racism underlying Nazi population policy, which in turn is  
688 rooted in the specifically German notion of the nation and Volk” (p. 116). Although not treated  
689 equally, all non-Germanic peoples were subject to Nazi population control.
- 690 9. German eugenics’ interest in the “Rhineland Bastards” extends earlier pre-war eugenics research in  
691 the then colony of Southwest Africa by anthropologist and anatomist Dr. Eugen Fischer, whose  
692 research on the “Rehoboth Bastards” culminated in the publication of his 1913 “The Political  
693 Importance of the Bastard,” securing his role as a leading research director in the Nazi regime. This  
694 connection helps clarify the link between intra-German eugenics and German colonial eugenics  
695 since it was in Germany’s African colonies, prior to 1915, that many later Nazi racial policies  
696 (around miscegenation especially) found their first articulation. For further reading, see Ehmann  
697 (1998) and Kesting (1998).
- 698 10. For further reading on the particular types of racism deployed in the Nazi eugenic programs, see  
699 Katz (1998). There, Katz makes the important distinction between intra-Aryan forms of Nazi  
700 population management that targeted criminals, prostitutes, the homeless, and the mentally ill;  
701 extra-Aryan racism against non-Jews (like Blacks and Slavs); and specifically anti-Semitic racism,  
702 which “employs the notion of race, in its own peculiar version, to express a larger systemic  
703 comprehension of the historical and metaphysical order” (p. 61).
- 704 11. Although the terms “colonialism” and “imperialism” are often used interchangeably, in this article I  
705 follow Richard Begam and Michael Moses (2007) in using both terms, but with slight differences in  
706 emphasis, in which “‘imperialism’ refers to both the policy and practice whereby a nation establishes  
707 rule over another country or group of countries through the application of military force or  
708 conquest, while ‘colonialism’ designates the institution and administration of an imperial power’s  
709 foreign holdings and dependencies” (p. 3).
- 710 12. There are two prior drawings (from sessions 17 and 18) that have the recognizable shape of the later  
711 *Empire* drawings. However, Richard was still calling these early drawings “starfish.” The first  
712 drawing he names the *Empire* was in session 23.

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