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Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive (review)

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ization had “complicated the process of thinking through decisions as to how to begin and to conduct treatments with certain patients.” Invoking Barthes and Ricoeur to help understand “the problem of difference as difference” in the psychoanalytic process construed as one in which “the task is to attend to the action of approaching the limits of what can be known,” Cole sees the inevitability of enactment, and then its subsequent in-depth analysis, as the method through which such questions can be most satisfactorily engaged and the “traumatic inscription” that infects the identity of the patient can be worked through.

On the National Public Radio news, the day I finished this review, it was announced that rates of resistance to HIV/AIDS drugs are on the aggressive rise, affecting as many as one in four people with new infections. Medically, this means that those newly infected will die more quickly and more morbidly, as was the case in the earlier days of the epidemic, at least if they are not diagnosed soon after infection and helped to comply with no errors with the complex medication regimens that are the only chance for people with drug-resistant HIV strains, often with extremely difficult side effects.

Our medical infrastructure is unprepared for this new wave. The necessary tests for HIV viral load and type are technically complex and thus expensive; people still resist getting tested; the same factors that make good mental health

treatment difficult to get also make good HIV treatment difficult to get. And we live in an interconnected world; when the new, resilient virus migrates to the global south, as it will, the access to treatment some manage to get here will be difficult, most often impossible.

Psychoanalysis is still, despite this excellent book, wholly unprepared for a new wave of morbid AIDS—unprepared institutionally, unprepared in the necessary technical innovations Cole’s book helps us consider, and unprepared in the internal lives of most analysts. Not only do we have work to do to prepare to treat a new generation of patients with HIV/AIDS who will come to us for psychoanalysis and for psychoanalytic psychotherapy, but we need to sort out how our discoveries can be made applicable to the vast numbers of people we will never be able to treat with these methods, a topic Cole does not address. In this sense Cole has given us more Leif Ericsson’s Map of Vinland than a treatment manual: more terrifying, more interesting, vitally necessary to our survival and development, and vitally useful.

—Richard Ruth

Verhaeghe, Paul. *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive*. New York: Other P, 2001.

Paul Verhaeghe’s collection of essays on Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis is unified by an underlying thesis: psychoanalysis is not

about “sexuality,” construed in either a narrow or wide sense. Strains of vulgar Freudianism mindlessly set the complexities of cognition to the monotonous refrain of “pee-pee, caca.” More sophisticated readers of Freud seek to save the master by pursuing a defensive strategy whereby it is conceded that Freud does indeed place sexuality at the center of psychical life, but that what Freud means by sexuality is much broader than is usually acknowledged. Many Lacanian interpreters of the Freudian legacy pursue just such a strategy, transforming Lacan, in turn, into a theorist obsessed with the (non-existent) sexual relationship. Thanks to an unspoken general consensus, doubts about whether or not sexuality really is the dominant motif in the unconscious are effectively stifled. The genuine merit of Verhaeghe’s book lies in his total break with the viewpoint that the psyche is organized exclusively around sexuality. Verhaeghe rejects this cherished analytic assumption by unambiguously relegating the “sexualized” formations of the unconscious to a residual, secondary position. What then, for Verhaeghe, is sexuality secondary to within psychical life?

Verhaeghe answers this query in several ways. However, the foundation of his approach resides in Lacan’s register theory. Verhaeghe’s reconsideration of the role of sexuality in psychoanalysis is executed *vis-à-vis* establishing a series of aligned distinctions rooted in the Lacanian distinction between, on one side, the Real,

and, on the other side, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. For example, Verhaeghe shows how the late Lacan's dichotomy between two types of *jouissance* ("other *jouissance*" and "phallic *jouissance*") is a translation of Freud's foundational division between the primary and secondary processes. But this is a translation that leads to an important shift: the other *jouissance* of the primary processes is not "sexual" in any sense whatsoever. All sexual meanings and connotations connected with the mobile distributions of libidinal investments is a result of the secondary processes channeling this primordial *jouissance* through the imprinting, representational defiles of sexual (i.e., "phallic") symbolism (according to Verhaeghe, this stamping of sexuality onto a non-sexual Real is what Freud means by "binding" [*Bindung*]). After the fact of this binding of other *jouissance*, of translating the primary processes into the "language" of phallic sexuality, the pre-/non-sexual Real is retroactively distorted by being rendered exclusively in the shape of sexuality as manifest at the level of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Furthermore, Verhaeghe asserts that the principle feature of the Real is not only that it is inappropriately portrayed within an interpretive scheme constructed around sexual motifs, but that it is intrinsically antithetical to any form of representation whatsoever. This amounts to a restatement of Lacan's famous *tuché-automaton* distinction from the eleventh seminar (a distinction that Verhaeghe frequently em-

phloys): the Real cause (*tuché*) is the origin or catalyst (a chance occurrence, an unpredictable "traumatic" event) for the Symbolically articulated structures of the signifying unconscious (*automaton*). But, this cause cannot be adequately rendered or digested by the "signifiers" of the unconscious which it itself is, in large part, responsible for shaping and setting in motion. The Real is, for Lacan, the unrepresentable ground of representation, the necessarily absent origin of the play of unconscious formations. Verhaeghe struggles to thoroughly think through the multiple psychoanalytic and philosophical implications of this basic dynamic.

In the first chapter, "The Riddle of Castration Anxiety," Verhaeghe asserts that "*the idea of castration is in the first place a defense against anxiety, and in that sense it is a secondary formation*" (10). Freud, in his 1937 "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," pessimistically concludes that castration is an immovable, unanalyzable "rock," a deadlock against which analytic interpretation runs aground with respect to both sexes. Thus, castration is some type of irreducible kernel that simply must be recognized (but cannot be further decomposed) by the analyst. Verhaeghe believes that Lacanian theory advances beyond the resignation of this conclusion. The claim is that the Real of anxiety is not originally linked to castration. Instead, the primordial kind of anxiety experienced by the individual arises from the situation of being passive with respect

to the enigmatic, unpredictable desire of an Other.

Although this first essay is brief, one can easily reverse engineer the steps in Verhaeghe's reasoning. The infant, in its state of pre-maturational helplessness, is utterly dependent on others for the satisfaction of its needs and wants; without this vital assistance, the infant is exposed both to increasing tension arising from unmet somatic requirements as well as, ultimately, to the risk of death. Since the maternal figure is usually the first, primary "Other" responsible for the life-and-death matter of nurturing the child, the young individual experiences a great deal of anxiety in trying to figure out what this mysterious and powerful Other desires from him/her in order to guarantee protection from the suffering connected with his/her corporeal condition. The anxiety associated with this passive situation is domesticated by being cast in the mold of castration. The "lack" of passive helplessness is concealed in being interpreted by the subject as the "lack" of the phallus—namely, the non-possession of whatever objects or signifiers are latched onto by the child as answers to the question of what the (m)Other wants. The various symbolizations of castration operate to bind and contain anxiety, rather than being the primordial source of this negative affect. Put differently, this is the process whereby the indeterminate anxiety of passivity is transformed into the determinate fear of castration, indicating that castration anxiety isn't anxiety in

the strictly psychoanalytic sense, but a form of fear *qua* defense against anxiety.

Verhaeghe's fourth essay, "Trauma and Psychopathology in Freud and Lacan," presents a case for rigorously distinguishing between trauma as a haphazard occurrence that gratuitously inflicts pain upon the person ("accidental trauma") and trauma as a necessary feature situated at the origin of subjectivity proper ("structural trauma"). What does Verhaeghe view as the structural trauma lying at the root of the unconscious? Once again, the tension between the unrepresentable Real and the representational domains of Lacan's other two registers is invoked: in particular, Verhaeghe advances the idea that the unavoidable failure involved in trying to locate suitable representatives for *Trieb* is precisely the trauma which all individuals are pre-destined to undergo by virtue of their metapsychological constitution. Structural trauma is an effect of the impossibility of an Imaginary-Symbolic re-transcription of the Real.

Apropos of two key concepts—drive and the Real—certain subtle inconsistencies can be detected on Verhaeghe's part. As regards drive, Verhaeghe vacillates between three claims that often sound identical, but that are, in fact, significantly different from each other: one, drive itself is internally split between the unrepresentable (i.e., the Real) and the represented (i.e., the Imaginary and the Symbolic); two, drive itself is the unrepresentable Real im-

pinging upon the secondary orders of the Imaginary-Symbolic axis (as the signifiers of the phallic *jouissance* of the sexual field); three, drives are divided into two types, involving a conflict between *Eros qua* phallic *jouissance* and *Todestrieb qua* other *jouissance*. The second claim risks backsliding into a vitalism—Verhaeghe is frequently eager to show that Lacan is not a vitalist of any stripe—dressed up in new terminological clothing, namely, a presentation of *Trieb* as a mysterious force welling up from an embodied source. Apropos of the third claim, more work would be required to show how a renewed appeal to the *Eros-Todestrieb* dichotomy of the second topography avoids encountering all of the old problems surrounding this difficult knot of concepts and metaphors in Freud. That said, what about the first claim, the assertion that each and every drive is internally divided?

Verhaeghe's talk of a divided drive is fully consistent with Freud's 1915 definition of drive in "Drives and Their Vicissitudes" (as well as Lacan's description of *Trieb* as a "montage" or "collage"). Freud states that all drives, by definition, consist of a "source," "pressure," "aim," and "object"; he also famously remarks there that drives lie on the frontier "between soma and psyche." The source and pressure are closely associated with the corporeal forces of the libidinal economy, while the aims and objects are established as ideational representations and mnemonic traces operative within a psychical system of inscriptions. Furthermore,

in his metapsychological essays, Freud stipulates that drives are known or encountered only via their representatives. It can now be seen that Verhaeghe's oscillation between sometimes speaking of the drives as unrepresentable and, at other times, referring to them as internally bifurcated is not a trifling, unimportant detail. In the Freudian metapsychological system, drives are not simply obscure undercurrents incapable of being represented. On the contrary, *Trieb* as such doesn't exist independently of its representational mediators; in fact, such mediation is inscribed in the very heart of its own architecture. In Lacanian terms, portraying drives as purely unrepresentable, as the Real alone, is to misrecognize their properly "extimate" character, the fact that their status is heterogeneous (i.e., simultaneously Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic). Thus, to say that drive *per se* is opposed to being rendered by representational structures is to miss the paradoxical, borderline status that is one of the novel hallmarks of the psychoanalytic concept of *Trieb*. What's more, Verhaeghe never really provides an explanation for why the drives cannot be represented (a claim that sounds contrary to Freud's position that drives operate in the psyche and are recognizable by the observer exclusively through the fashion in which they are intertwined with ideational representatives).

Similarly, with the Real, Verhaeghe sometimes sounds caught in a state of indecision. On the one hand, the Real is treated as an-

terior or external to the Symbolic. On the other hand, due to worries that such a description risks reducing Lacan to a kind of developmental vitalist, Verhaeghe occasionally insists that the Real is strictly internal to the Symbolic. The Real doesn't pre-exist the Symbolic, but is produced immanently out of the internal impasses of the symbolic order (this should lead to some skepticism about the notion of the Real being utterly unrepresentable). Given just how heavily Verhaeghe relies upon this particular Lacanian register for explanatory purposes, sorting out its nuances is crucial for this text.

The fifth and sixth essays, "Subject and Body" and "Mind your Body," seek to shed light on a Lacanian theory of embodiment. What is the position of the body in Lacan's thought? "Subject and Body" does a nice job of charting the course of Lacan's engagement with the notion of embodiment as it evolves over the course of his teaching. Verhaeghe unveils some surprising consistencies connecting the early period of the "mirror stage" and the later seminars of the 1970s. In "Mind your Body," Verhaeghe argues that the late Lacan aims at overcoming Descartes, at superseding the dualisms associated with the modern subject. Verhaeghe claims that Lacan dispenses with dualism. This sixth essay is a bit disappointing in two ways. First, it pays absolutely no attention to the myriad references in Lacan's work to Descartes. Verhaeghe is silent as regards Lacan's meticulous examinations of the (often positive) relation between

the *Cogito* and his own theory of subjectivity. Second, isn't the fundamental opposition between the Real and the Symbolic a dichotomy of sorts? Verhaeghe, while maintaining that a Lacanian stance rejects dualistic models, doesn't explain why his own arguments are not themselves reliant upon just such models.

In terms of style and presentation, Verhaeghe's English is awkward at times, and the text is rife with grammatical errors and misspellings. Also, parts of the book are repetitive. For example, the second essay ("From Impossibility to Inability") duplicates a discussion contained in *Does the Woman Exist?*. Another symptom of repetitiveness is that Verhaeghe cites the same few passages from Lacan's work again and again.

Nonetheless, Verhaeghe displays an impressive mastery of Lacan's corpus. Furthermore, he deserves to be praised for the boldness and cogency of his departure from the hackneyed and questionable appeal to sexuality as the inexplicable substratum of the unconscious. *Beyond Gender* is definitely representative of the current state of the art in Lacanian theory.

—Adrian Johnston

Shepherdson, Charles.
Vital Signs: Nature,
Culture, Psychoanalysis.
New York: Routledge,
2000.

A glance at the endorsements of Shepherdson's *Vital Signs* immediately affirms the significance of

this book. Judith Butler states categorically that "Shepherdson tackles some of the most difficult and pressing problems in psychoanalysis and feminism"; Joan Copjec proclaims "[t]his book is a revolutionary examination of French feminism"; and Leo Goldberger, editor of *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* asserts that "Charles Shepherdson brilliantly illuminates the theoretical specificity of psychoanalysis as a unique knowledge base, focusing on topics of particular interest within feminist theory and clinical practice." After reading Shepherdson's book, it became clear that such striking endorsements were no exaggeration; *Vital Signs* provides an extraordinarily lucid account of Irigaray and Kristeva. And the final chapter on Foucault demonstrates that while Lacan and Foucault are not in *every sense* compatible, they are not incompatible (as is so often argued).

Shepherdson maintains that the "distorted reception" these influential theorists receive results from their interpretation "through an inappropriate paradigm." This paradigm, as Shepherdson argues, is the all too familiar distinction between "the social construction of gender" and a "biological reductionist" approach. More succinctly, he contends that within this paradigm both the scholarly and clinical contribution of psychoanalytic theory as it relates to feminist theory—particularly French feminism—is virtually lost. Rather, he argues that psychoanalysis must be understood on its *own terms*—that it is only by