

Antonio Viego's *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies*

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Dead Subjects argues that the notion of the ego in psychoanalytic theory pathologizes people of color in and through legal and clinical processes in the United States. Antonio Viego explains that in ego-psychoanalysis, the most popular interpretation of Sigmund Freud in the United States since the 1930s, the ego is naturalized as a universal subject that is whole and transparent. Unfortunately, in ego-psychoanalysis, notions of a whole and universal subject have been used to support assimilationist efforts since the 1930s and 1940s. These notions in fact either reduce people of color to a marker of difference or render them incomplete subjects by concealing ethnic whiteness and heteronormativity. As a consequence, people of color are forced to assimilate into white heteronormativity in order to be “cured” of insanity and at the same time are ethnic-racialized psychologically, but barred from becoming whole (white) subjects. In this way, Viego exposes how ego-centered psychoanalysis pathologizes people of color, a process that has become highly pervasive through its adoption in and influence on legal and clinical practices.

Dead Subjects theorizes racialization into psychoanalysis through Jacques Lacan’s theory of the insufficiency of language to fully communicate any subject’s desire. In order to support his argument, Viego develops an original interpretation of Lacan’s earlier work and uses a wide range of examples from Latino Studies to support his claims. Viego proposes a parallel between the border-queer subject in Latino/a Studies and the hysteric and barred subject in Lacanian

psychoanalysis. The hysteric and the barred subject destabilize the universal subject of ego-psychoanalysis in the therapeutic session; much like border-queer subjectivities destabilize master narratives, the notion of valuable knowledge, and even what is a knowable subject in academia. Just as the hysteric challenges the Freudian assumption that the analyst should define the parameters of what is normal, border-queer subjects externalize new subjectivities onto the social and political structure. In this way, both the hysteric and border-queer subjectivities display their assemblage and constantly produce new “symptoms” in need of new interpretation, which in turn affirms their piecemeal qualities and symbolic slipperiness. By displaying their assemblage and symbolic slips, the hysteric and border-queer subjects exceed language—although they resist at a level of language, they cannot be encompassed by it. In his interpretation, Viego shows how border-queer subjects exceed ethnic categorization and can subvert racialization through theories of Latino Studies such as rasquache aesthetics, oppositional consciousness, or disidentificatory practices, all of which represent a kind of disengagement and escape from the assimilationist and ethno-racist universalist terms of the ego.

Viego’s analysis also theorizes and exemplifies how to bring together historicist with psychoanalytic critique. In the ego-psychoanalysis chapter, for example, he draws from census data, immigration trends, and personal correspondence between key figures in psychoanalysis in the 1930s to trace the genealogy of how ego-based psychoanalysis spread in the United States and how the practice itself was influenced by the contemporaneous social and political trends of assimilation. Viego provides performance scholars with an important theory to understand the psychoanalytic dimensions of the performance of identity—especially in relation to processes of ethnic racialization. In particular, his explanation of the divided subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis is in conversation with the performance of authenticity and identity, placing Viego in dialogue with much recent work in performance studies. His analysis of the way that the subject exceeds language can lay the psychoanalytic foundation for what performance analysis has theorized in other dimensions as embodied repertoires and hauntings. In this way, Viego’s theorization can provide a strong foundation to include Lacanian psychoanalysis as an important dimension of identity-based performance analysis.

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