

Afterword: Uncanny Modernities, Early and Late

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I.

As these lively essays attest, the modern self has always been open to spiritual doubles, to others of one kind or another, to ghostly presences that seem uncannily at home amidst the intimate reaches of ordinary existence, notwithstanding the norms of liberal individualism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2016:125). This fact has become ever more overtly acknowledged as the global reorganization of economy and society in the late twentieth century unsettled the architecture of Euro-centric civil order and its secular orthodoxies. Hard-edged sureties seemed increasingly gas lit by spectral uncertainties, by a sense of slippage between the way we experience things, and the way they are authoritatively held to be; also by the return of something long suppressed at the heart of the most familiar aspects of everyday life (Freud 2019; Kirsch, Mahlke, and van Dijk, above). This is plainly evident in contemporary popular culture across the planet, in the vernaculars through which we play with images capable of surfacing stifled or unspeakable sensations. Take the much-debated horror movie, *Us* (2019), by American director Jordan Peele.¹ The film was one of many others in this genre across

¹ See “Jordan Peele’s *Us* turns a political statement into unnerving horror,” Tasha Robinson, *The Verge*, 22 March 2019; www.theverge.com/2019/3/9/18257721/us-review-jordan-peeel-get-out-lupita-nyongowinston-duke-elisabeth-mosstim-heidecker-horror, accessed 23 May 2019. Also “*Us*’s Jason/Pluto theory, explained and debunked,” Alex Abad-Santos and Aja Romano, *Vox*, 2 April 2019; www.vox.com/2019/4/2/18290380/us-movie-jason-pluto-tether-theory-explained-true-false, accessed 23 May 2019.

the world.² It introduces us to the Wilsons, a black middle-class family, as they arrive at their holiday home near Santa Cruz, California, a town where the wife and mother, Addie, underwent a childhood trauma, long since suppressed, in a mirrored fun-house called “Find Yourself.” Now, as night falls, the Wilsons see a family in their driveway. Wearing red jumpsuits, the strangers look at once vacant and menacing. The fact that they wield large scissors – humble yet lethal household tools – provides a vital clue. But who are they? Spiritual doubles? Estranged labor power? Perhaps, after Anthony Lane (2019), “the nation’s id”? It is Jason, the youngest Wilson, who catches on first: “It’s us,” he proclaims. Yet what is it that these revenants actually want? They seem intent on invading the family home and wrecking it with a vengeance, going about their business by weaponizing the ordinary props of bourgeois domestic life. “Who are you?” asks Mrs. Wilson of her ghoulish alter ego. “We are *Americans*,” rasps the latter; the film insists that there is no private nightmare that is not entangled with the workings of a larger political world. In fact, it is precisely the secure separation of the private “home” from the “world” that is under assault in this terrifying tale.

II.

In his somewhat uneasy essay on “The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud ([1919]:1955:241) remarks that perhaps “the most striking” example of this particular creepy feeling of

² Other movies in this genre include the Mexican *We Are What We Are* (directed by Gorge Michel Grau; 2010); the Korean *A Tale of Two Sisters* (directed by Kim Jee-woon, 2003); the Thai *Shutter* (directed by Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wangpoom, 2004); and the Uruguayan *The Silent House* (directed by Gustavo Hernández, 2010).

dread is the idea of “a *haunted* house.”³ Playing famously on the German word *Unheimlich*, “Unhomely,” he notes that the dictionary defines *Heimlich* both as something “belonging to the “home” – the “familiar, the “intimate” – and as something “[c]oncealed, kept from sight” (p.221-2). It was the friction between these two meanings that sparked Freud’s conception of the uncanny, an insidiousness intrinsic to the known, the reasonable, the domestic (Russell 2017:2); an estrangement from reliable, quotidian comforts; a sense of being engulfed by arcane forces that should properly remain latent. Freud was disconcerted by the fact that the subject of this inquiry remained obtuse, graspable only by way of aesthetic terms, of qualities of feeling that excite the creeping horror that distinguishes the “unhomely” from the more generically “fearful.” Yet the properties peculiar to the uncanny are neither novel nor exotic (p.240). They are things that have been defamiliarized, repressed by would-be secular civilization, things that inadvertently come to light to become objects of estranged recognition (Clery 1995:114). This quality is personified, Freud goes on, in a cultural figure long known in Europe and beyond: the *doppelgänger*, the ghostly twin, a disconcerting double that spooks the would-be “autonomous individual.” The self, from this vantage, is simultaneously at home and estranged: forever held captive, Freud suggests ([1919]1955:235), by its menacing other.

Here again, the concept of the “*Unheimlich*” gets at something at once profound, yet discernable “only out of the corner of the cultural eye,” as Terence Hawkes (1997:16) puts it. At issue is the “scandalous potential” of familiar things to become

³ Original italics.

strange through repetition, to “ironiz[e]...overt ‘meaning’ and propel it into a realm of implication beyond the reach of words.” This capacity to unsettle or enchant tends to play fast and loose with the “logical, rationally codified equivalencies” that we presume in the language of the law and empirical verification.

It seems almost inevitable, then, that the *Unheimlich* would serve as a key organizing idea for this provocative set of essays. For it captures, quite cannily, the central issue that its editors seek to highlight: the under-appreciated role of the spectral in the intimate, phenomenological domains of human existence, not least in its most secure sites of affective refuge, constancy, and nurture. At issue is the occulting of what Hannah Arendt (1958:59) termed the “limited reality of family life,” the place that offers “shelter against the world.” This pervasive unease does more than trouble the equanimity and containment of local domestic worlds. It also unsettles the secular positivism presumed by the liberal human sciences. And, while it could be argued that anthropologists have always been attuned to the role of the mystical, the symbolic, and ritualized in social life, they have tended to focus predominantly, the editors suggest, on the rationalist, political, and instrumental dimensions of these qualities (Kirsch, Mahlke, and van Dijk, above). Important, in this respect, has been a stress on the representational force of spiritual idioms, their power to serve as weapons of the marginalized, or as signals of historical duress.

Its effort to do justice to the implications of an intimate co-existence with spirits, this collection resonates with a post-structuralist interest in issues we might term emergent, ambivalent, and incommensurate. The contributors seek to move beyond the presumption that meaning is stable and its expressive forms durably fixed. They are

also wary of overly robust correlations among social, material, and affective forces. Spectral phenomena, especially when viewed through a subjective, sensory lens, appear by their nature to be evanescent, equivocal, precarious. Yet these fluid sensibilities remain entangled with more durable social and political forces. Like Raymond Williams' (1977) "structures of feeling" or (in light of the focus of this volume) experiences of haunting (Gordon 1997:50; Dziuban 2020), they are at once collectively modulated, yet never "fully articulate," and their affective overflow is unlikely to crystallize as ideology, or worldview.

This set of concerns is widely echoed in the late modern human sciences, where a reaction to what many regard as the false unity of modernist claims has taken many "lines of flight" (Guattari 2016). Several of the studies in this volume, for instance, examine collective efforts, in particular social contexts, to address an unnerving sense of slippage from established norms and stated ideals. In seeking to grasp such pervasive experiences of discordance, Eric Santner (2019) invokes the concept of *mana*: a Polynesian term used by early 20th century anthropologists for secret powers or mysterious forces. We are dealing, here, with forms of "knowledge which cannot be known but only...excessively signified" (Santner 2019:31). As William Mazzarella (2017) points out, the term *mana* was used by early anthropologists to refer to an ambiguous force they themselves struggled to put into words: the animation that infused both subjects and societies with a sacred vitality, a "collective effervescence" sparked by close interpersonal engagements both intimate or expansive in scale, through concerted communal action or the electric energy of crowds. This insight requires us to restore the dimension of enchantment to all, putatively profane, modern existence. But it also

reinforces the inescapable interconnection of the intimate and personal to embracing economies of power, economy, and violence. To invoke Arendt (1958:38) again: with the rise of the modern world and its understanding of the “social,” it becomes impossible, ideology notwithstanding, to segregate the “housekeeping” of the private family realm from political economy as a collective concern. Spectral home invasions underline the fact that the two “constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself.”

To be sure, even in its concerns with the most elemental forms of religious life, anthropology has always focused on the *reciprocal* production of the individual and the collective. In this respect, its theoretical scope is simultaneously personal, existential, and communal (Mazarella 2017). This interplay was especially evident when, in 1930's and 1940's, scholars of Africa struggled to make sense of the perfidious power of witchcraft and of vengeful ancestors among kin and neighbors – the conviction, among seemingly rational people, that trusted intimates could double as infernal enemies both living and dead, capable of destroying the objects of their hatred. And because the elementary kinship unit had to open itself up to life-giving exchange with like entities beyond itself in order to reproduce, intimacy was a quality that existed between as well as within domestic groups, which were never without internal difference, tension, and politics. Classic accounts of witchcraft or ancestral wrath portrayed them as moral philosophies, allegories of cause and event, jealousy and violence, fueled by a flow of affect and ambivalence among the *dramatis personae* within domestic life (Fortes 1961; Evans-Pritchard 1976). Naming the witch is an effort to predicate what can only be partly known (Siegel 2006), but it was also, as Evans-Pritchard (1976:25) insisted, a

quest for “socially relevant explanation” for the occurrence of misfortune. Rather like the papers assembled here, the best of such work made plain how the process of divination involved the effort to contain psycho-social disruption, read not merely as a symptom of historical crisis (Levi-Strauss 1963;Turner 1969), but also of the essential drama of ordinary life (Ndebele 1986:154). For all the instrumental, functionalist interpretations applied to witchcraft and spirit possession in Africa, classic accounts of these phenomena seldom failed to convey something of the fluid, generative, unpredictable nature of the liaison of the human and the spectral (cf. Comaroff 2018). They also made clear that, inherent in the capacity of religion to forge moral order and consensus is the potential to do the opposite: to introduce disorienting feelings or a sense of uncertainty, ambivalence, or estrangement (Mazarella 2017).

That said, the genealogy of anthropological approaches to the study of religious life certainly bears the imprint of the legacies of liberal thought, as in the tendency to impose Cartesian divisions between the sacred and secular, the private and public, the individual and the collective. These dualisms structure the ideological field in which key terms in play in these essays take on meaning and force – terms like the “intimate,” for instance. The modern understanding of intimacy implies a “close personal or sexual relationship,” with related connotations of togetherness, affinity, physical attachment, confidentiality. In this sense, the term dates back (at least, in English usage) to the mid 17th,⁴ and presumes a clutch of related constructs: of person, status, property, propriety, privacy, and domesticity (Kirsch, Mahlke, and van Dijk, above). This fan of reference

⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intimate>, accessed 29 May 2019.

registers the sharpening of the socio-legal contrasts that comprise the liberal civic order: the public as against the private, the commons and the family estate, sites of production and reproduction. Intimacy was simultaneously an emotional, spatial, and structural quality, integral to a normative model of kinship, care, and mutuality, of inwardness and confidentiality; of a feminized feeling of home (*heimlich*) that existed in complementary opposition to the masculine world of labor, politics, competition (Rybczynski 1987; McKeon 2006). Yet like other Euromodern binary contrasts – the secular versus the sacred, for instance, or the city versus the country – the actual separation of the domestic from the public requires ongoing effort, thus to segregate what in fact are intersecting, reciprocally transforming poles in the continuous processes of social life. Such is the case, too, of the would-be segregation of love from money, or gift from market.

While commonly associated, in modern English, with subjectivity and a contained, protected private life, the intimate has spawned an indiscrete, scandalously improper double. British Victorians, argue Chase and Levenson (2000), attached signal importance to family privacy, but its sheltering claustrophobia generated both tensions within, and a wider public appetite for domestic scandal. Intimacy, in fact, became a spectacle, and had continually to be salvaged from moral assault through the erection of boundaries of one kind and another. Evidence here of the process of “hedging,” the suggestive term used by the editors of this volume to describe recurrent efforts, in the cases discussed here, to reinforce the barriers that regulate traffic among human, material, and spiritual worlds. The horticultural image of the hedge, after all, is less a wall than a device for moderating flow, a porous boundary that deploys material taken

from the existing landscape to bound off a garden or private property from its surrounding terrain, or protect a claim, a financial investment or portfolio.

Global change in the nature of technology, economy, and governance in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries have radically unsettled the dynamics of this liberal modern ecology and its common-sense ways of knowing – confounding the logic of political containment, demarcation, and flow. As the essays presented here make plain, estranged horizons breed new specters, prompting renewed efforts to redraw the outlines of legible identities and shore up the intimate domains of everyday life. But structural slippage has also fostered novel forms of speculation, challenges to the heritage of liberal thought; challenges long prefigured by provocations like the Freudian idea of the uncanny which, like an intimate demon, makes evident habitually suppressed occlusions and exclusions. Indeed, they voice a submerged story, the ghostly life of another kind of spirited theory-making, long haunting the logic of instrumental reason, both in its Western strongholds and beyond.

III.

Kirsten Mahlke (p.XX) retrieves one enduring strand of this submerged story in her exploration of the strange trajectory of “El Familiar,” a form of familiar spirit that appeared — in the guise of the Devils’s Pact – with the advent of forced agrarian labor in early modern France, and again in the sugar plantations of Argentina during the Junta in the 1970's. “El Familiar” takes the form of a ferocious black dog with a taste for human meat. In both situations, it brokers a diabolical contract, one that enables its master to consume the life-blood of workers, singly or collectively, whether by way of debt-

bondage, or the extractive violence of advanced agribusiness. The alienation of human labor, here, takes the unhomely form of a trusted domestic creature that proves capable of brutal treachery, a kind of demonic exploitation that escapes the regulation of either church or state. Mahlke traces this uncanny image across the Atlantic, via French-owned sugar plantations in the New World, and across the centuries to neoliberal times, where it bears testimony to the enduring presence of slavery and primitive accumulation in the history of capitalism, early and late. Familiar spirits, then, tell an unfamiliar, suppressed story that links the Old World and the New. It speaks of a foundational *Unheimlichkeit*, a moment of estrangement when the home is no longer a site of self-sustaining production, becoming instead a source of workers who leave as migrants to toil elsewhere – and are never fully “at home” again when they return. It is a narrative conveyed in a medium that is “beyond words;” one that, as Mahlke notes, is resistant to change, yet adaptable to new socioeconomic realities. Like capitalism itself, which even as it changes, remains uncannily the same.⁵

A remarkably similar theme emerges in Gudrun Rath’s (p.XX) account of the transatlantic figure of the zombie, vengeful specter of dehumanized labor, alienated forever from home, kin, and self-possessed personhood. The zombie is popularly held to have originated in Caribbean, the vestige of a lost African past that was born again in Hollywood as an eternal social exile – literally, an undying species of horrifying threat. But, argues Rath, this figure also has a more complex, less linear history, one that embodies the very making of Atlantic modernity itself. Emerging from a layered, multi-directional traffic of texts and images traceable in the French Caribbean from the late

⁵ Engels, as cited by Andre Gunder Frank (1971:36).

seventeenth century, the zombie was uncannily good to think with. Or, to fantasize about. Shamelessly breaching boundaries – of the public and private, the secular and sacred, European and West Indian, violence and revolution – it served as versatile, popularly-consumed figuration. And as such, it made visible the repressed interconnections and paradoxical coexistences of a creolized and otherwise unspeakable history. A favored “meta-trope” of nineteenth century French media, from children’s literature to travelogues and *feuilleton*, the zombie was used again and again in efforts to recover the recent past, and embody the tempestuous waves of Caribbean history.

These occult imaginings are never arbitrary in their poetic form or aesthetic texture. Mobilized in the attempt to give voice to what are often inchoate or unspeakable sensations, they serve as a *camera obscura*, a personification of fraught laws and conventions as they impress themselves on the body social. This is especially evident in Florence Bernault’s account of the preoccupation with interracial and cross-species intimacy in a biopolitics and erotics of empire in 19th and 20th century Gabon. Gorillas and chimpanzees, she shows, served all parties to the colonial encounter as all-purpose, mythic monsters, ambiguous boundary objects (Star and Griesemer 1989; see also Voss, above)⁶ somewhere between human and nonhuman, European and African, the tractable and the ferocious. As both *doppelgänger*s and demons, apes were neither wo/man nor animal and, as such, were equivocal links that embodied troubling “racial subjectivities” at a time when evolutionary theory and imperial rule were at cross-

⁶ The concept of the “boundary object” seems especially apt here, given that it was developed, as an heuristic term, in relation to interdisciplinary observation carried out in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology

purposes, the former seeking to establish a continuity between distinct forms of life, and the latter to reinscribe hierarchical separations among them. A profusion of images of primates – pictures, effigies, and eyewitness accounts – emerged from the frontier zones where Africans and Europeans interacted, images that captured reciprocal fantasies and fetishisms, depicting apes both as killers and pets, racial others and kin, vile beasts and demon lovers. Recent theories that seek the origin of HIV-AIDS in the transfer of the simian immunodeficiency virus from chimpanzees to humans in this region of Africa (by incidental infection, zoophilia, or bestial rites) underline yet again the sinuous traces of this colonial obsession, which relies on haunting images to make tangible connections – in this case, of racism and pathology – across time and places.

To be, these colonial obsessions lurk just beneath the thresholds of collective consciousness in our current world, along with an insistent sense that mysterious, undetected forces play themselves out behind the dominant ideologies and civil facades of liberal politics, economy, and society. And while such ghostly feelings might serve to undermine certain reigning hegemonies, they also drive the quest for alternative articles of faith; the interplay of deconstruction and fundamentalism is an enduring feature of modern ontology. In the age of frantic, mass-mediated communication, conspiracy theories reverberate across the world, from recurrent "satanic panics" in the US, UK, Netherlands, South Africa, and Brazil to the avalanche of intrigues across the world about the spread of COVID-19.⁷ Yet again, the idiom of these imaginings is anything but

at the University of California, Berkeley.

⁷ See "Why Satanic Panic Never Really Ended. The Collective Fears That Consumed the US in the 1980s and '90s Are Still Alive and Well — All the Way Through QAnon and Beyond," Aja Romano, *Vox*, 31 March 2021; <https://www.vox.com/culture/22358153/satanic-panic-ritual-abuse-history-conspiracy->

arbitrary; from the allegations, in 1980's America, that preschool teachers were performing evil rituals with children, to the international belief that the Corona virus was spread by 5G towers, or by Bill Gates, who hatched a nefarious plot to insert microchips into the arms of unsuspecting vaccine recipients.⁸ Such theories often dwell, as these instances suggest, on diabolical assaults on the security of the realm intimate, the innocent, the familial by would-be protectors.

The preoccupation with finding terms in which to register the play of the supernatural in an ostensibly disenchanted world does not limit itself to arcane, mystical vocabularies. To the contrary, thoroughly modern ghosts invoke thoroughly modern ghost-busters. Or rather, as Ehler Voss describes them, technicians of the sacred (cf Rothenberg 1969), mediums who seek to reconcile the spectral and the scientific, using orthodox, “objective” means in the effort to produce evidence of the uncanny (or the ‘paranormal’) perceptible to the human senses and plausible as verifiable fact. Modern ghost hunting, which remains a lively pursuit and an enduring idiom in popular culture in the US and beyond, has a long history. Already in nineteenth century Europe, mediumship – both human and technological – raised controversial questions about the protean relation of matter to spirit, body to mind, science to religion. At that time, there was still a keen interest, among educated elites and the wider population, in the

theories-explained, accessed 9 July 2021.

⁸ See “Wuhan Lab, 5G: 9 Crazy Conspiracy Theories COVID Has Spawned,” Gayatri Vinayak, *Yahoo!Life*, 27 April 2021; https://in.style.yahoo.com/bill-gates-wuhan-lab-5-g-9-crazy-conspiracy-theories-covid-has-spawned-062950169.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvLnphLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKrPy8VEAJhecad2wEsdro6nS0RmEI_FqfZK7fv_mT1WlnDbzKB2kP-ldX61yhDxTvBnBg-j14c2ZwB4zNDP-48BygXsctqXRhhi9qvrBafuS5nQc1JITCDzfSPe9Q-U52aZtU2wk3Jlx5Q123wOztzWz13UyZPxFo144MBledns, accessed 9 July 2021.

mediating role of liminal phenomena like “animal magnetism,” spiritualism, hypnosis, and ectoplasm. But by the later 1800’s, Voss notes, the hegemony of Cartesian dualism had ‘domesticated’ the challenge of mediumship by banishing it to the realm of the arcane and the psychic, relegating it to the domain of the private, which would become the proper place for religion within the secular liberal polity.

Still, ghost hunting has remained a lively pursuit. Whether as a matter of faith or fantasy, its appeal thrives alongside a resurgence of charismatic creeds that bear testimony to the limits of disenchantment in the late modern world. Some critics have argued that mechanical reproduction puts an end to the aura of ritual or the emanations of great works of art. But the likes of Hillel Schwartz (1996) insist, to the contrary, that automation breeds its own mystification. Mechanical reproduction – the signature techniques of photography, for instance – gives rise, Schwartz argues, to the Culture of the Copy, the unceasing doubling of persons, portraits, images, and counterfeits that haunts modernity. And this defies the liberal preoccupation with individualism, and its reverence for a human uniqueness not to be cloned. Indeed, the explosion of new electronic media and modes of virtual duplication appear to have multiplied haunts of the spectral. Mundane modes of digital copying populate cyberspace with infinitely multiplying images, virtual selves that spook human persons by circulating their simulacra (or counterfeits?) along the pathways of an ever more involuted web, designed never to forget (Mandolessi, above). It is a web that has no weaver, no Archimedean, all-seeing eye. Yet the very immortality of its memory strikes many as inescapably panoptical, freakier than older, more destructible kinds of archives. To be able to live, says Nietzsche (1957:6-8), we must be able to forget. The distanced

intimacy of internet communication, of disembodied eyes and ears that can collapse space and penetrate the walls of protected existence, exposing human subjects to the world in ways that make it increasingly impossible to close the door on the intrusive outside. Or to unplug “the networked self” from its ethereal entanglements, Or to erase the eternal memory residing in the cyber-universe.

It is thus not surprising, Mandolessi suggests, that the online world has hosted new struggles over the unstable boundary between the private and the public, home and world, material and metaphysical, an order of contrasts whose control remains central to the hegemonic forms of order and authority in liberal modern times, both early and late.

IV.

All this returns us to the image of the haunted house, the invaded home; to the unexpected ways, that is, in which surreal forces spook the unsettled boundary between the domestic realm and the world at large. This image resonates especially vividly at a time when global shifts in political economy and the means of communication put unprecedented pressure on the ideal-typical categories of modernist social order, not least beyond European metropolises. As I have stressed, the political-legal rationality that governs this order has always had its barely suppressed underside, its alternative sovereignties and commitments, its lively registers of myth and magic, desire and violence. These surface in the form of unruly passions, uncanny images, and passionate spiritual assertions that queer the line between the sacred and the secular integral to liberal state-making (Asad 2003). The claims of other-worldly authority have

never been securely contained by that line, either in the global North or beyond, or limited by the efforts of civic nationalism to confine them to the domain of the private, the personal, the tribal, or the atavistic. Indeed, critics of various kinds have long questioned the vaunted secularism of civil society and the existence of the public as a homogenous sphere that transcends differences of class, race, and culture, or identities vested in gender, sexual orientation, generation or faith (Fraser 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 1998; Zillinger 2017). In late modern times, however, resurgent spirituality and born-again conviction of all kinds is ever more ready to challenge the sovereignty and jurisdiction of profane modern authority, forming non-secular, parochial publics, or “semi-publics,” hedged about by beliefs and rituals that endlessly defy attempts to enforce the liberally founded “separation of powers.” Assertive spirits increasingly appear in communal spaces, inspiring the projects of law-makers, politicians, and social activists, as well as purveyors of prosperity gospels and enchanted economies of various kinds.

Those who channel these occult forces – priests, prophets, poets, pundits – engage in avid world-making on varying scales, building followings, shrines, and sites of gathering that frequently trouble received distinctions between the intimate and the public, home and marketplace. The disruption of conventional social and spatial domains has been abetted by the advent of personal electronic media and the digital dissemination of video images of mediumship, ritual, and preaching beyond the here-and-now of sacral events. This animated traffic establishes new consuming subjects, new links among once segregated populations, classes, and scales of exchange, potentially undermining the authority of national jurisdictions and political geographies

(Schulz 2012; Zillinger 2014; Hirschkind 2006). Novel sorts of ethereal commons come to life – as also, do vehicles of spiritual intimacy – TV trance, internet divination, digital diasporas, and electronic caliphates – through powerful cyber channels for the occult and the evangelical.

Thomas Kirsch (p.XX) puts the ontological dimension of human-spirit intimacy at the center of his account of world-making in Southern Zambia, where crusading Pentecostalism is transforming subjects and collectivities. Traffic between the living and the dead looms large in the plural religious field of the Gwembe Valley. Spirit possession, sometimes quite literally depicted as intercourse, is a pervasive reality. But the charismatic faiths that seek to establish their superior authority here are also vested in possession; in their case, possession by the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit. For Pentecostals, the restless ancestors and wild or forgotten wraiths who attach themselves to the living, for good or ill, represent the dangerous, capricious, corruptible qualities of “tradition,” now assimilated to the realm of Satan. In fact, the churches are less invested in the elimination of charisma than in its routinization by inducting neophytes into a direct, dyadic relationship with the sovereign power of the Spirit and the global community of the ordained. This move can be seen as effecting a rationalization, or modernization, by introducing the idea of a universal, omniscient God – as Robin Horton (1971) once argued for African conversion more generally – and also his universal alter in the figure of Satan. Conversion here implies a shrinking obligation to wider networks of kin and dependents, living and dead,⁹ and a deeper investment in

⁹ A similar paring down of wider kinship commitments has been a noted feature of Pentecostal conversion elsewhere (on Latin America; for instance, see Rambo and Farhadian (2014:93).

an intimate relationship with what Johnny Cash called “your own, personal Jesus.”¹⁰ A congregation of such born-again believers, then, can indeed be termed an “intimate community.”

To be sure, collective intimacy of this kind is a widespread social form, yielded by the processes of individualization on which liberal modernity is centered. In their own pneumatology, Pentecostals are “methodological individualists,” understanding community as an assemblage of discrete beings, each uniquely formed in its interdependence with the Spirit; this *contra* Durkheim (1995), for whom the sacred (and the subjects inspired by it) were born of the social, *sui generis*; of the visceral experience of *collective* coexistence. In Pentecostal congregations, by contrast, persons are believed to be shaped by the descent, into each in turn, of the holy fire, and they give voice to their ecstasy in a cacophony of joyful noise. But it is precisely this sort of collective effervescence (Kirsch, XXX) that, for Durkheim, gives rise to collective consciousness, both of a transcendent divinity and of the God-fearing self. From this vantage, collective intimacy is less a paradox than the elementary form of social life.

This capacity to make and remake transcendent truth is taken up in van Dijk and Setume’s (p.XX) discussion of the growing influence of Pentecostal Christianity in Botswana. Like their Zambian counterparts, Pentecostals here take aim at what they see as the inscrutable, unreliable, morally-ambiguous implications of tradition, which they see as impeding personal and collective self-determination. They detect this malign influence in the unreliability of moral commitment among kin and the widespread public

¹⁰ “Your Own, Personal, Jesus,” Johnny Cash, *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, released 2002.

dis-ease about the fragility of core institutions of social reproduction. These uncertainties are epitomized in a popular debate about “seeds” (*dithôsé*). Conventionally, in Botswana, marriage ceremonies are sealed by a ritual in which each partner consumes a piece of meat that contains seeds to protect their union from spoiling from within or sabotage from outside, especially by meddling relatives. Here and elsewhere, marriage is regarded as an intrinsically hazardous undertaking; apart from all else, it carries the foundational structural danger of opening the family to alien interests and intentions. These days, the dangers appear to outweigh the precautions: conjugal seeds have taken on sinister connotations, threatening to turn bad and opening one or the other partner to harm.

Pentecostal leaders are vocal about associating these hidden threats with pernicious tradition. As in Zambia, they urge their followers to disentangle themselves from networks of oppressive kin, evil rites, and vengeful ancestors, all glossed as avatars of Satan. They press them instead to join the ranks of those born again into a new, self-possessed, self-willed identity, liberated from arcane entrapment. In this realm, enlightened self-interest rules. Benign “counseling,” rather than dark indoctrination, promises a brightly-lit future, there for the choosing. On offer, in short, is the ethic of modern evangelical Protestantism and the Spirit of late liberal capitalism: one of transparent motives, explicit intentions, and consensual contracts. But professions of faith in redemptive truth seem seldom to vanquish completely the hold of mysterious, uncontrolled powers and desires. Tradition lives on, within Protestant ontology, in what is arguably an empowered form: as the devilish other, whose uncanny wiles constantly threaten to undo the see-through assurances and rosy predictions of a

life in the Spirit.

This dialogue of images, which pits a demonized tradition against an empowering regime of pellucid, faith-endowed truth, has many analogues elsewhere, where the organization of economy and society, of labor and relations of gender, generation, race and class have led to a redrawing of the lines that separate the intimate and the worldly. This has been occurring in the rural South African lowveld, Niehaus (p.XX) shows. Here, older iconographies of witchcraft that set postcolonial youth against the rapacious authority of elders and chiefs are giving way to a preoccupation with the exploits of young women, believed to harbor the germ of Satanic desire deep in their bodies. Dark, demonic discourse congeals as a foil to the purifying arc light of Pentecostal reform, a process articulated above all in the theatrics of public confession. Such performances also convene new charismatic communities, drawn into a collaborative drama of driving the new avatars of evil from their midst.

The opening of local rural populations to global economies of desire and self-fashioning after apartheid has coincided with radical shifts in patterns of domestic reproduction: falling demand for proletarian labor, increasing dependency on government grants and female income, and a perceived disintegration of established moral authority have all but extinguished millennial hopes of post-apartheid prosperity. At the same time, fantasies have spread of the predations of young women, who appear receptive, both physically and emotionally, to the dangerous potency of demonic powers, many of foreign origin. Tales circulate about ghostly corporations that spirit young rural women away to subterranean cities, replete with malls, cars, and the trappings of an urbane consumer paradise – all of it paid for, it is claimed, by extracting

value from ordinary, God-fearing people back home. These elaborate speculations provide a rich language for exploring guilt, anger, and the putative perversions of local relations of moral and material production. Young women are in the cross-hairs of a lively popular forensics, being the subjects of a tangle of accusation, desire, and expectation.

Perhaps most striking about this avid attempt to detect inchoate motives and intentions, Niehaus notes – and his account accords with those of Pentecostalism elsewhere – is that it coincides with the emergence of a newly intimate, reflexive sense of self. This novel subjectivity is the product, to be sure, of unprecedented social conditions; unprecedented possibilities of female wage work, desire, ambition, for instance, along with intensified obligation, demand, and blame. The new circumstances both confer a novel public agency and subvert it. For others seek to capitalize on the enhanced capacities afforded young women, yet also to demonize them, the better to subject them to patriarchal control. It seems unsurprising that these women find resonance in narratives of sudden Satanic seduction and the lethal appetites it unleashes. Or that they are prone to staging electrifying dramas of devilish possession and reject efforts to domesticate it. But it is equally evident why the emotive charge, the maddening ambivalence made manifest in these unnerving outbursts, should often explode on such banal everyday terrain as the school. Uneasily located between worldly emancipation and homely constraint, such terrain is not finally contained by the agents of social order, either sacred or secular.

In sum, what emerges from the intriguing essays assembled here is that the infinitely renewable, fundamentally ungraspable forces unleashed by the intercourse of

people and spirits are finally uncontainable by the sovereign claims, liberal norms, or instrumentalities of the late modern world. They elude the efforts to know the, tame them, or hedge them in. Like the Freudian uncanny, then, this interplay marks the return of something primal, potent, and magical, in which inchoate primal fear jostles unruly fantasy. And even new, undreamed of possibilities.

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