

**Against Diagnosing the Spirit:  
A Note on the Clinic of Spirit Possession**

**Leah Gipson and Richard Reinhardt**

*Introduction*

From Jean-Michel Charcot's clinic to contemporary discourses of "mental health," an almost seamless, quasi-medical discourse seeks to establish an imaginary space in which the *untreatable* drive in the singularity of the subject might be labeled, diagnosed, and treated as a malfunctioning of the organism.<sup>1</sup> While Charcot's catch-all category "hysteria" has now grown out-of-fashion in some circles, new categories are invented—their "spectrums" evoked as stopgap, with little thought—to protect clinicians from any anxiety that might emerge from the difficult task of listening to and engaging the singularly beautiful that could emerge from offering the subject a space of freer, but necessarily failed, speech about that spirit which acts from within. To paraphrase Jacques Lacan, resistance is on the side of the clinician.<sup>2</sup>

1 Within the discourse of the metapsychology under elaboration by GIFRIC and the E<sub>f</sub>Q, the untreatable entails that which is intractable in the subject and tied to an impasse that sits at the heart of the human subject. The untreatable will escape any attempts at domestication via the chosen routes of medical care. See Willy Apollon, "The Untreatable," translated by Steven Miller, *Umbr(a): Incurable*, no. 1 (2006): 23-39; Lucie Cantin, "The Drive, the Untreatable Quest of Desire," translated by Tracy McNulty, *differences* 28, no. 2 (2017): 24-45; Tracy McNulty, "Untreatable: The Freudian Act and Its Legacy," *Crisis & Critique* 6, no. 1 (April 2019): 226-251.

2 Jacques Lacan's *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of*

The structuring of clinical disciplines upon the avoidance of anxiety to which hearing something of what is singularly at stake for the subject, as a subject of the unconscious, might give rise in the clinician, produces a contentment with reducing the subject to the exchangeable object of comparative medical or psychological discourses. In this scenario, the clinician, sometimes more subtly and other times less subtly, takes up the position Lacan derided along the lines of an orthopedics or an engineering of the soul, of adjusting the subject, overtly or covertly, to often underexamined social norms that saturate the psychotherapeutic frame.<sup>3</sup> In a way, the clinician who does not wish to act as the supercop of society and culture must become a friend and a student of spirit possession — one who wants to know something about the spirit/psyche of the other scene of the unconscious that possesses the subject. Put otherwise, from our perspective, this spirit must be supported, rather than diagnosed and exorcised.

This essay grows out of the collaboration of its authors in teaching a class on “Social and Cultural Foundations” to clinicians-in-training at a psychoanalytically-oriented institution in Chicago. While courses that fulfill similar requirements might normally be taught in a multiculturalist mode, we attempted to create a space for collective work on the questions “psychoanalysis as decolonizing praxis: under what conditions?” breaking our quarters into themes like “the split subject of society, culture, and religion,” “diagnosing the spirit,” and “conversion: freedom/constraint.” Our work entailed introducing students to key theoretical concepts in the Freudian, Lacanian, and post-Lacanian fields, as well as to films which we thought could be constructively

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*Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955* (New York and London: Norton, 1988 [1978]), 228.

<sup>3</sup> Our mentions of “scenario” and “disavowal” (below) in terms of the non-psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic clinics aims to underline an aspect of their machinations that we consider to be structurally perverse, along the lines of the objectification of the subject.

worked with as art objects. Our wager was that an emphasis on concepts like spirit, effraction, split subject, and *mondialisation* (world-formation), might support clinicians-in-training to take up a position of welcoming the speech of the *subject*, beyond the speech of the *client* as a purported representative of a social or cultural group, a so-called population.<sup>4</sup>

Spirit possession has been evoked as an analogue for the work of the unconscious in the subject. As much as psychiatrists and analysts of psyche and society have conjured up possession as a valuable analogue for the difficulty of problems related to agency, affliction, and suffering, though, we also consider the ways in which it could better function as an analogue to ground an analytic ethics in the welcoming of the unconscious as beautiful. Our discussion of working with spirits in a haunted house, drawing upon Luca Guadagnino's *Supiria* and Remi Weekes's film *His House*, aims to further develop this analogy between possession and analysis as a productive point of provocation for dominant clinical trends bent on exorcism and censorship. We aim to show that such a re-thinking of possession was a key component of Sigmund Freud's intervention, and one that could be of crucial import in the clinic's welcoming of subjects in an age of *mondialisation*, where the appearance of the untreatable in various structures — like femininity, psychosis, and perversion — puts increased pressure on the urgent need to renew psychoanalysis and the psychotherapeutic clinics that disavow their debt to Freud's discovery.

### *The Spirit: to Diagnose or to Welcome?*

<sup>4</sup> On GIFRIC's development of *mondialisation*, see Jefferey Librett, "The subject in the age of world-formation (*mondialisation*): Advances in Lacanian theory from the Québec group," in *Innovations in Psychoanalysis: Originality, Development, Progress*, eds. Aner Govrin & Jon Mills. *Innovations in Psychoanalysis: Originality, development, progress* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 75-99.

It has been noted that Charcot's resuscitation of the category of hysteria relied upon and sought to retroactively revise the early modern theological concept of spirit possession.<sup>5</sup> Charcot drew particular attention to the famed example of Loudun, where a convent of Ursuline nuns became possessed, purportedly bewitched by the libertine priest Urbain Grandier. Charcot wrote a preface to an 1886 republication of the autobiography of the convent's famed superior Soeur Jeanne des Anges, arguing that those who had been considered possessed were, in fact, sick with hysteria.<sup>6</sup>

The use of photography as a kind of documentary evidence cast the hysterics of the Salpêtrière within the longstanding stage of a "theater of possession," to use Michel de Certeau's term. Charcot's acolytes assigned sets of bodily gestures, which had hitherto been germane to possession, within the biomedical discourse, as Charcot sought to rebrand and resuscitate the category of hysteria.<sup>7</sup> While the continu-

5 See Paul Johnson, *Automatic Religion: Nearhuman Agents of Brazil and France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 41-77.

6 Jean-Michel Charcot, "Preface," in *Soeur Jeanne des Anges: Supérieure des ursulines de Loudun (XVIIe siècle)*, ed. Gabriel Legue and Gilles de la Tourette (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1886), i-v.

7 On the theater of possession, see Michel de Certeau's *The Possession at Loudun*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1970]), 85-108. It is worth noting that this photographic evidence of extreme bodily postures as the *sine qua non* of hysteria, is consistent with Apollon's notion of the censorship of the voice at work in discourses about possession, though Apollon talks about this in terms of writing, rather than in terms of photography (see "Writing and the Voice," from Apollon's *Le vaudou: une espace pour les voix* in this issue). By way of contrast, as we will discuss below, Apollon points precisely to the limits of the observable as any kind of legitimate guide in the psychoanalytic clinic. Willy Apollon, "The Limit: A Fundamental Question for the Subject in the Human Experience," trans. Daniel Wilson, *Konturen III* (2010): 103-118.

On the use of photography in Charcot's clinic, see, for instance, Asti

ities between Charcot's clinic and Loudun and the use of photography through which these continuities were reinforced have been often noted, what we want to emphasize is that Charcot's attempts to diagnose the spirit entailed the censorship and confinement of the untreatable. Similar anxieties had been at work before, in the elaboration of early modern spiritual and theological frameworks for discernment, which proliferated in the period around the figure of the possessed body.<sup>8</sup> While Charcot's clinic primarily took the bodies of women as the instance for hysteria, the body of multiple figures, construed in discourses as racial or religious others, along with the child, were now taken, like the woman, as being liable to spirit possession, because they were described as having a kind of leaky agency, or a porous and vulnerable kind of self.<sup>9</sup> We suspect that the impulse to diagnose the spirit, which recoded earlier theological-spiritual discourses into a biomedical discourse is still very much with us, despite Freud's interruption of this trajectory in his inauguration of psychoanalysis.

Freud also made use of the concept of spirit possession, though the spirit was recast as that which should be welcomed, upheld, and worked on and with as it spoke through the subject from the unconscious as the other scene. In this sense, spirit possession can ground a psychoanalytic ethics as a working on and a working with rather than a diagnostic labeling and an often inevitably botched attempt at exorcism. Despite Freud's reliance on the concept of spirit possession, the subsumption of the theological concept of spirit possession into the quasi-medical concept of hysteria would be re-worked in Freud's theo-

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Hustvedt, *Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth Century Paris* (New York and London: Norton, 2011) and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, translated by Alisa Hartz (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003 [1982]).

8 Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

9 Paul C. Johnson, "An Atlantic Genealogy of 'Spirit Possession'," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 2 (April 2011): 393-425.

ry, in a way that differed radically from Charcot. Jean Laplanche noted Freud's debt to possession:

'Internal foreign body', 'reminiscence': the unconscious as an alien inside me, and even one put inside me by an alien. At his most prophetic, Freud does not hesitate over formulations which go back to the idea of possession, an idea which Charcot, to his credit, took seriously (even if he transposed it into scientific terms) (65).<sup>10</sup>

In a footnote, Laplanche continued to elaborate Freud's debt to the concept of possession, pointing out that, in a response to a questionnaire, Freud listed among "the ten most important books from a scientific point of view" selections from Copernicus, Darwin, and "the old Doctor Johann Weier (1515-1588) on belief in witches."

We read Freud's 1923 "A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis" as a key point of clinical intervention, marking his interruption of religious and scientific proclivities, both, to diagnose the spirit. This involves projecting what comprises the unconscious onto something external to the subject, whether in the form of demons or in the biomedical mechanisms connected to the organism.<sup>11</sup> Despite a nod to Charcot's work in the beginning of his essay, Freud's radical

10 Jean Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," trans. Luke Thurston, in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 52-83.

11 "In our eyes, the demons are bad and reprehensible wishes, derivatives of [drive] impulses that have been repudiated and repressed. We merely eliminate the projection of these entities onto the external world which the middle ages carried out; instead, we regard them as having arisen in the patient's inner life, where they have their abode." Sigmund Freud, "A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (hereafter *S.E.*), trans. and ed. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), 19: 72. Subsequent appearances will appear parenthetically.

departure from Charcot's scientific presuppositions is revealed in how he works with the historical case of the seventeenth-century painter Christoph Haizmann. Indeed, immediately after stating his appreciation for Charcot, Freud writes, that "[t]he demonological theory of those dark times has won, in the end, against all the somatic views of the period of 'exact' science" (72). Contrary to a simplistic rehearsal of Freud's purported dismissiveness toward religion, we read this statement along the lines of Lacan's statement: "If psychoanalysis won't triumph over religion it is because religion is invincible. Psychoanalysis will not triumph – either it will survive or it won't."<sup>12</sup> We propose that the demonological theory won to the extent that Charcot smuggled its attendant moralism in through the back door of the Salpêtrière and that the tendency to diagnose the spirit continues to haunt the clinic. Following Freud's intervention, spirit possession could rather be taken to ground a psychoanalytic ethics of welcoming that which is speaking and acting in the subject as that which is beautiful.

Aside from Freud's reading of the no-doubt interesting twists and turns of this historical account, one whose documentation he considers sufficient to constitute a "true case history" of a neurosis, we are interested in isolating only a few elements, which demonstrate the significance of spirit possession as an analogue that grounds psychoanalytic ethics in the welcoming of unconscious formations as beautiful. First, in his engagement of the historical source material, Freud insists that the existence of passages from Haizmann's diary played a definitive role in his argumentation. Even as he occasionally emphasized what he considers to be the dutifulness and accuracy of clerical scribes, despite his suspicion of them, it was the subjective evidence that comes from Haizmann's own representational work that Freud took to be the most compelling.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, and related to this, whereas Charcot made

12 Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion, Preceded by a Discourse to Catholics*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Polity, 2013), 64.

13 "The second [source-the diary] can scarcely have been of any significance for the reverend fathers, but so much the more is it of value for us.

extensive use of photography in his clinic of hysteria, Freud's reading partially follows the thread of Haizmann's representational permutations, both through his paintings of the devil's body, which gradually takes on new elements in the succession of eight paintings,<sup>14</sup> and also focuses, in great detail, on Haizmann's production of two written pacts, one signed in ink and the other in blood.<sup>15</sup> Freud postulated that the supposedly first pact, written in ink, was actually constructed after the one written in blood, invented by Haizmann *après-coup* as an alibi after his first exorcism had failed, when Haizmann had again fallen ill. Freud hypothesized that this necessitated Haizmann's construction of the first pact in ink to explain the recurrence of his illness. The point here is that, for Freud, the inefficacy of the first exorcism is crucial to understand Haizmann's own invention of the two pacts for our understanding of the case. Third, in his argumentation, Freud raised a point of connection with Schreber in terms of how his eventual cure involved the creation of a dedicated space for the feminine at work within him. Specifically, Freud points out how Schreber resigned himself to take up the position of the feminine in relation to God—which he had to maintain in order to leave the asylum and to re-enter the social link:

Senatspräsident Schreber found the way to recovery when he decided to give up his resistance to castration and to accommodate himself to the feminine role cast for him by God. After this, he became lucid and calm, was able to put through his own discharge from the asylum and led a normal life—with

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It serves, in large part, to confirm our judgement of the case, which might otherwise have been hesitant, and we have good cause to be grateful to the clergy for having preserved the document although it added nothing to support the tenor of their views and, indeed, may rather have weakened it" ("A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis," S.E. 19: 73-74).

14 S.E. 19: 89.

15 S.E. 19: 93-99. On permutations in fantasy, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book IV: The Object Relation*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge and Medford: 2020 [1994]), 310-326.

the one exception that he devoted some hours every day to the cultivation of his femaleness, of whose gradual advance towards the goal determined by God he remained convinced.<sup>16</sup>

In this respect, Freud emphasizes the importance of providing a space for the feminine or for that which was working within Schreber as a crucial component of his cure.

Whereas Charcot was interested in the reproduction of the observable, as if capturing the performance of some particular gesture could tell us what was most crucially at stake for a subject, Freud was interested in the representational work of the subject, which entailed processes like condensation, displacement, and projection. In other words, where Charcot's photography constituted evidence, Freud upped the ante in his consideration of the subject's representational production as a complex kind of evidence involving both an expression of what was crucially at stake and, at the very same time, a repression, since, in Haizmann's case, these features are displaced and projected onto the devil as a substitute for the dead father. In his reading of the case, Freud took the position of welcoming Haizmann's constructions and their permutations as the most valuable kind of evidence, and this positioning grounded his psychoanalytic ethics, putting them on the side of welcoming the spirit as the object to be worked with, rather than that which must be extricated or exorcised.

The question of how beauty should be evaluated haunts the gap between the photography of Charcot's clinic and Freud's careful attention to and engagement with Haizmann's representations. Freud established this question of beauty as central within the ongoing research agenda for psychoanalysis, toward the end of his writing, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, stating that "[p]sychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty."<sup>17</sup> After Freud, the analyst insists on the position that what comes from the unconscious is itself potentially beautiful, and, following Lacan, "it is to the beauty [of

16 *S.E.* 19: 92.

17 ("Civilization and its Discontents," *S.E.* 21: 83)

the unconscious] that one must speak.”<sup>18</sup> To the extent that, as Lacan put it, “[i]f the neurotic inhabits language, the psychotic is inhabited, possessed, by language,”<sup>19</sup> a conception of a psychoanalytic ethics that rests on a welcoming of that which comes from the unconscious as beautiful would necessitate that, at least in the clinic of psychosis, the psychoanalytic experience both acknowledges and goes beyond the limits of language, in which the psychotic subject is (dis)possessed. In the metapsychology elaborated by Willy Apollon, the spirit is associated with the human and a traumatic effraction, a breaking-in and breaking-through, connected to the infant’s experience, in utero, of the audible voice of the stranger that traverses the body of the mother in ways immeasurable and unobservable, from a scientific point of view.<sup>20</sup> The traumatic effraction gives rise to the spirit—in the capacity to hallucinate, for instance—that designates the human, and which seems closely connected to the untreatable that the clinic must learn to welcome as beautiful, rather than that which the clinic must attempt to extricate or exorcise.

Spirit possession is situated at a kind of dividing line for what is at stake in questions of the addressable and the untreatable. Something similar to Charcot’s impulse to observe and diagnose the spirit, by relocating it in the domain of medical discourse survives in many facets of today’s clinic. For instance, “cultural formulation” (as now discussed, in the *DSM-5*) provides one way of re-routing the subject’s understanding of his/her/their own symptoms within the general understanding of a purported cultural group. This achieves a double effect. On the one hand, it aims to ensure the supremacy of psychologistic knowledge as a universal. On the other hand, it provides a kind of “escape hatch”

18 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Norton, 1981 [1973]), 131.

19 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York and London: Norton 1993 [1981]), 250.

20 On effraction, see Apollon, “The Limit,” 107-108.

for that which is operating in the subject, by connecting it to understandings held within their purported culture, as an alibi. One who understands their affliction as possession, for instance, will now have a space to say so, in the clinic of the *DSM-5*, and little more elaboration is needed, since this belief can be attached (and thus dismissed) *vis-à-vis* a cultural discourse.

Our point is not that cultural considerations are irrelevant in the clinic. Rather, it is that what must be upheld are the unique operations of a spirit within a subject that a given culture aims to censor. Both Charcot's clinic and cultural formulation (as but one recent instance) forestall the welcoming of the spirit, which is excluded in the process of its inclusion under a different name: a diagnosis that pertains to the organism or a culturally specific understanding of affliction. Against this impulse, psychoanalysis offers a space of invitation for the subject to work on and with the spirit operating within them. The untreatable finds its place of address within a space of the formal constraint of the transference — founded upon the analysts's invitation and curiosity premised on their lack.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, this invitation is also premised on the analyst's wager that the subject, on the basis of their spirit, has the capacity to introduce something new into the social link. As such, analysis provides a possible space for the subject to grapple with this newness as beautiful, rather than merely inconvenient, or worse, deadly. At successive moments, the address of that which was hitherto unsayable opens up the possibility of ongoing grappling with the demonic Thing. We now move to a brief discussion of this welcoming of the traumatic spirit within a space of formal constraint through a discussion of Luca Guadagnino's 2018 film *Suspiria* and Remi Weekes's 2020 film *His House*.

21 See Bret Fimiani's discussion of curiosity in the reversal of the transference in *Psychosis and Extreme States: An Ethic for Treatment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

*Trauma and Beauty in Guadagnino's Suspiria and Weekes's His House*

In Luca Guadagnino's 2018 film *Suspiria*, Madame Blanc (Tilda Swinton), the head dance instructor at an elite girls' dance academy of Berlin, which also doubles as a witches' coven, tells Susie (Dakota Johnson), the protagonist, "There are two things dance must never be again: beautiful or cheerful."<sup>22</sup> We must break the nose of every beautiful thing." Practicing for the lead role in "Volk," the fictional dance choreographed by Madame Blanc, Susie describes the operation of something unknown working inside her while she is dancing. When Madame Blanc questions the adolescent Susie about how she feels when practicing the dance, Susie says that when she dances she feels something similar to what she imagines it must be like to have sex. Blanc questions her further—"With a man?"—to which Susie responds that the experience is more like what she thinks it must be like to have sex with an animal.

Susie's nightmarish dream montages draw together scenes from her upbringing in a Christian sect in Ohio, with vague impressions of moving light, and intestines. In the climactic scene of the film—a ritualized sacrificial bloodbath—Susie botches the planned effects of the ritual by revealing herself as the spirit, Mater Suspiriorum, the Mother of Sighs, as her voice repeats "it's beautiful" three times, when her colleagues dance convulsively in an underground vault, now-strewn with corpses and blood. It is this position of the insistence on beauty amid the traumatic and non-agentive, Susie's adolescent rejoinder to Madame Blanc's restricted sense of beauty, that interests us.

In an interview, Guadagnino insisted on the importance he attaches to form, rather than to beauty:

[W]hen asked how important beauty is in his life and his work, the director is disdainful. "I think beauty is a very over-

<sup>22</sup> *Suspiria*, directed by Luca Guadagnino (Amazon Studios, 2019), Film.

rated concept,” he says. “In particular what is overrated is the idea that beauty comes objectively. From this perspective I’m not interested in it at all. And I’m definitely not interested in style. I’m interested in form, in the shape of things. And in commitment to the degree of never letting go the quest for the meaning of things. That can come off as beauty and style, but that’s not where I start from.”<sup>23</sup>

An analogy can be drawn between Guadagnino’s discussion of form as comprising a structure that facilitates a subjective quest which must not be relinquished, on the one hand, with psychoanalysis as a space involving formal constraints, on the other. Analysis is a framework through which the unique and idiosyncratic in the quest of the subject could be supported and allowed to emerge.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, beauty is never proffered *a priori* as a starting point, but rather as a question upon which the subject will eventually decide and whose limits they could expand within the formal constraints of the transference framework, as that which was initially troubling becomes the thing which one would not want to live without.<sup>25</sup>

As Susie’s experience is constructed in *Suspiria*, the constraint of movement imposed in her performance of the dance “Volk” opened up the space of an only fleetingly describable erotic experience of a spirit working within her. Despite the violence in the climactic scene, this scene can also be read as the interruption of a repetitive ritual, already violent in its exploitative nature, through which Madame Markos, the

23 Rochelle Siemienowicz, “Luca Guadagnino on A Bigger Splash (interview),” SBS, April 30, 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/movies/article/2016/03/16/luca-guadagnino-bigger-splash-interview>.

24 On analysis as a space of formal constraint in the transference, see Tracy McNulty, *Wrestling with the Angel: Experiments in Symbolic Life* (New York: Columbia, 2014), 51-85.

25 See a similar formulation, along the lines of the support offered by the symptom, in Serge André, *L’Imposture perverse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993), 11-12.

figure of the crone, seeks to rejuvenate her depleted body through the exploitation of the adolescent girls who are the dancers at her school. The interruption of this violence is brought about by Susie's introduction of her object into the ritual space.<sup>26</sup> Here, revealing her object as *Mater Suspiria*, Susie delivers death one-by-one to her classmates only after asking them what they want. Death is construed in this sense, as an alternative to the violence of having one's body exploited and consumed for another's gain. Radically different from psychotherapy, analysis aims to offer a space to speak about what Lacan construed as the beauty behind the shutters and that which is behind the language, itself inevitably a repetition, with which the psychotic is (dis)possessed in the machinations of the social link that exploitatively seek the censorship of the spirit.

Remi Weekes's film *His House* (2020) is another example of the connection between form and the subjective experience of the aesthetic, in the confrontation of the spirit with censorship.<sup>27</sup> The introduction of the question of the aesthetic and of the spirit unsettles the discourse of trauma. Reintroducing the classic horror themes of a haunted house and familial trauma, Weekes adapts a story by Felicity Evans and Toby Venable into a narrative about a South Sudanese refugee couple Bol and Rial Majur. The film begins the moment Bol (Sope Dirisu), Rial (Wunmi Mosaku), and young girl Nygyak (Malaika Wakoli-Abigaba) with her blue-eyed doll, climb onto the back of an overcrowded Toyota truck. The scene changes from day to night, truck to boat, bodies in water. Bol opens his eyes, forces them shut again, and exhales. He is lying in bed. "You were dreaming." Rial says to him, "What did you dream about?" He answers, "Our wedding day." Their quiet, playful exchange is abruptly interrupted by an officer and the unsettling noise of the detention center where they have been sharing a small bed in a cell with another occupant. The cellmate cautions, "Don't get your hopes up. They will send you back to die, like the bastards always do." After a brief, condescending encounter with a review board, who au-

26 McNulty, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 121.

27 *His House*, directed by Remi Weekes (Netflix, 2020), film.

dibly whisper about Bol and Rial having lost a child, they realize they are being released on bail as asylum seekers. Bol and Rial are taken to their new home in a housing complex in London.

Weekes's *His House* is layered with dialogue, every word between characters is packed with the presence of history, colonial violence, African displacement and European resentment. With no hint of irony in his voice, the British case worker announces to Bol and Rial, "This is all yours. This is all for you... It's bigger than my place." As he pushes the front door open, it collapses. The place smells, a box of left-over pizza in the kitchen is crawling with roaches. A neglected unit with a front yard that the neighbors use to dump their trash and old furniture; a white teenage girl in school uniform pees around the side of house. As she looks out of the kitchen window, Rial hears the girl saying, "I think someone lives here." The case worker's dry list of rules recedes into background noise as Rial and Bol share a knowing glance, a moment of pleasure. But this feeling is fleeting. The Majurs soon begin hearing and seeing things coming from the walls. Was this house haunted before they arrived, or did they bring something with them?

A family moves into a haunted house looking for a new beginning, a place that will offer a way to leave a past behind. But in a haunted house, spirits dictate time, or what is left of it — the family encounters something remembered, and the forgotten inhabits the scene. The past can now speak through the walls of the house, through the floors, and people are beginning to see things, allowing us to observe what is happening in the body. The aesthetic experience of each of the characters in *His House* emerges as they peer into spaces and crevices with anticipation, accepting the house's invitation. What might be seen as a depiction of post-traumatic stress disorder quickly begins to unravel in the story of an Opeth, a witch who lives beneath the structure of the house and torments Bol in his sleep. Rial warns Bol that the Opeth will not stop until he is repaid for what has been stolen, Nygyak's life. Bol becomes obsessed with living in the house and the promise of a new beginning reclaims its original danger. Rial is trapped between Bol's fantasy of new beginning in London and her own, of a lost daughter and a home. Where does possession take place?

In the confines of a haunted house and in the constraints of analysis, a frame is constructed for the fantasy and the symptom to emerge in such a way that something new becomes possible. In the climax of the film, Bol breaks the locks of the windows and doors, constraining both of them in the house without the possibility of escape. When Rial tries to escape through a window she is transported to another world from her past, trapped within her fantasy, which repeats, resurfaces, and insists on being traversed. In the midst of the traumatic crisis brought about by this constraint, something new is allowed to emerge that entails an ongoing living with the spirit as that which could not and should not be lived without. They end up staying for something new, traversing their own individual fantasies.

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the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and Project Row Houses, and Nawat Fes.

**Richard Hoffman Reinhardt** is a PhD candidate in Anthropology and History at the University of Michigan, where he studies theories of religion and psychoanalysis and early modern histories of Christian spirituality and mysticism, African diasporic religions, missionization, colonization, and enslavement. A Candidate Analyst of the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis (San Francisco), he works as a psychoanalytic clinician at Depth Counseling, a psychoanalytic group practice and behavioral health clinic in Chicago. He is a member of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Circle of the Freudian School of Québec and of SPIRAL (the Society for Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Interventions and Research after Lacan). He teaches on psychoanalysis in the MA in Art Therapy and Counseling Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, at the Center for Religion and Psychotherapy Chicago, and at the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis. He has a clinical and research interest in the psychoanalytic clinic of psychosis and extreme states.