The Witch in the Human Sciencesand the Mastery of Nonsense

The Witch in the Human Sciences and the Mastery of Nonsense

> Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.
>
> —1 JOHN 4:1

There is a largely unacknowledged historical tendency and predisposition within the human sciences with roots in much older practices of defining social facts and the discovery, interpretation, and the production of the real itself. In plain language, it emerges from a method that allows the researcher to sense, interpret, and eventually master forces that appear to be nonsensical and yet are held to be essential to the reality of everyday social life. While such invisible forces have gone by many names, one can track a historical persistence of this epistemological concern with things that cannot be seen or logically interpreted but are nevertheless held to be present.[1]

One way of tracking this problem of the mastery of invisible forces has been offered by the literary scholar Jonathan Strauss, specifically with regard to the notion of the irrational as a privileged space in medical discourses in nineteenth-century Paris. Strauss argues that the role of irrationality and "nonsense" was a "legitimizing force" for medicine in that "the very incomprehensibility of the mad created a mysterious and extra-social language that

the rising medical profession could adapt to its own purposes."[2] This kind of mastery is of course no news to anthropologists, who have claimed a similarly privileged space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through their understanding of the "nonsense" of "the native." The empirical mastery of domains consigned to the illogical realm of human social life—and in particular life in distant societies—formed the methodological basis that allowed the fieldworker "to see" unknown forces. From Malinowski forward, ethnology depended on exactly this process, as anthropologists forged a bond with the invisible and irrational as a methodological pillar. Anthropologists thus had to develop a battery of tests that could yield some felicitous information as to the "true" nature of unseen forces and their operations within empirical, real-world contexts. The heart of our argument in this book is that *Häxan*, in its curiously excessive attempt to produce a nonfiction film about the power of the witch, deploys an analogous approach and relies on very similar conceits for citing evidence of what is empirically "real" in the world.

The attempt to secure evidence of forces felt but unseen is certainly not an invention of the nineteenth-century sciences of life and man.[3] A clear conceptual link exists between the investigative techniques developed by sixteenth-century theologians and Church inquisitors in the face of what was understood to be a vast proliferation of the incredible, unbelievable power of Satan and emergent scientific fieldwork practices in anthropology and other social sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the systematic, empirical investigation of strange events, singularities, miracles, and other types of staple phenomena in preternatural philosophy predates Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), there is a method that emerges within the ensemble of human sciences proper to the science of *man* that is unable to expel these direct, necessary engagements with unseen and empirically unprovable forces.[4] Although the credible status of such phenomena as real per se has been detached from these disciplines, the status of these phenomena as dark precursors[5] driving the inquiries taken through the signatures of anthropology and science serves as the focus of our engagement here. As such, we argue that anthropology as a science is predicated on rationally mastering invisible, irrational forces. Or, perhaps more precisely, anthropology emerges as a distinct human science from the desire to credibly master *nonsense*. Well versed in anthropological

literature regarding witchcraft, possession, and ritual, Benjamin Christensen, too, demonstrates the desire to bring the invisible and nonsensical into view; although Christensen's medium was cinema rather than more traditional forms of ethnological record, *Häxan* nevertheless stands as one of the most powerful, unsettling expressions of the aspiration to produce evidence of forces unseen.

Myths, Origins, and Methods

Following what George Stocking has termed the "Euhemerist Myth" of anthropology[6]—that is, a rationalizing tendency to interpret mythology as historical event—we argue that the links between Christensen's *Häxan* and Bronislaw Malinowski's fabled definition of the methodological task of the anthropologist are undeniable. In the ur-text of this myth, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski confidently identifies "the final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight":

> This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world. We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him. In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. In each culture, we find different institutions in which man pursues his life-interest, different customs by which he satisfies his aspirations, different codes of law and morality which reward his virtues or punish his defections. To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realizing the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man.[7]

Although subjected to rigorous critique in the decades since its original publication in 1922 (the same year *Häxan* was released), Malinowski's direct expression of the desirable method and the underlying aspiration grounding this technique has never been definitively overturned within the discipline. To this day the paragraph quoted above serves as the distillation of method and disposition alike when confronted with the deceptively difficult questions

"Who are you?" and "What do you do?" The assertion by anthropologists claiming to have assumed the "point of view" of another, not to mention the resulting ethical disequilibrium, has been rightly subjected to a series of stringent critiques over the years. But the idea that we should fully dispense with Malinowski's epistemological aspiration and regard interlocutor others as "Other" remains unthinkable within the discipline as well.[8] This inconsistency has generally been resolved by one of two potential displacements: the first proposes that we detect the underlying structures framing "points of view," while the second aims to appreciate the meaning of social facts as a substitution for Malinowski's blunt demand to assume the simultaneous position of the "social" scientist and the object of this science.

What grounds Malinowski's claim that the fieldworker must achieve the cultivated, sensed point of view of another is a privileged relation to the unknown. This privileged relation must emerge through experimentation and through the ability to, in some fashion, test what is asserted to be real; in the anthropology of Malinowski's vision this test is a series of subjective trials[9] subsumed within the rubric of "fieldwork." In this way, a discipline such as anthropology can legitimately claim kinship not only with other human sciences but also with the "hard" sciences. The tie between mastering what Strauss has termed "nonsense" and asserting scientific authority has strong links to transformations that occurred in the course of the "witch craze" in Europe, specifically regarding the terms of evidence within the overlapping institutional domains of science and law, both dominated by theology, to which we will return in the following pages. Certainly institutions charged with the task of discerning truth from falsehood have shifted dramatically over the centuries, yet the murmurs of this original theology remain audible in Malinowski and Christensen, even today. *Häxan* exists as a visual amplifier of these persistent murmurs.

Malinowski's method requires certain presuppositions in order to be effective. First, it presumes that the experiential disposition of the analyst is a legitimate and effective way by which one can begin to form an understanding of a phenomenon otherwise held to be imaginary, fictional, or simply untrue. Second, it turns on the principle that witnessing and testimony can concretely serve as evidence as to the reality of something otherwise beyond the direct experience of the researcher. In seeking to bring the invisible and nonsensical into the realm of ethnographic fact, Malinowski

explicitly recognizes the representational nature of this truth; only the testimony of the expert makes belief in such phenomena as real (in any sense) possible. Dan Sperber has pointed out that most religious beliefs follow the same representational logic.[10] Since Luther's radical assertion that faith can only be a commitment to the representation of a truth, the explicit nature of this relationship has been a contentious element in Western Christianity's own efforts to discern truth and the nature of the world. Malinowski has thus only updated and secularized a much older epistemology dating back to precisely the period *Häxan* depicts. In the words of Joseph Leo Koerner, "Lutheranism is the original anthropology of 'apparently irrational beliefs.'"[11] As we shall see in *Häxan* (a quite "Protestant" work in many ways), this overriding "conviction in the utterly invisible" is not solely the concern of either theologians or scientists and hardly limited to the time of the Reformation and the subsequent witch craze.

Realizing the Witch

In the closing decades of the fifteenth century, it was clear to ecclesiastical and secular authorities in Europe that they were witnessing a crisis in the form of a proliferation of witches.[12] The growing number of beings intent on the destruction of Christendom mirrored the growing power of Satan on earth, and for many, indicated an impending apocalypse. In more immediate terms for theologians, the seemingly viral proliferation of demonic power beyond the grasp of human experience, intuition, or thought required a radical change in the manner by which authorities could investigate and evaluate situations that involved invisible, supernatural powers.

First appearing in 1487, in an atmosphere of fear and grave doubt, the notorious demonological text the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Der Hexenhammer* or *The Hammer of Witches*) established a logical if not disputed relation between investigative procedures, the constitution of evidence, and the assertion of fact during the period.[13] Proceeding in a manner explicitly contrary to previous scholastic methods of ascertaining the nature of the real, the assertion of expertise in the *Malleus* by authors Henry Institoris (Heinrich Kramer) and Jacob Sprenger, while quite radical for its time, echoes to a startling degree much later statements to the same effect, including

Malinowski's own assertions discussed earlier. The claim to expertise in the *Malleus* is phrased as follows:

> We are now laboring at subject matter involving morality, and for this reason it is not necessary to dwell on various arguments and explanations everywhere, since the topics that will follow in the chapters have been sufficiently discussed in the preceding questions. Therefore, we beseech the reader in the name of God not to ask for an explanation of all matters, when suitable likelihood is sufficient if facts that are generally agreed to be true either on the basis of one's own experience from seeing or hearing or on the basis of the accounts given by trustworthy witnesses are adduced.[14]

Institoris and Sprenger were actively responding to concrete fears of Europeans at the time. Their bold assertion of expertise in matters real but (often) invisible shares much with Luther's reply to the question of how might we see God: "Just as our Lord God is the thesis of the Decalogue, so the devil is its antithesis."[15] Nothing troubled the soul of the late-fifteenth- and then sixteenth-century European as much as God's apparent absence in times of great change and strife. Forcing Satan and his followers from the shadows through an interpretive expertise over the concrete, secondary manifestations of his reality was often reassuring, *relief* for the pious believer on the brink of doubt. Heretics such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit, Waldensians, and Cathars managed God's absence without positing the embrace of life that the Devil urges in binary opposition to that of the Good, albeit infused with the perilous dogmatism eschatology always brings.[16] Most had no luxury to imagine such a world.

As Satan's power appeared to grow (at least in the treatises of theologians) the problem of the Devil interfering with the most intimate communications with the Divine became acute.[17] How does one know who *really* hears the prayers and entreaties of the faithful? Moreover, given the Devil's deceit and omnipresence, how does one *really* know who is speaking when prayer is returned? The paradoxical comfort the inquisitor offered was rooted in questions of theodicy in a world where the trappings of belief are everywhere but where there is no incontrovertibly visible evidence of God's acknowledgment or answer to the prayers of the faithful. Thomas Aquinas had earlier raised this thorny problem of doubt: "It seems that there is no God. For if, of two mutually exclusive things, one were to exist without limit,

the other would cease to exist. But by the word 'God' is implied some limitless good. If then God existed, nobody would ever encounter evil. But evil is encountered in the world. God therefore does not exist."[18]

Aquinas refutes his own speculative preposition through his famous five proofs of God's existence;[19] demonologists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were not so sure. For demonologists such as Institoris, Sprenger, or Johannes Nider, a third figure beyond that of "God" or "man" was required; this figure in concrete terms was the witch.[20] Thus, the absent term in this understanding is shifted from God (although most could not claim to have directly seen God) to the witch, the chasm between God and man now itself functioning as a kind of proof, a reassurance that the evil of the world can be explained through the various iterations of Satan's power.[21] The Devil therefore serves to prove God's existence, the polarity reversed *toward* God's permission for demons to cause evil in the world and *away* from the nagging, perceived void where God is expected to be. As demonologists would persistently claim in the sixteenth century, *God must exist because Satan is right in front of me!*[22]

If human beings were slow to recognize divinity compared to malicious beings such as demons (after all, it was *demons* who first recognized the divinity of Christ, long before his disciples came around),[23] then how could one confidently recognize the presence of Satan? By definition inquisitors would have taken the reality of witches and Satan for granted, yet the scope of demonic power authorizing these beings concrete reality in the world would have nevertheless struck inquisitors as unbelievable.[24] Hearing the name of the witch in an accusation or a confession, bolstered by the details of truly sacrilegious and inhuman deeds, would still have been a shock to them and was very much subject to verification. Put differently: with the interweaving of learned demonology into the fabric of a dominant theology that ratified the sovereignty of God primarily through the worldly evidence of Satan's forceful opposition to that divine power, inquisitors believed that what was reported to them was possible; but it would be a gross misrepresentation to argue that inquisitors would not have then sought to empirically verify such claims. Indeed, even within this style of reasoning, it was possible that individual accusations could be found to be spurious or false. The invisibility of the spiritual world was expressed as an essential given, but demonologists and inquisitors at the time still desired *proof*. As doubt

arose everywhere around them, the viral proliferation of the witch came to provide that proof.

As numerous scholars of the witch trials have noted, the strategy of leading the accused in her testimony was common during interrogations.[25] In an effort to prove a particular instance of witchcraft had occurred, inquisitors often had to lead, goad, and viciously repeat the torture of "the witch" until a narrative was produced that at least partially satisfied the demands of evidence.[26] For the inquisitor or witch hunter, it was never enough to simply "believe." Rather, the interrogation under torture represented an experimental form of knowing in crisis.[27]

It would be absurd to argue that this style of interrogation was later simply reproduced in the more modern contexts of the human sciences or in early ethnographic studies such as Malinowski's pioneering work in the Trobriand Islands. Yet the truth value of a nonsensical confession made sensible has a strong connection to a series of truths regarding human belief, action, and social practices across a much longer historical arc than generally acknowledged. This link is perhaps even clearer if we shift our attention from the pragmatic humanism of Malinowski's approach to the ethnographic style of early French ethnographers such as Marcel Griaule. While rejecting the stark ontological difference asserted by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl between the nonsensical world of "primitives" and the science of the West, Griaule's own approach to ethnographic research developed in the 1930s betrayed an aggressive belief that "natives" could not (or simply would not) ever be able to produce a "proper" explanation of the forces around them or their own beliefs and motivations in relation to these forces. They would lie, conceal, protect—and so wresting their knowledge from them, learning truth from lie, was essential to representing their reality in order to interpret it in its true picture:

> The role of the sleuth of social facts is often comparable to that of the detective or examining magistrate. The crime is the fact, the guilty party the interlocutor, and accomplices are all the members of this society. This multiplicity of responsible parties, the extent of the areas where they act, the abundance of pieces of evidence serving to convict appear to facilitate the inquest, but in reality they guide it into labyrinths—labyrinths that are often organized. . . . Not to guide the inquest is to allow the instinctive need that the informer has to dissimulate the most delicate points. . . . The inquest must be treated like a strategic operation.[28]

Thus, while testimony was an essential tool for ethnographers of this school, the encounter between researcher and subject constituted a series of *severe tests* by which the researcher could gather the necessary empirical evidence in order to make a felicitous truth statement regarding what was "really" at play. While the nonsense to be mastered had shifted from the demonic, incredible forces at play for the inquisitor to the misguided tall tales of the native interlocutor, the logic of gathering evidence through a series of trials or tests is surprisingly durable between these investigative contexts.[29]

As authoritarian as Griaule's approach to fieldwork explicitly was, it was also consistent in its recognition of the struggle that lay at the heart of raising testimony to the status of the "really real."[30] Haunted by the possibility of deception, Griaule was more explicit in his recognition that any form of testimony (his or an interlocutor other's) requires a test or a trial in order for it to be elevated to the status of a fact. Avital Ronell captures this necessity when she writes, "A passion or experience without mastery, without subjectivity, testimony, as passion, always renders itself vulnerable to doubt."[31] Aspiring to an objective form of scientific knowledge that obviates this doubt, Griaule aggressively frames the scene of ethnographic encounter itself as a kind of antagonistic trial whereby the ghosts and gods of the natives are forced out of the shadows and made concretely apparent to the senses of the anthropologist. This approach attempts a more delicate balance than its belligerent tone would lead us to believe. Griaule himself appears to acknowledge that the testimony obtained, while able to generate some understanding, will never resolve itself in a proof in the strict sense of the term. In essence, fieldwork in this context produces knowledge of hauntings that is itself haunted. As inquisitors also tacitly acknowledged, this paradoxical haunting is what gives testimony its power of fact in the first place. If testimony were truly "certainty" or mere "information," as Jacques Derrida reminds us, testimony "would lose its function as testimony. In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted. It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the possibility, at least, of literature."[32]

The expertise that comes with wrangling the invisible and nonsensical very often is rendered visually (it should come as no surprise that the filmmaker Jean Rouch was one of Griaule's students). Yet strategies of visualization

are hardly limited to a "French" approach in this instance, as commentators ranging from Clifford Geertz to Anna Grimshaw have noted the visual qualities of Malinowski's ethnographic writing, with Geertz going so far as to playfully term his output the imaginative result of "I-witnessing."[33] Nor are such creative test results solely a phenomenon of twentieth-century social science. The paradoxical necessity of an *expressive* element within an objective test in relation to what would otherwise be nonsense is evident in many of the examples of sixteenth-century visual culture that remain known to us today. For example, in Franz Heinemann's 1900 *Rites and Rights in the German Past* (a work that figures prominently in *Häxan*),[34] a woodcut shows an investigative technique deployed by inquisitors and witch hunters: trial by ordeal. The woodcut depicts a crowd of people surrounding a bound woman as she is nudged away from the shore. Heinemann's image is similar to others, including a detail of a bound, naked woman undergoing the trial by water drawn from Eduard Fuchs's *Illustrated Social History from the Middle Ages to the Present*.[35] The possible outcomes were few: if the woman floats she is clearly able to contravene the laws and God and nature and is therefore a witch or heretic; if she sinks, she has made no such pact with Satan and the judges proceed to thank God for her innocence (though she may have just as likely been fished out before drowning). It is important to note the role of procedural expertise that such ordeals required, as the trial by water here functions as experiment as much as a punishment, designed to reveal an otherwise invisible truth.

It is clear that concerns about what was admissible as evidence of the real motivated such "trials" and served to frame the possible interpretations of their results. Testimony, experimental results, and expert inquisitorial interpretation together came to form an early version of the *case study* that, in turn, could be synthesized as evidence in service of accounting for variation that exceeded *general laws* regarding relations and phenomenon in the world. Individual cases came to serve as an effective strategy in providing analytic purchase for phenomenon that were otherwise invisible to even the discerning eye of the expert. It is this act of taking a single, natural object (the case) and abstracting its qualities to describe phenomena that we find in the clinical work of Thomas Sydenham in 1668, something the historian Philippe Huneman further traces through the psychiatry of Philippe Pinel, which we can extend even further in the famous cases histories of Sigmund

Freud.[36] Following this thinking, close analysis of salient individual cases would make hidden tendencies visible in practical, "natural" terms, a characteristic that made the method attractive to artists and scientists alike who were seeking to move away from a reliance on metaphysics.[37] It is no accident that in the nineteenth century the clinical photography of Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne and Jean-Martin Charcot, and the chronophotography of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, exerted a formal, expressive influence that often exceeded the limited audience of scientific peers.[38]

Charcot and the Bibliothèque diabolique

> It is easier for superstitious men, in a superstitious age, to change all the notions that are associated with their rites, than to free their minds from their influence. Religions never truly perish, except by natural decay.
>
> W.E.H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1865)

> The physician seeks to fill what he knows with what he sees. He is in search of the manifestation of his nosological concepts. Mobilized by attention, he considers the deployment of a knowledge in the new and visible form of an appearing. In short, he discovers without learning.
>
> Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun* (1986)

There are witch confessions that are insane. This fact was recognized by many skeptics in the sixteenth century who, while acknowledging Satan's unquestioned power, cast doubt on the truth value of unlearned witnesses to this invisible power and the theological frameworks deployed by inquisitors validating their interpretations of how such reported acts were consistent with the authoritative discourses of the Church or (in the case of Protestants) of the gospels themselves. *Possessions* set the stage for the explicit medicalization of the mobile, invisible forces that experts had been struggling to master, explain, and take measures against—a new mode that is equally didactic and forensic. In such well-known incidents as the possessions among the Ursuline nuns of Loudun from 1634, we find an increased medicalization of the invisible that, over the course of a long transition,[39]

reverberates through the medical and human sciences of the nineteenth century.

The quote from Michel de Certeau's *The Possession at Loudun* refers to the physicians called upon for aid in the wake of the Church's failure to exorcise the demons haunting the nuns at Loudun. Jean-Martin Charcot was of course well aware of the enduring relationship between religious sense and medical knowledge underscored by de Certeau's statement.[40] Thus Charcot did not so much invent as inherit a perspective on the relation between religious ecstasy, magic, witchcraft, and "nervous disease." He and his students collected and published historical accounts under the title *Bibliothèque diabolique*—a series in which many texts and treatises from the sixteenth century were reproduced, including *Soeur Jeanne des Anges, superiéure des Ursulines de Loudun: Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédee*,[41] *Science et miracle: Louise Lateau ou la stigmatisée belge*,[42] and *La possession de Jeanne Fery*,[43] all of which were accounts contemporary to Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus ac venificiis* (*On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons*, 1563), and follow the *Malleus* by nearly a century. The books in the *Bibliothèque diabolique* indexed as much as clarified the link between witchcraft and hysteria for Charcot and his followers. In *Science et miracle* (a 1875 book on witchcraft, faith healing, and demonic possession), Bourneville begins by warning his readers that the "profound time of ignorance in the Middle Ages" has been prolonged into "modern society,"[44] appealing to an appraisal of history in service of a project for scientific modernity. For Bourneville and those producing work in the *Bibliothèque diabolique*, case studies were meant to demonstrate the precariousness of misrepresentation and the consequences of ignorance.

The errors of demonologists and exorcists were rooted in what was characterized as the mistaken conceptualization of their object of investigation. Yet, accusations of error and superstition aside, the procedural elements of the investigations collected in the *Bibliothèque diabolique* bore a startling resemblance to those undertaken by Charcot and his students, particularly in their studies of hysteria. While it is certain that witch hunting and the exorcism of spirits in the sixteenth century were hardly interchangeable with clinical studies of nervous illness in the nineteenth century, the conceptual scaffolding of the emergent science that they were creating bore more than a passing resemblance methodologically to these now antiquated forms of

inquiry. More than anything, the continued fascination with the secondary, visible effects of primary invisible forces demonstrated that the discernment of spirits, like the diagnosis of nervous illness, involved a long-term labor of social interpretation that required the mutation of old categories and the creation of new ones.[45] The contentious fragility of these endeavors revealed by these historical accounts served as salutary lessons for Charcot and his followers; the fact that their own conceptualization of their object largely retained its status as the insensible, invisible, outside forces that served as the focus of the work in the *Bibliothèque diabolique* was an irony that largely escaped comment.

It is impossible to overstate the influence the works produced by the students of Jean-Martin Charcot had on the trajectory of inquiry across the human sciences of the late nineteenth century. Charcot himself collected artistic and historical materials on the relation between witchcraft and hysteria, which he presented under the title *Les démoniaques dans l'art*, published by the Academy of Medicine in 1887.[46] Charcot's famous students such as Georges Gilles de la Tourette and Paul Auguste Sollier attempted "to trace the hysteric through history" with "sincerity and veracity." They concerned themselves not only with prevailing social attitudes toward "misdiagnosed" hysterics of the early modern period, but also with clinical attention to the physical manifestation of hysteria found in images and writings on the time. In Gilles de la Tourette's *Traité clinique et thérapeutique de l'hystérie d'après l'enseignement de la Salpêtrière*[47] and Sollier's *Genèse et nature de l'hystérie, recherches cliniques et expérimentales de psycho-physiologie*,[48] we find detailed indexing of symptoms such as religious fervor and stigmatization alongside psychosomatic indicators such as blue edema or swelling with local cyanosis, and "autographic skin" that would appear intensely red after touch—all physical signs of witchcraft attributed to earlier centuries.[49]

As A. R. G. Owen points out, the word "medicine" finds its etymological roots in sorcery, after Seneca's tragedy of *Medea*, whose betrayal and revenge leads to the murder of her children.[50] Even within the writings attributed to Hippocrates, "the sacred disease" (epilepsy), erroneously perceived as resulting from hostile magic, could be reconsidered in terms of individual physiological disorder.[51] Yet "hysteria," itself from the Greek for "uterus," seemed to hold a special place in the moral imaginary.[52] In the century before Charcot's famous neurology clinic at Salpêtrière, nearly ten thousand

women were kept there at the second Bastille, La Force Prison. These were destitute women, the insane, "idiots," epileptics, and Parisian society's "least favored classes."[53] The special susceptibility of women to witchcraft mirrored the "feminine weakness" associated with the hysteric, exacerbated by low social status. It was nuns and devoted female members of the Church that raised special concern when "possessed" by unexplained forces of demonic or psychic origin. Like later diagnostics of hysteria, the discernment of spirits was at its root a discernment of *female bodies as such*.[54]

Ulrich Baer points out that what Charcot created was a *tableau vivant* transformed into a *tableau clinique*—a hysterical reliving of the original symptom and reframed trauma in an attempt to suspend the two temporalities (real and reimagined) in the same image.[55] This "reliving" is precisely what Freud and Breuer meant to produce through hypnosis in their studies on hysteria, to isolate the mechanisms of hysteria and the surrounding symptoms of catharsis and dementia, their most famous cases being Anna O., Frau Emmy von N., and later of course Freud's own Dora.[56] It's no wonder that one element of fascination with hysteria was its "look"—its *aesthetic* link to forms of possession. Traugott Oesterreich, who published his *Occultism and Modern Science* in 1923, traced a similar path toward an aesthetic ideal of possession beginning with the *Acta Sanctorum* in the Catholic Church.[57] In countless accounts of possession, we find descriptions of demons speaking through the mouths of girls, as well as possession manifested through "external signs" of a new physiognomy, particularly in the face. We also find identical descriptions of voice, personality, and facial change in Pierre Janet's *Névroses et idées fixes*.[58] In his studies of medical psychology, Janet describes the aneasthesias, amnesias, subconscious acts, somnambulisms, and fixed ideas all associated with possession—including a case of spontaneous abortion brought on by powerful thoughts of a previous abortion.[59] Oesterreich's observation that Catholic religious ceremonies to "treat" the possessed worked to heighten the intensity of possession, reflects the same heightening that Charcot himself considered of the subjective state of the hysteric in his clinical theater.[60]

In sum, what is critical to note in all these cases is an overriding desire to gain some empirical purchase over forces openly acknowledged to be invisible and insensible. The tension animating each of these domains lay in the conceptually arranged chasm between outer and inner states. For exorcists,

building on the techniques of inquisitors and witch hunters, possession acts as the bridge across this chasm. Two centuries later, neurologists and psychologists construct the same scaffolding. Anthropologists by the time of Malinowski attempt to close this aporia by sympathetically occupying the very inner space of their interlocutors, with the witches, spirits, and demons no longer explicitly the target of the inquiry, but rather fieldworkers as truth-tellers returning from the dark corners of the real. In the midst of these efforts, *Häxan*, aspiring simultaneously to the status of science *and* of art, sought to force *everything* into plain view. As powerful and forward-looking as *Häxan* truly is, the specter of sheer nonsense as its real object remains. And yet we still today hunt ghosts and witches, fueled by a desire operationalized in a method of being close enough to something to *sense* it, because even objective scientific mastery demands a closeness to things unseen, unprovable, indeed *nonsensical*, yet *there*.