Figure 1. Susu (left) kisses a reluctant
Nana Ekua (right) in *Jezebel* (dir. Socrate
Safo, Ghana, 2007 and 2008).

Occult Melodramas: Spectral Affect and West African Video-Film

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When I first met the highly prolific Ghanaian video-filmmaker Socrate Safo in Accra in the spring of 2007, he brought along his film *Women in Love* (Ghana, 1996) to show me. We were driving out to a village where he was shooting his latest film, and since Safo likes to be as productive as possible at all times, he keeps a small television and VCR in the front seat of his maroon Dodge minivan. While Safo usually uses the equipment to edit films or watch parts of them while he is stuck in Accra's notorious traffic jams, that day he wanted to use the time to screen his most well-known film for me. At first, I found *Women in Love* hard to follow. It was difficult to concentrate on a film as we were bouncing up and down on bumpy dirt roads, and both its implausible plot and the poor quality of the video did not help matters. Eventually, though, I was lured in by the story line: *Women in Love* is about a woman, Julie (Vida Ampomah), who wants her clothing shop to be successful and seeks the advice of a well-to-do, single friend. The friend sends Julie to an occultist who takes her to the beach and

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initiates her into a cult that worships a lesbian water spirit. Julie quickly becomes quite successful, acquiring her own mansion and Mercedes-Benz, but her wealth comes with a condition: she may never again sleep with a man, and any woman whom Julie sleeps with may also never again sleep with a man or that woman will go mad. Understandably, when Julie seduces a married woman this creates tensions and troubles for the nuclear family—and it is the stuff of which good melodrama is made. I was completely hooked on the story and enthralled by the fact that a popular genre dealt with a topic as taboo in West Africa as homosexuality.[1]

But when the film was over, Safo told me that he was disappointed with *Women in Love*. He knew that the production values were substandard and that with all the development in technology he was confident that he could do better. Which is why, he said, he was planning to remake the film later that summer. He promised that the new version would keep the original story line that made it so popular, but would also showcase all of the special effects that he could now do digitally. And indeed, *Jezebel*, the four-part remake of *Women in Love*, released in 2007 and 2008, is full of such special effects: in this version the water spirit materializes out of thin air and transforms into a human, the Mercedes-Benz is replaced with a yellow Hummer that is produced by a morphing fireball, and good and evil spirits fight each other with breaths of fire and resilient Bible shields. Like *Women in Love*, *Jezebel*, which I examine in detail in the second half of this essay, is paradigmatic of a genre of West African video-film that I call the *occult melodrama*, a genre that is made possible by the flexibility of video technology.

Before the advent of video, it would have been unthinkable for a popular, mass-consumed visual media industry to exist in West Africa. Until the arrival of the VHS, the expense of celluloid film, the lack of in-country postproduction facilities, and the paucity of African theaters meant that filmmaking was never considered a profit-making endeavor. While many West African filmmakers still continue to make celluloid films, in Nigeria and Ghana, video, in its various formats, is now the technology of choice. Nigeria's video-film industry, known as Nollywood, currently releases more than two thousand films a year and is the world's second largest film

industry after Bollywood.[2] Ghana's Ghallywood (also referred to as Ghanawood) operates on a smaller scale but often shares actors and producers with Nollywood. Both industries produce incredibly popular, inexpensively made, straight-to-video films that are viewed in video parlors, ad hoc social spaces, and private homes. Unlike African celluloid films, which are typically screened at international art theaters and are not often seen by African viewers, video-films are sold on the streets of most Anglophone African towns, online, and in African supermarkets across the globe. Thus, Nigerian and Ghanaian video-films are produced and viewed within a social milieu that is specifically West African but also transnational and multiply determined, like West African culture itself. Like other national cinemas, then, Nollywood and Ghallywood video-films are both culturally unique and globally recognizable: they speak to and from cultures that are the products of traditional systems of reference as well as new formations of meaning.

Furthermore, as the name suggests, video-films are hybrid forms. They are videos, shot in a number of different video formats, including VHS, Betamax, DV, DVC-pro, and Hi8, and are distributed on VHS, VCD, and now primarily DVD. Video-films also borrow themes from feature films: they are predominantly melodramatic stories about city life, village conflicts, and love gone awry. They typically consist of anywhere from one to four parts and are often sold in installments, with audiences eagerly awaiting the next plot twist or resolution. Like the Hollywood melodramas, Indian love stories, and Latin American *telenovelas* that have influenced them, West African videos focus on stories in which individuals struggle to maintain or obtain status, wealth, sexual security, and generational continuity against the overwhelming forces of a morally corrupt society. Following other media forms produced within the melodramatic mode, video-films are stories in which social conflicts are expressed through personal feelings, private dilemmas, and bodily sensations rather than through direct ideological contestations.

However, since melodrama is often the mode that expresses the symptoms of social contradictions, its aesthetics necessarily vary when the genre is extended to non-Western cultures where cul-

tural conflicts are articulated in different ways.[3] Unlike American melodramas, many West African video-films often include occult story lines or subplots that focus on witchcraft or spirits. Characters can shoot lightning bolts and fireballs from their hands; humans morph into snakes or vultures; and ghosts materialize out of thin air to chase their murderers. As Christine Gledhill argues, (Western) melodrama, as a bourgeois form, is both limited by the conditions of verisimilitude and at the same time the very genre that best expresses the types of desires and perversities that bourgeois realism represses. This, she argues, leads to the "siphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive mise-en-scène which makes a work melodramatic."[4] In the occult melodrama genre of Nollywood and Ghallywood, unrepresentable desires and fears are channeled through the supernatural and, more specifically, the diabolical.[5]

For Brian Larkin, whose work on Nollywood films easily applies to Ghanaian films, video-films produce an "aesthetics of outrage" designed to stimulate and provoke reactions in the audience by sensationally depicting religious, social, and moral transgressions that contribute to everyday instability and uncertainty in the postcolony.[6] As both the Nigerian and Ghanaian film industries grow and become more varied, the "negation of morality" that Larkin describes has been expressed in a number of different overlapping genres and subgenres (186). Scholars, in the meantime, have been trying to map the ways in which these genres are both recognizable to and somewhat outside world cinema categories. Tobias Maria Wendl, for instance, argues that African video-films depicting forces of evil should be considered part of the global genre of horror films. He argues that fantastic video-films, much like Western horrors, use monstrous, impure, or evil characters to elicit emotions such as fear and repulsion.[7] Onookome Okome, however, expresses concern about subordinating local ways of envisioning the occult into universal, predefined genres such as the horror film. He suggests that the "psycho-social reactions" to witchcraft, fetish priests, and money magic in African video-film might be very different from the reactions to the evil monsters of Western horror genres.[8]

Okome, in turn, identifies genres that are specifically West African: the occult/city film and the "hallelujah video" (4). The occult/city film is one in which the violence of the city is an explicitly occult or ritualistic violence. More specifically Christian than the occult/city film, the hallelujah video, primarily made by Pentecostal churches, focuses its main plot on the spiritual salvation or quest of a wayward protagonist. Likewise, Wisdom S. Agorde refers to the broad category of the "occult video," the type of film that allows audiences to both see and condemn the ways in which morally corrupt individuals use occult powers to become wealthy.[9] It is important to note here that both Okome and Agorde are indebted to the notion of the occult economy as it has been formulized in the work of Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff. For Comaroff and Comaroff, the occult, at least in an African context, has become linked through an array of "magical technologies" to the incoherence and obscene inequalities of the "free" market.[10] Thus, the occult refers as much to supernatural forces as it does to political and economic ones.

In video-film these occult anxieties are expressed through the conventional focal points of cinematic melodrama: love triangles, the instability of the bourgeois family, scopophilic pleasure, and women's virtue or lack thereof. Thus, I propose that examining the occult and melodramatic aspects of these films together opens up new directions in video-film genre criticism that take gender and the body as a point of departure. As Larkin has already suggested, the aesthetics of outrage of video-film physically stimulates the viewer much in the way that Linda Williams describes in her work on body genres: "low" genres like melodrama, pornography, and horror are designed as systems of excess that cause viewers to weep, revolt, shudder, scream, or experience sexual pleasure.[11] But what has yet to be brought to the discussion of West African video-film is the way in which these body genres hinge on the spectacle of the sexualized female body. The occult melodrama, like Safo's *Jezebel*, allows us to examine how women embody extremes, perversions, and private pleasures that are not confined to earthly realities and to the immediately visible world.

Visible and Invisible Simultaneity

Although melodrama is a protean form, most scholars have followed Peter Brooks's argument in *The Melodramatic Imagination* that suggests that melodrama emerges from a secular society where sacred certainties can no longer provide assurance and ready-made meaning to individuals. Feminist scholarship on melodrama has expanded Brooks's work and examined melodrama as a mode that foregrounds the desires and transgressions of gendered bodies. But what such scholarship has often overlooked is the way in which Brooks's argument hinges on the notion of the occult and locates the melodramatic mode as existing in the wake of the "shattering of the myth of Christendom."[12] Melodrama, Brooks claims, is born from the epistemological moment when a "hierarchically cohesive society" can no longer validate social life; thus melodrama exists in order to locate the "moral occult," the hidden forces of virtue in a desacralized society (vii).

West African video-film, which emerges within an increasingly religious and spiritual milieu, demands that we pay attention to these hidden, occult forces just as much as it requires a feminist framework to understand the way in which gender is constructed through the films. At the same time, we must pay attention to the regionally specific social forces that have shaped video-film's ascendancy, which I suggest require a rethinking of Brooks's claims.[13] The birth of video-film is concomitant with inflation, the disappearance of civil service jobs, the rapid expansion of the informal sector, and the rise of Pentecostalism, a way of life that now dominates the social sphere in much of non-Muslim West Africa. It begins during the economic crises of the 1980s, a period of post-oil boom despair for Nigeria and deleterious coerced privatization for much of sub-Saharan Africa. Thus many of the occult stories reflect a period of general uncertainty as much as they embody, both directly and indirectly, a Pentecostal ethos.[14]

West African video melodrama therefore launches at a time when what is shattered is not the sacred but rather the myth of individual success through hard work alone, and at a time when Pentecostalism reconfigures this myth in terms of faith in God.[15] African video-films that are influenced by the Pentecostal climate

do not seek to make legible hidden spiritual values in the same way that Western melodramas do. Rather, they present a world in which supernatural forces operate side by side with the daily lived realities of postcolonial precariousness. Many charismatic churches contend that demonic forces rather than sociopolitical conditions are the obstacles to personal success. Prosperity is achieved through prayer and compliance with church teachings concerning sexuality, frugality, and perseverance. Moreover, the church teaches that visible poverty may actually be a false impression, for although a believer might see himself as poor, he is told by the faith gospel that God sees him as wealthy.[16] Likewise, outward images of wealth such as cars, fancy clothing, and mansions can be signs of a blessed life just as often as they can be illusions of the devil, who has repackaged sin to make it look like virtue (201). In video-films, where corruption often masquerades as wealth, there are always echoes of the Pentecostal worldview that what one sees, hears, or feels is not necessarily the truth. In both Pentecostalism and the video-films that emerge in its shadow, everyday forms of sensation are not reliable ways to know the world.

Many observers of video-film contend that viewing pleasure comes from the fact that the films make the occult world visible and therefore believable, wresting it out of the realm of mere rumor. As Birgit Meyer writes, the videos act as a form of revelation: "The camera appears to trade upon Pentecostal claims of throwing light into the 'powers of darkness.'"[17] Meyer's work highlights Pentecostalism's emphasis on light, public presence, and visual witnessing—which stems, in part, from Protestant claims that all believers, not just priests, have the capacity to see what remains hidden or behind the surface of the biblical text. Such an engagement with "the public performance of revelation" is precisely, according to Meyer, what motivates many of the West African video-films produced in what she calls a "Pentecostalite" style. These videos—influenced by Pentecostal modes of thinking, though not necessarily produced by the church—address the spectators as eyewitnesses to the divine in the manner of televised sermons and church events. But since "making something visible presupposes an invisible," the relationship between vision and belief is complex

and should be seen "as part and parcel of a dialectics of revelation and concealment" (435).

As Meyer's work implies, video-films dissolve the distinction between the visible world and the invisible world, reproducing what is often conceived of as a dangerously unstable balance between the two. Building on Meyer's argument about visuality and Pentecostal belief, I want to take her claims in a somewhat different direction by paying close attention to the affective potentials of the types of videos she discusses. What seems to make occult melodramas compelling to their audience is not simply that they are part of a Pentecostal worldview but also that they use domestic dramas and visual effects to successfully recreate the sensuous impact of occult rumors. Furthermore, it is often the case that video-films' displays of immoral behavior and spirits are actually quite offensive and troublesome to believers. Thus the pleasures to be found in the occult melodrama rest just as much on revealing and concealing the powers of darkness as they do on complex, conflicting forms of anxiety, eroticism, and transgression.

Moreover, while video-films certainly correspond to Pentecostalism's belief that the eye alone cannot perceive the world, this concept also has a strong precedent in many African cultures. As Achille Mbembe suggests, the status of the image in contemporary African popular culture is a continuation of the autochthonous belief in the simultaneity of the visible and invisible world: "The invisible was not only the other side of the visible, its mask or its substitute. The invisible was in the visible, and vice versa, not as a matter of artifice, but as one and the same and as external reality simultaneously—as the image of the thing and the imagined thing, at the same time."[18] In this way, video-films are objects and sites of embodied perception, of social and corporeal excess, that register long-standing uncertainties about both the material and the spiritual world.

Furthermore, because they are dependent on invisibility, occult video-films transmit affects such as pleasure, shock, disgust, or joy—all moments of intensity or amplification—by destabilizing visual certainty. Spectrality—or what I call *spectral affect*—is therefore key to understanding the multifaceted sensuous engage-

ment that audiences might experience when viewing an occult film. *Spectral affect* refers to the way in which occult forces make themselves known and felt, like all noncognitive affects, through relays of attachment or flashes of intensity. In other words, if affects are indeterminate blocs of sensation that "make feelings feel," spectral affect transmits feeling specifically by recourse to the occult or supernatural.[19] Moreover, *spectral affect* is also intended to evoke the related concept of special effect and, in particular, to underscore the imbrication of technological special effects and supernatural magic. Following Hent de Vries, who conjoins the logic of special effects and miracles, and Tom Gunning, whose recent work highlights the uncanny and phantasmatic quality of visual media, I argue that modern media are not opposed to the spectral but, rather, are an extension of it.[20] By focusing on spectral affect, I suggest that the pleasure in occult melodramas extends beyond a visual pleasure and is intimately bound to the multiple forms of anxieties and invisibilities on which the films are predicated and that they register through the inherently mutable and unstable technology of video.

Video Anxiety

As was the case in the US, home video was first introduced into West Africa as a bootleg technology, as a blank format for recording. In the US, consumers first used VHS primarily for recording television programs for later playback, or what is called time-shifting. In West Africa, cassettes were originally used in piracy networks to dub and distribute foreign films.[21] However, in the mid-1980s, Yoruba theater groups began using VHS technology to record and sell their live performances. At a time when economic circumstances made it difficult for many Nigerians to pay for theater tickets and when crime made it unsafe to leave home in the evenings, VHS was considered to be a relatively cheap and safe form of entertainment. Likewise, Nigerian and Ghanaian filmmakers, businessmen, and out-of-work state television producers realized how easy and relatively inexpensive it was to make a film on video format. They began to assemble friends, craft loose

scripts, and make low-budget films on rented equipment. In 1992, Nigeria had its first big hit, Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage*, an occult and Faustian melodrama about an upwardly mobile businessman in Lagos who sacrifices his wife for wealth.[22]

Although the first wave of video-films was marked by low production values and affected by the inherently grainy and unstable quality of video images, audiences were drawn to the novelty of locally produced films. Studies of early audiences emphasize how Africans were elated to see themselves on-screen for the first time and to have the opportunity to interact with stories that came from what they knew and experienced in their everyday lives. Many observers also note that the mode of video presentation, either in homes, video clubs, or street corners, created different expectations and enabled viewing practices that unsettled the structure of institutionalized cinema. However, little attention has been paid to how these experiences are mediated through the aesthetic qualities of video technology. Larkin notes the ways in which infrastructures of piracy influence the quality of video images by eroding the data storage that distorts both sound and image, producing a "hallucinogenic" effect.[23] While Larkin focuses on how imperfect technologies entail a specific cultural experience determined by the constant cycle of breakdown and repair, I want to explore how the hallucinogenic mode of video produces a very specific type of aesthetic experience, one that augments and limits access to the visual in unique ways.

From Sean Cubitt's landmark study on the multiple forms and practices of video media to Lucas Hilderbrand's more recent formulation of video as a bootleg technology, media historians and theorists have brought attention to the way in which video, while connected to older forms of media, disrupts the forms of stability they rely on. To begin with, video depends on the transfer of electronic signals rather than on fixing images onto a photochemical strip. While celluloid film relies on the materiality of a filmstrip that stores the photographic image and sound track, video stores visual and audio information as pulses of electricity. In film, the image has been exposed on celluloid—one can hold up a filmstrip to the light and see exactly what was recorded. By contrast, video

cannot display the materiality of its images: what is recorded cannot be seen on the magnetic tape or disc itself because the information is stored as a series of digital signals, as ones and zeros that can only be displayed with playback monitors. Because there are no fixed pictures, video is an inherently mutable technology. It is therefore processual and constantly in flux, not bound by particular frames or photochemical fixing but rather produced through variable and continuously rendered electronic impulses.[24]

Laura Marks, in her discussion of "video haptics," argues that because video's electronic images are always impermanent and incomplete, video requires "giving up visual control."[25] Video necessitates a willingness to involve the body's entire sensory apparatus in filling in the gaps left on the surface of the image. The significantly lower levels of pixel density, the variabilities and decay of the image, and the lower contrast ratios mean that video provides less detail than film and gives viewers an incomplete amount of visual information. Similarly, as Hilderbrand points out, video has a unique aesthetic of failure that is produced through its continual use and duplication. Images drop out, develop lines of distortion (or noise bars), and become jerky or exaggerated. Even digitized video skips entire frames, is subjected to scratches and marring, and has its own interference patterns. Hilderbrand adds that viewing an image on TV means that the image one sees is never entirely complete because the colored pixels alternate at a different rate than they do in film (30 "frames" per second instead of 24).[26] For Marks, this inherent "unknowability" of video lends an eroticism to the medium.[27] She argues that because watching a video requires an intersubjective relation, or a mutual exchange between the viewer and the image, video solicits an affective and "haptic" interaction that "presses up to the object" and necessitates a "thinking through the skin" (xiii, 18).

Whereas Marks, like other media scholars of video in the Euro-American context, focuses her analysis on experimental video art, on images that invite an embodied spectatorship, Nollywood and Ghallywood practitioners use video in different ways and for different reasons—and they certainly do not intentionally produce unfulfilling or "insufficiently visual" (10) images in

the same way that experimental artists do. The production gaffes, out-of-focus images, lighting difficulties, and low-resolution images that were especially prominent in the videos from the 1980s and 1990s and are still sometimes noticeable today are not themselves intended to elicit an affective response from the audience. Early practitioners turned to video because economic circumstances put celluloid out of reach, not because they felt attached to the grainy quality of video. Tunde Kelani, one of the pioneers of the industry, initially called video a "stop-gap measure" and assumed that he would eventually return to celluloid when economic conditions in Nigeria improved.[28] Safo, who was trained not as a filmmaker but as an auto mechanic, also expresses concern about the technological flaws in his early films.[29] It is clear, then, that videomakers count on audiences to overlook these flaws in order to enjoy the story being told despite its low-budget affect rather than to let their gaze linger or find pleasure in the inadequacies.

Nevertheless, Marks provides us with a useful formulation to begin thinking about the sensuous nature of West African video images, for there is indeed something erotic in the partial visibility exhibited in Nollywood and Ghallywood videos, in the ephemeral and unstable quality of the images, and of course in their spectral aesthetics, that highlights the viewer's inability to know and master his or her visible world. For Marks, "What is erotic is the ability to move between control and relinquishing, between being giver and receiver. It's the ability to have your sense of self, your self-control, taken away and restored."[30] In occult melodrama, this type of dynamic is precisely what occurs: the viewer's sense of power and visual mastery is diminished; then, several hours later, everything is restored through a happy and expected Christian ending. In this way, watching a film that produces anxiety can be pleasurable or erotic because it allows the viewer to continually cede and regain control.[31] The pleasure-anxiety nexus of video-film is therefore a result of the "incomplete" images, the sexualized women, and the occult stories they produce.

Ghostly Affect, Occult Woman

While Marks approaches experimental video art through what she calls a haptic criticism, or surface reading, I turn to what may be called a spectral criticism: a methodology of interpreting the occult affects of Nigerian and Ghanaian video-film by looking at what seeps through the surface. Here, then, I focus on the occult woman, the woman who has been "vaporized" by heteropatriarchal institutions but who returns, nonetheless, to haunt them.[32] Although video-films depict both men and women who participate in occult practices, women, as in most witchcraft discourses, are made to embody moral corruption in ways that men are not. Thus, occult melodramas create modes of looking in which the woman is simultaneously spectacle and spectral. In other words, the woman is not only the object of desire but also the object of concealment, an occult figure whose activities are not often known. She is, in a sense, a typical femme fatale, who, according to Mary Anne Doane, is "never really what she seems to be" and who is never "entirely legible, predictable, or manageable."[33] But while the Hollywood femme fatale is always the object of the gaze, the spectral women of West African video-film also serve as a reminder of the occult world that lurks beneath the visible world. If, as Doane suggests, the femme fatale is all about the surface, Nollywood and Ghallywood's occult women are about the seething, the bubbling up beneath the surface.

Nollywood's most canonical spectral woman appears in Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage*, the film that jumpstarted the industry and paved the way for many films that would follow the format of the multipart melodrama about wealthy city-dwellers. The film focuses on Andy Okeke (Kenneth Okonkwo), a young man who has recently moved to Lagos and is trying to accumulate fortunes like his friends. After several business failures, Andy is invited to join a cult—the cult of Lord Lucifer—that requires him to sacrifice his wife, Merit (Nnenna Nwabueze). Andy obliges, drinks Merit's blood, and becomes rich. But Merit's ghost begins to haunt him, and he eventually goes mad. Merit pops up—the special effects and sound track have her apparition springboarding into the frame—at important moments in Andy's life: his next

wedding, a chieftancy ceremony, and an important business deal. She haunts his house, makes his bedroom walls shake, and drives him to insanity. In this sense, Merit is not a spectacle to be looked at: she is pure ghostly affect. She makes Andy tremble and shudder and faint. She causes him shame and remorse. Furthermore, on the copy of the film I acquired in 2007, white specks across the screen, called "dropout," and noise bars were common. Some of the more damaged images had even lost their vertical stability, creating a jerky and sometimes double image that served as a visible inscription of the video-film's ghostly affect.[34] Thus the video femme fatale's danger is generated not by a transparent medium but by a ghostly, electronic pulse.

However, what Merit's haunting does not do is expose Andy's crimes. In fact, several characters in the film, including Merit's family, have already figured out what Andy and the other cult members have done. Instead, her ghostly presence makes him feel his crimes. As Avery Gordon suggests: "What is distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes obliquely. . . . Specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view."[35] Following Gordon, I would like to emphasize that ghosts and occult forces do not represent or stand in for an invisible or fantastical world. Rather, the ghost is a real presence, a presence that demands our attention. This is precisely what Merit does in *Living in Bondage*: she demands that we pay attention to Andy's moral transgressions and to the crimes of the urban elite. The visual pleasure or erotics of a film like *Living in Bondage* is not based on the spectacle of a woman but on the specter—she who animates the unresolved social violence.

Living in Bondage, then, provides us with a literal example of spectral affect. But in many cases, Nollywood and Ghallywood's occult women are not ghosts per se. They are witches, or spirits, or those marginalized, often invisible subjects whose haunting presence, as Gordon suggests, demands that we pay attention. To a certain extent, the anxiety in video-films is directly linked to economic instability. As I have suggested, it is an anxiety related to what

Comaroff and Comaroff have labeled "occult economies," econo-mies where wealth, because it has been separated from formal, dis-cernible labor practices, appears through seemingly supernatural or mysterious networks.[36] The anxiety in these economies stems from the fact that money is increasingly acquired through fraud, speculation, pyramid schemes, and scams: because its sources are inscrutable, wealth appears as if by magic, even when magic per se is not involved. Furthermore, new wealth is often privately con-sumed, poured into cars and mansions, rather than publicly distrib-uted. It is this type of conspicuous consumption that contributes to the level of unease expressed in stories and rumors about the accumulations of the nouveau riche.[37] Thus witchcraft, vampires, zombies, or cult murders all serve as useful ways to describe how personal success is accomplished only through cheating, tricking, or somehow consuming the labor of unwitting innocents.

Bliss Cua Lim, in her study of Asian ghost films and fantastic cinema, notes that the presence of supernaturalism in film allows for the existence of multiple times that do not coincide with linear and calendrical time. Examining the allegorical and nostalgic New Cinema movements of Hong Kong and the Philippines, Lim sug-gests that these films "wreak havoc on linear notions of national progress, calling the future to responsibility for its unfulfilled promises."[38] Lim therefore outlines the way in which a postcolonial art cinema can produce a pleasurable critique of the linearity of an imperial, colonial time that excludes nonteleological experiences. Building on Jacques Derrida's discussion of the ghost who is at the core of ethical politics, Lim argues that ghost films, which unhinge the temporality of the present, demand historical accountability. Although West African video-film functions within the confines of the melodramatic genre, we can see that it too offers a very differ-ent version of the rationalist ideals of progress that were so often at the heart of colonial rhetoric. Furthermore, in a film like *Living in Bondage*, the ghost functions similarly to that in the art films Lim discusses: Merit disturbs the temporality of the present by making it accountable to the past.

However, whereas Lim suggests that the enchanted or spectral is outside capital, I argue that, at least in the case of West

African video-film, it is inextricably tied to the various hauntings of global capital. Many video-films are indeed commentaries on the hidden nature of past and present forms of capitalist excess and exclusion: they are visual manifestations of stories that use rumors about witchcraft and sorcery to describe anxieties about the success of those who accumulate wealth without, as Comaroff and Comaroff suggest, "ordinary labor costs."[39] Here, then, Derrida's notion of ghostly time is also useful because it is beholden to the ghost of Marx, a ghost that demands justice in the age of late-capitalist globalization, not unlike the ghost of Merit.[40]

Nevertheless, I do want to underscore that the occult also encompasses more than just the economic and, as Lim suggests, is very much about the unsettling of linear temporality. Thus occult anxiety, as I define it, is not only about figures who are a threat to production; it also attaches itself to those who are a threat to the teleological time of heterosexual reproduction. It is therefore linked to concerns about changing sexual morals, about urban women who increasingly find prostitution to be the only means to survive, about an increasing visibility of gay and lesbian activists, and about women who are financially independent and have rejected the role of housewife. While it is not always the case that street workers, gays and lesbians, or single businesswomen are associated with the occult, one often hears apprehensions about these figures expressed in such terms. The rise of Pentecostalism in both Nigeria and Ghana has in fact contributed not only to this sense of moral panic but also to a vocabulary in which threats to the monogamous heterosexual family are linked to the devil or to various spirits. This type of discourse is clearly present in Safo's *Jezebel*, where anxiety about the economy, occult spirits, and the Westernized lesbian all converge in an erotic melodrama about the loss of innocence and virtue in postcolonial Accra.

Of Lesbian Water Spirits

As I have noted above, *Jezebel* is both a remake and an expanded version of Safo's *Women in Love*, a film that was one of the first African films ever to depict lesbianism.[41] Although Safo has retained

a single copy of *Women in Love*, part 1—the one he showed me in his minivan—he no longer has his copy of the second part. A rigorous search both online and in Accra's Opera Square market, the main venue for purchasing video films in Ghana, reveals that neither part of the film is still being sold, and a WorldCat search indicates that only one copy of part 1 exists in the global library system. Thus, *Jezebel* is a remake of a film that has all but disappeared. It is a ghostly return to a film that haunted many of those familiar with its story.[42]

Jezebel begins when a young working-class woman, Nana Ekua (Marian Addo), confides in her friend Susu (Pearl Kugblenu) that she is having financial difficulties because her husband Mark (Prosper Akude) needs 1 million cedis (the Ghanaian currency) to finish his studies. Susu laughs at the small sum of money her friend needs and pulls out a bulging envelope from the glove compartment of her shiny new SUV. Susu then explains that Nana Ekua can have her own car and all the wealth she wants if she agrees to sleep with Susu. Nana Ekua is initially shocked and disgusted by the idea but consents after minimal persuasion (see fig. 1).

The next day Susu begins to initiate Nana Ekua into her privileged lifestyle. She dresses Nana Ekua in more fashionable clothes—short shorts, a low-cut tank top, and sunglasses—and takes her friend to the local car dealership. But once Nana Ekua has selected her car, Susu reminds her that she will need to fuel the car, and that to do so she will need to be able to get men to give her money. Susu says that she can arrange things so that when a man tries to sleep with her, he will become flaccid. That way, Susu explains, Nana Ekua can get money without having to give. In essence, Susu is describing a situation in which Nana Ekua will be a prostitute but without what the Comaroffs call "ordinary labor costs." Nana Ekua is still hesitant, but she does not resist.

Nana Ekua is then taken to the coast in order to join the cult of the spirit Jezebel. Jezebel's face appears superimposed against the backdrop of the ocean (fig. 6, closing image). The water spirit is then summoned by a priestess who is dressed in a white robe and a silver cross. Jezebel emerges from the water and begins to initiate a frightened Nana Ekua by kissing her on the lips. As the two women

Figure 2. The priestess flashes her silver cross.

kiss, the sound track turns to ominous studio music while the film rapidly cuts back and forth between the priestess's cross and Nana Ekua's initiation kiss (fig. 2). The music and movement create a sense of moral panic and anxiety as Nana Ekua's gaze focuses on the cross, reminding her of the un-Christian nature of her acts. The attention given to the cross in this scene situates the cult of Jezebel within a Christian tradition that is filled with false prophets, with agents of the devil impersonating the faithful. In the Bible, Jezebel—the evil wife of King Ahab—is not only someone who is sexually promiscuous and manipulative, she is also one who adorns herself and masquerades as a servant to God. The issue of false representation—one that runs through a wide range of West African video-films—is directly addressed when, in part 3 of *Jezebel*, Nana Ekua's family debates how to cure her of her madness. There is a general consensus that the church is more effective than a fetish priest, but the family is wary because they claim that since there are so many fake pastors who are just trying to get wealthy, it is impossible to tell the charlatans from the real men of God. Therefore, as is the case with many aspects of urban Ghanaian culture, the cross that Jezebel's priestess wears is not what it seems. Or to paraphrase Mbembe: the sign is not the thing.[43] In the postcolony, "everything almost always conceals something else": criminals are politicians or church leaders, politicians are criminals, shoddy products are passed off as high-quality goods, and ill-begotten wealth poses as industriousness (148).

Furthermore, in Safo's rendition, Jezebel is not only a biblical harlot, she is also a Mami Wata spirit. Mami Wata, whose name we can hear chanted in the theme song, is a trans-African water

divinity. She is typically portrayed as a mermaid spirit, but she can change shapes, genders, and identities at any given moment, and she often takes on different forms and myths in various local contexts. Although visual images of mermaid-like water deities first appeared in Africa thousands of years before recorded contact with Europeans, many scholars suggest that modern Mami Wata stories originated in the fifteenth century, the first era of intensified international trade between Africa and the West.[44] However, Wendl argues that the contemporary religious cult of Mami Wata was enabled and shaped by the modern photographic image and its transnational mobility. He argues that the images of Mami Wata seen today seem to be related to a poster brought to Nigeria by British colonialists in the early twentieth century. The image, reprinted in England and India and sold in West African markets, was a studio photograph of a Samoan snake-charmer woman taken in Hamburg in 1885. By the 1930s, the poster was delinked from its original context and commonly referred to as Mami Wata throughout West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas.[45] Contemporary video images of Mami Wata, which are certainly not unique to Safo's films, thus owe much to the nonfixity and technological transportability of Mami Wata's image.

Furthermore, Mami Wata is a figure typically associated with the seductions of fortune and wealth and with the inscrutable origins of consumer goods brought from elsewhere. Even though she is an African spirit, she is often linked to the West or to "overseas" and to the "continued control exercised by anonymous foreign capital."[46] This accounts for Jezebel's light skin as well as her lesbianism, which in African Pentecostal churches has been understood to be a degenerate, antisocial behavior imported into Africa by the immoral West. Mami Wata aids her followers—both men and women—who seek power, riches, and success. However, since she is understood as being an agent of the devil, she typically demands severe sacrifices, which can range from human life to the celibacy of her devotees, sometimes figured as her lovers. Thus, pledging oneself to Mami Wata often entails choosing material success, or Western values, over a family life, a choice that can be

traced to colonial-era interpretations of European lifestyles based on colonial officers, traders, and missionaries who came to West Africa with an abundance of goods but no family.[47]

In *Jezebel*, Nana Ekua essentially gives up the ability to have children, since men will no longer be able to attain an erection around her. However, her husband Mark is able to overcome the power of Jezebel through prayer. By invoking Jesus Christ with a guttural chant before sex, he is able to penetrate and impregnate his wife. This angers Jezebel, who vows to destroy their marriage and take the blood of their baby. Jezebel emerges from the sea, takes on a human form, and shoots fireballs that materialize into luxury automobiles. After a protracted scene in which Jezebel conjures up five different cars, she settles on a yellow Hummer (figs. 3 and 4). Although the images of the automobiles are clearly cutouts from magazine advertisements, it is nevertheless an awe-inspiring display of the capabilities of video technology.

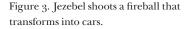Figure 3. Jezebel shoots a fireball that transforms into cars.

Figure 4. Jezebel's morphing yellow Hummer

Furthermore, the scene is quite likely based on rumors that circulated in Ghana in the late 1990s. In her discussion of Safo's *Women in Love*, Meyer relates a rumor about a policeman who reportedly witnessed a large jeep driving out of the sea.[48] The jeep was full of perfumes and cosmetics and was driven by a light-skinned woman. Once the jeep reached Makola, Accra's main market, it disappeared from sight. A similar story circulated about a woman who saw a ball of light emerge from the sea and transform into a flashy car filled with luxury goods. After witnessing the event, the woman went mad and lost her senses. Meyer reads

these stories as expressing the ambivalent views that urban Ghana-ians have toward modern life and toward the goods they consume. Luise White makes a similar claim about rumors in colonial Kenya in which cars, and especially fire trucks and ambulances, were asso-ciated with vampires. These stories, White suggests, must be under-stood in the larger context of reservations that many Africans had for a new sector of skilled laborers who came into close proximity with motor vehicles.[49] However, what I suggest is that when such stories are placed on-screen, they cannot simply be understood as responses to moral and economic anxieties. When the invisible world is given voice in visual media, it is done to elicit an affective response, one that will entice audience members to keep purchas-ing the sequels. Therefore, the portrayal of Jezebel strolling along the beach and shooting fireballs that turn into luxury automobiles is more than just an explanation or metaphor for the hieroglyphic nature of capitalist consumption and more than just a visualization of invisible forces in a globalized world.

The special effects, the whizzing fireballs, and the morph-ing cars create a sensation scene of intensities that place the multi-sensory anxieties of Ghanaian life on vivid display. As Jezebel performs her magic, her headband and yellow tank top sparkle in the strong sunlight and complement the shining flashes that emerge from her hand. The glittering light bounces off her attire and turns the previously invisible spirit into a hypervisible body that literally reflects the visual effects of conspicuous consump-tion. In other words, the video technology extends Jezebel's visible/ invisible spectrality by saturating the screen with an excess of light that amplifies Jezebel's occult power. Furthermore, as Jezebel con-jures her cars, the sound track loops the chorus of the *Jezebel* theme song, a hypnotic chant that repeats the phrase "agents in the king-dom of Jezebel" layered over the sound of pig snorts. Here, the rhythmic music—the *melos* of melodrama—transmits disgust by associating Jezebel's material excess and sexual transgression with the dirt and shamelessness of a pig. Thus, the scene captures the erotic pleasure-anxiety inherent in occult video-film by synchroniz-ing the glistening and glamorous with the morally abhorrent and socially destructive.

Of course, this scene also contains elements of classic scopophilia. The audience's gaze—sutured to the camera—is focused on a scantily clad woman who calls herself the Queen of Love and who reigns over a cult of devoted and also scantily clad female lovers. Next to the sparkling Jezebel is a shiny car, perhaps the only object that might attract a heterosexual male gaze as much as a woman's body. This car-woman coupling, heightened by their mutual sheen, cements the equation between woman and spectacle much in the way that feminist film theorists suggest. But Jezebel is also a constantly shifting figure, a materialization of occult rumors that video-films affectively transmit. Therefore, although *Jezebel* does indeed display the woman as object, the video also, like a rumor itself, leaves much out. The image of Jezebel is similar to the magazine advertisements that Safo pastes into the above scene—she is erotic and enticing in part because the quality and size of the image makes it impossible to grasp her in her entirety. In this way, Jezebel is not a cinematic femme fatale but a video femme fatale. She is not subjected to the contrast lighting or subtle camera tilts that make Hollywood's evil women enigmatic but rather to the technical preconditions of video itself. As Marks suggests, then, the viewer's full sensory apparatus is required to fill in the visual gaps.

In *Jezebel*, Safo collapses the boundary between fact and fiction, or true and false, not only by confirming rumors about Mami Wata but also by allowing them to have an affective force. Audience members, especially the more devoutly Pentecostal ones, may say that they watch the films for instructional purposes, to learn how to avoid the demonic.[50] However, while this might be one explanation (or perhaps justification) for viewing occult melodramas, it certainly does not account for the full range of sensual pleasures the audience experiences, nor does it adequately articulate affective or corporeal reactions that operate on a prediscursive level. What I am suggesting is that viewing videos on small screens—often amid friends and family—allows the audience to collectively experience the sensuality of the rumors of the occult and the awe, joy, and trepidation of the occult world in a safe and protected environment. The gaze is not only sutured to the camera, then: it is also sutured to an imaginary witness, like the policeman or the mad-

woman, who was afforded privileged, albeit dangerous, glimpses of Mami Wata. Layered over the scopophilic pleasure is what I call a *spectraphilic* pleasure: a pleasure derived from feeling the occult's presence, from experiencing the wonder and anxiety of its visible invisibility.

The Spectraphilic Gaze

In her recent work on video and digital media, Laura Mulvey suggests ways in which new media open up different modes of seeing. She argues that when Hollywood films are watched on video and small screens, the process of identification and the hold that the narrative has on the spectator are weakened. The "fetishistic spectator" who can pause, skip, and repeat moments in the film becomes more fascinated with image and small gesture than with a plot or character that holds the spectator in place. Thus Mulvey suggests that films watched on new media formats become "feminized": "In this reconfiguration of 'fetishistic spectatorship,' the male figure is extracted from dominating the action and merges into the image. So doing, he, too, stops rather than drives the narrative, inevitably becoming an overt object of the spectator's look, against which he had hitherto been defended."[51] Thus the cinematic viewing arrangement that Mulvey had in mind when she wrote "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"[52]—in which seated audiences (taking on a masculine subject position) gaze at a large screen as a celluloid filmstrip is projected from an apparatus behind them—no longer applies.

In *Jezebel*, Safo plays with these new configurations of spectatorship and gender by delinking the male gaze from the power of visual technology. As her first stage in destroying the marriage between Mark and Nana Ekua, the now human Jezebel approaches Mark as a potential business partner. She then invites Mark to her mansion where he encounters an entire swimming pool of Jezebel devotees. He is clearly aroused by the sight and asks Jezebel if he can film them on his cell phone. Jezebel consents, but when she needs one of her followers to conjure up a drink from the bottom of the pool, she tells Mark that he must turn away. Jezebel hands Mark

the bottle of wine and tells him it is a gift for his wife. He snaps a photo of himself with the spirit-woman and leaves for home. However, when Mark tries to show Nana Ekua a photo of Jezebel, Jezebel has disappeared from the image. Mark appears to be standing by himself. This coincides with the common belief that Mami Wata and other occult spirits cannot be photographed, though the fact that the Samoan snake-charmer image was a photograph—and one taken by Europeans—rather than a drawing did lend authority to the Mami Wata cult.[53] The inclusion of Mark filming and photographing Jezebel and her followers is a typical enunciative marker—a moment when the audience is made aware that it is watching a film and that its look is mediated by an apparatus. Here, then, the camera announces rather than conceals its association with a voyeuristic gaze, foregrounding the primary identification that links the heterosexual male point of view to the camera. But in *Jezebel* this link actually serves to destabilize, not affirm, the potency of the male gaze. The viewer who identities with Mark realizes that he or she cannot in fact see the invisible forces that drive and corrupt the nation's sexual and material economy. Jezebel forces Mark to turn away, and then she disappears. She therefore vitiates the power of Mark's gaze just as she impedes, albeit only temporarily, his sexual abilities. It is Jezebel and not Mark who holds the power of the gaze and who can in fact deny or grant her own to-be-looked-at-ness. Thus the spectraphilic gaze allows its object to slip away, to elude capture. Its eroticism resides not in the ability to master woman but in woman's ability to confound the boundaries between the visible and invisible, to be both attainable and unattainable, near and far.

It is significant, then, that water provides the most repeated visual trope of the film, whether it is the swimming pool discussed above or the frequent cuts to the ocean. Water is, of course, both translucent and opaque. One can see through a glass of water or a pool, but the bottom of the ocean remains obscure. Likewise, water both promises endless visibility and at the same time calls attention to the limits of the visible. A ship becomes visible once it reaches the horizon, but to the naked eye it appears to come from nowhere at all. Safo uses the manipulability of video technology to present

Jezebel as a watery, semitransparent image, whose seething, foaming presence literally bubbles from beneath the surface. As in figure 6, Jezebel's image is often superimposed over other images and can appear at any given moment in the film. Sometimes emerging from water and at other times materializing out of thin air, Jezebel comes from both knowable sources and inscrutable ones. Like the video signals that generate her image—and indeed like the photo of the Samoan snake charmer that became the icon for a trans-African water cult—Jezebel is never fixed and never fully visible. Her affective presence is spectral: she is a mysterious but nevertheless constantly felt force.

At the end of part 2, Nana Ekua has fallen into a coma after drinking the bottle of wine given to Mark by Jezebel. As Nana Ekua sleeps, Jezebel appears as an apparition and tells Nana Ekua that she will go mad until her baby is born. Nana Ekua wakes up on a strange beach and begins wandering the streets of Accra. Her punishment, the literal loss of her senses, ejects her from the affective human community around her and further removes her from the realm of respectable citizenship. As is the case in many melodramas, the woman's moral excesses manifest as bodily, often hysterical symptoms.[54] Parts 3 and 4 are occupied with finding a cure for Nana Ekua's madness and with her family's gradual discovery of the cult of Jezebel. There is a temptation, then, to see this as a drama of exposure, a story that, like film noir, concerns itself with solving the enigma of the criminal or criminalized woman. Indeed, under hypnosis Nana Ekua reveals the cult's secrets. She tells her hypnotist, "There are many people who have joined the sisterhood. They are in corporations. They are the movers and the shakers in this country. They command. . . . You barely know and you can't imagine." But of course the audience already knows. They have already spent parts 1 and 2 imagining. Because the simultaneity of the visible and invisible worlds exists from the beginning of the film, any revelation of the occult offered in the third and fourth hours is redundant. There is no narrative shock left to deliver. And yet the film can keep going and keep selling its installations because it continues to transmit the pleasure, anxiety, and spectral affect that audiences desire.

"In the Nick of Time"

One of the standard features of melodrama is that its endings always provide moral closure to the events that have unfolded throughout the story. Drawing on a range of melodrama theory, Williams writes, "Melodrama's recognition of virtue involves a dialectic of pathos and action — a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time.'"[55] In the final installment of *Jezebel*, this dialectic is neatly resolved, as pathos turns into action and the water spirit is killed just in time to restore the heteronormative and reproductive family. Thus a "happy" ending requires releasing Nana Ekua from her punishment and reestablishing her virtue as a victim of the social forces around her. In essence, the ending depends on distinguishing the childbearing Nana Ekua from the Jezebel devotees who are associated with lesbianism, prostitution, and witchcraft, all of which are figured as hypersexualized, animalistic, greedy, and nonreproductive threats to the survival of Christian virtue and "honest" capitalism.[56] The "in-the-nick-of-time" rescue therefore literally preserves time by saving both Nana Ekua and the social order itself from a queer and spectral time of "no future."[57]

But *Jezebel*'s battle scene goes beyond the tidy moral resolution that saves future generations from the "too late" scenario, in part because, as Lim argues, fantastic cinema always "exceeds the confines of secular, homogeneous time."[58] Here, redemption is made possible not just by Christian salvation but also by transferring the excesses of the characters to the video image itself. Thus Nana Ekua is cured of her hysteria at the moment in which the video-film itself turns the most histrionic, where video technology turns the hidden occult world into a magical visual force field. As Nana Ekua lies on a table in what looks like a modern office building, she is surrounded by Jezebel's priestess and a group of followers. Just as the priestess is about to stab Nana Ekua, a pastor and his followers break into the building. A spiritual battle ensues in which Jezebel hurls fire clouds and radiating neon discs at the Christians, who volley them back with the Bible. Red lightning bolts then strike the building and turn into flames that surround and destroy the Jezebel devotees (fig. 5). Nana Ekua and her child both have a chance to be born again.

Figure 5. The final battle

Despite their low-budget aesthetics, the special effects there-fore recreate the affective joy of having felt the defeat of Jezebel. Such a moment allows for the temporary mastering of occult anxi-ety and coming to terms with the incompleteness of visual infor-mation. Thus, the special effects stand in for the possibility of the miraculous, for the ability to save future generations from degen-eracy and diabolical forces. At this particular moment, the sensory pleasure that comes from watching such a scene has much less to do with the voyeuristic gaze, the making legible of occult specters, or the salvation of the unborn child and much more to do with the indeterminate spectacle of affect, with the anxious hate, fear, and disgust that is magically transformed into joy and salvation, even exuberance. Video does not capture or fix these affects but rather allows them to exist as flashes of intensity that are "as [un]stable as electricity."[59] Yet, as much as this scenario preserves the future, it also opens it up to a number of queer, spectral, and mutable pos-sibilities. Perhaps, then, the sign is not the thing.

Notes

1.   Although, as I later discovered, Safo's film was just one of many to broach the subject. For a survey and analysis of the recent slew of West African video films that address the issue of lesbianism and male homosexuality, see Lindsey Green-Simms and Unoma Azuah, "The Video Closet: Nollywood's Gay-Themed Movies," *Transition* 107 (2012): 32–49.

2.   See UNESCO Media Services, "Nollywood Rivals Bollywood in Film/Video production," 5 May 2009, www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/nollywood_rivals_bollywood_in_filmvideo_production/.

3.   Wimal Dissanayake makes this same point when arguing for the culturally unique and varied forms of Asian melodrama that are linked to the various myths, rituals, and religious practices of Asian societies. See the introduction to his edited collection, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–8. Likewise, Ana Lopez argues that the sociopolitical conditions of Latin America lend themselves to distinct forms of melodrama that challenge cultural and economic dependence on the West. See "The Melodrama in Latin America: Films, Telenovelas, and the Currency of a Popular Form," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 596–608. While a growing body of work has addressed the cultural specificities of Asian and Latin American melodrama, African melodrama has been largely unexplored in film theory.

4.   Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the*

Woman's Film, ed. Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 9.

5. Because my focus is on occult melodramas, I realize that I risk misleading the reader unfamiliar with the diverse archive of West African video-films. It is therefore very important to note that not all Nollywood and Ghallywood films include references to the occult. In fact, there is an increasing variety of film types and story lines, with genres like comedy and the docudrama growing rapidly. My intention is not to account for all videos but, rather, to look closely at one popular subgenre.

6. See Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

7. Tobias Maria Wendl, "Wicked Villagers and the Mysteries of Reproduction: An Exploration of Horror Movies from Ghana and Nigeria," *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 2 (2007), postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/view/15/showToc.

8. Onookome Okome, "Introducing the Special Issue on West African Cinema: Africa at the Movies," *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 2 (2007), postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/view/15/showToc.

9. Wisdom S. Agorde, "The Triad of Men's Violence in *Time*: A Ghanaian Occult Video Film," *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 2 (2007), postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/view/15/showToc.

10. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 2 (1999): 279–303.

11. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," in *Film Genre Reader* 2, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 140–58.

12. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 15.

13. Birgit Meyer makes a similar argument about the usefulness and limitations of Brooks's arguments in a West African context. See Birgit Meyer, "'Praise the Lord': Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 1 (2004): 92–110.

14. For a further discussion of Pentecostalism's influence on video-film culture and its mode of visuality, see Birgit Meyer, "Religious Revelation, Secrecy, and the Limits of Visual Representation," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 4 (2006): 431–35; Birgit Meyer, "Impossible Representations: Pentecostalism, Vision, and Video Technology in Ghana," in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 290–312; and Birgit Meyer, " 'Praise the Lord.' "

15. However, it should be noted that outside southern Nigeria and southern Ghana there are smaller video-film industries aimed at Muslim viewers. The most notable is the Hausa video-film industry based in Kano, Nigeria, and sometimes referred to as Kannywood.

16. Marleen De Witte, "Spirit Media: Charismatics, Traditionalists, and Mediation Practices in Ghana" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2008), 198.

17. Meyer, "Religious Revelation," 432.

18. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 145.

19. In a particularly lucid gloss of contemporary affect theory, Eric Shouse draws on Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to explain how affect is distinct from either emotions or feelings. Affect, he suggests, is a nonconscious experience that determines the intensity of feelings. Affect, in short, "makes feelings feel," and it can play an important role in determining how individual bodies interact with objects, people, and experience. Thus, Shouse argues, the power of many media forms is that they transmit affect that is independent of content and ideological media. Eric Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *M/C Journal* 8, no. 6 (2005), journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php.

20. See Hent De Vries, "Of Miracles and Special Effects," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50 (2001): 41–56; Tom Gunning, "To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision," *Grey Room* 26 (2007): 94–127; and Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," in *Fugitive Images from Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 42–71.

21. On video film and the "infrastructure of piracy," see Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 217.

22. For histories of the video-film industry, see Okome, "Introducing"; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Birgit Meyer, "Ghanaian Popular Cinema and the Magic in and of Film," in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 200–223; John McCall, "Nollywood Confidential: The Unlikely Rise of Nigerian Video Film," *Transition* 95 (2004): 98–109; Jonathan Haynes, "Video Boom: Nigeria and Ghana," *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 2 (2007), postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/view/15/showToc; Pierre Barrot, ed., *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*, trans. Lynn Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); and Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome, "Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Films," in *Nigerian Video Films: Revised and Expanded*, ed. Jonathan Haynes (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 51–88.

23. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 237.

24. See Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, trans. Anja Welle and Stan Jones (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008); Sean Cubitt, *Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993).

25. Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 13.

26. Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*, 110.

27. Marks, *Touch*, xii.

28. Okome, however, notes that Kelani has since changed his view and has become quite optimistic about the future of digital imaging. See Okome, "Introducing."

29. Watching some of his early films alongside Safo, I was struck by how often he shook his head or expressed dissatisfaction at production flaws. While his films, like Ghanaian and Nigerian video in general, have improved tremendously, they are still by and large not up to the production standards of most African and international celluloid films.

30. Marks, *Touch*, xvi.

31. For Sigmund Freud, anxiety is an important emotion because it prepares the subject for the danger of loss and can therefore protect the psyche against unpleasurable experiences. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud famously writes about the *fort/da* game his grandson played, in which the child would continually throw his toy away and then retrieve it. Freud contends that his grandson was enacting the departure and reappearance of his mother in order to master the anxiety generated by her disappearance. With the fort/da game's aesthetics of pushing away and pulling closer in mind, I am considering anxiety much in the way that Marks sees the erotic. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 13–17.

32. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7.

33. Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

34. Another aspect of video's nonfixity is the lack of an archive and of preservation. With the exception of a few of the more canonical films, older Nollywood and Ghallywood films can be nearly impossible to find.

35. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

36. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 291–343.

37. Barbara Frank, "Mami Wata, Wealth-Owning Spirits, and Changing Economic Morals in West Africa," in *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora*, ed. Henry John Drewal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 115–24.

38. Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 188.

39. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism," in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 786.

40. Lim, *Translating Time*, 153. For a related discussion of Derrida, the spectral, and Algerian visual culture, see Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

41. *Women in Love* actually debuted the same year as another Ghanaian lesbian-themed video-film, *Supi: The Real Woman to Woman* (dir. Ashiagbar Akwetey-Kanyi, Ghana, 1996), and I have been unable to ascertain which film came out first.

42. The anthropologist Serena Owusua Dankwa notes that *Women in Love* is a film that proved to be damaging and harmful to the communities of women who sleep with women in southern Ghana. In the course of her fieldwork, Dankwa found many women referring to Safo's film as a cautionary tale about what might happen when working-class girls become involved with wealthy women. Serena Owusua Dankwa, " 'It's a Silent Trade': Female Same-Sex Intimacies in Post-Colonial Ghana," *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 17, no. 3 (2009): 192–205.

43. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 145.

44. Henry John Drewal, ed., *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

45. Tobias Maria Wendl, "Visions of Modernity in Ghana: Mami Wata Shrines, Photo Studios, and Horror Films," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 269–92.

46. Johannes Fabian, "Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and Conjectures," in *Readings in African Popular Culture*, ed. Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 24.

47. Frank, "Mami Wata," 120–21.

48. Birgit Meyer, "Mami Wata as a Christian Demon: The Eroticism of Forbidden Pleasures in Southern Ghana," in Drewal, *Sacred Waters*, 383–98.

49. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

50. This is the argument made in Katrien Pype, *The Making of Pentecostal Melodrama: Media, Religion, and Gender in Kinshasa* (New York: Berghahn, forthcoming).

51. Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 166.

52. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

53. Wendl, "Visions of Modernity in Ghana," 271.

54. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minneli and Melodrama," in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 272.

55. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 30.

56. On the convergence of lesbianism and prostitution in Nigerian video-films, see Lindsey Green-Simms, "Hustlers, Homewreckers, and Homoeroticism: Nollywood's *Beautiful Faces*," *Journal of African Cinemas* (forthcoming).

57. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Edelman argues that "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (11). Against the teleological time of the Child, Edelman posits a queer temporality, marked by a spectral "haunting excess" and the pleasures of the death drive (31).

58. Lim, *Translating Time*, 25.

59. In "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," Shouse compares affect to currents of electricity in order to emphasize the "unformed and unstructured" nature of affects.

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Figure 6. Jezebel's transparent image appears superimposed over the ocean.