When in doubt. . .?

A reply

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When I tell people in Indonesia that I work on witches (or *suanggi*, the regional term for the cannibalistic spirit-figure that people in Buli call *gua*), they usually respond with a surprised snort. It is followed, after the briefest of pauses, by a short question: "So? . . . Is there?" (*Jadi? . . . Ada*?). The chortle I read as emotional short-hand for: "that is ridiculous," or possibly "that is not a proper topic (for a Westerner like yourself)"; an emotional bundling of the complicated (post)colonial history and xenography that attends any study of witchcraft. The follow-up question "*jadi, ada*?" counters the initial surprise with a challenge to solve a riddle that we now seem to have in common: "So, what did you come up with: do witches exist or don't they?" Some of my most interesting and, in spite of what one might think, also most hilarious conversations in Indonesia have come out of discussions about this question with those who asked it.

Is there?

Ada? This short question—"is there?"—does not have a short answer. In fact, it does not have a proper answer at all. It is therefore the question rather than the answer that deserves ethnographic and analytical attention. For the question is an existential one, in both the grammatical and philosophical sense: are there witch-es? While Indonesian (like Buli and many other Austronesian languages), drops

the dummy subject "there" from existential sentences (of the "there is a dog in the house" sort), the existential verb *ada* is also used in locative sentences (of the "the dog is in the house" sort). *Ada*? asks a double question about the *Da-sein*, the being-there, of witches: "*are* there witches?" (in general) and "are witches *there*?" (concretely located in a place). But asking the question at all, and so intuitively, springs necessarily from the possibility that they might *not be there*; even that they might <u>not</u> *be*. "*Ada*?" is fundamentally a question about the haunted being and potential nothingness of witches . . . as well as of existence.

Charles Sanders Peirce has argued that the motive for asking a question is the irritation of doubt, while the wish to pronounce a judgment is driven by belief. Herein, he suggests, lies one important aspect of "the dissimilarity between the sensation of doubting and that of believing" (Peirce 1955: 9). I will later have reason to disagree with Peirce about other aspects of doubt, but about this we are in agreement. Doubt is experientially different from belief: we know when we are in doubt about something and when we believe something. The former often takes the shape of a question, the latter tends to take the form of a proposition. The ethnographic challenge in studying witches and witchcraft has for me been to hold on to this difference: to seek to grasp those phenomena in the world that emerge into language and linger in the world as questions of potentiality and absence rather than as pronouncements about existence and presence.

Ada?: "Do witches exist? What do you think?" I am not the first anthropologist to be involved in conversations with informants about this. It is perhaps one of the oldest conversations that anthropology has had, not only with itself but also with its interlocutors in the field. But the conventional response by anthropologists to this type of question has, it seems to me, been to attempt to provide an answer (see also Graeber 2015). Deeming the old, and obvious, rationalist answer: "No, witches are not there, so lighten up!" to be both logically flawed and ethnocentric, anthropology has, at least since E. E. Evans-Pritchard's ground-breaking study of witchcraft (1937) been experimenting with other, seemingly more appropriate answers, most of which run along the lines of: "Yes, they are there 'if you believe they are,' but they are there for good reasons. Let me explain." This analytical approach, framed in a variety of formats around the basic pair of "belief" and "reality," brought important sociological and comparative insight. But it also came at a cost. Wedding informants' questions that spring, at least in my experience, from existential uncertainty to anthropology's penchant for symbolic holism and sociological explanation played up the "there-ness" of witches, their epistemological (or, depending on theoretical persuasion, ontological) being, while downplaying their "not-there-ness," the epistemological and ontological obscurity that makes the question pertinent and urgent in the first place. Instead of trying to answer the question—whether witches exist ontologically or culturally, to "us" or "them"—*The empty seashell* was an attempt to explore, ethnographically and historically, the epistemological conditions of possibility for asking this question in the first place, repeatedly and often urgently, in Buli. And the argument of the book is that those conditions of possibility are not founded on belief but confounded by doubt.

It has been a real treat to read the four comments and discover where the argument of *The empty seashell* (*TES*) works and where it does not. A treat because all four comments are careful, incisive and tantalizing readings "along the grain"

of the text that open up new vistas. Take, for instance, Rosalind Morris' opening analysis of the drawing of a witch by Fanda Guslaw on page nineteen of *TES*. There, completely unnoticed by me until Morris points it out, is a diabolical happy-face. It smiles at the reader from the breasts and genitals of the witch, a sexualized figure-ground inversion that is impossible to ignore once you see it. I never noticed it, so I never thought to ask about it (and since Fanda was ten years old when she drew it, asking such things would have been a delicate ethical exercise). At the same time, I am not entirely sure whether the smiley, made of the sexual body parts of the witch, *is* in fact there. Is it a happy face deliberately or unconsciously drawn by Fanda or more like the man-in-the-moon, an image that emerges from a certain perspective, like the human propensity to divine faces even on Mars, or a will to psychoanalyze, for instance? So the witch-smiley sits there, like all witchcraft: impossible to ignore, even as I do not know whether it is in fact there. The comments are full of such intriguing observations and analytical extensions, and for these and for the willingness to "play along" that they display, I am deeply grateful and honored.

The comments are also a treat when they read "against the grain." As Morris points out, many other studies highlight the epistemological anguish and cognitive dissonance of a life with witches. This argument of *TES*, she points out, is not original. True that: *TES* is cobbled together. In fact, the four commentators are among its chief sources of inspiration and intellectual copy-paste. Morris has helped me understand Jacques Derrida's relevance for anthropology in general and for ethnography in particular (Morris 2007), because deconstruction far from being abstruse and abstract clap-trap (Kandell 2004), demands, as Morris so aptly points out, a radical empiricism that makes it an ally of ethnography, particularly when trying to probe the conditions of possibility and impossibility for experience. Webb Keane's wonderful studies of the people of Anakalang on Sumba demonstrate the need to take representations seriously by studying them as forms of agency that simultaneously succeed and fail, whether these are Anakalang ideas of "tradition" or Dutch Protestant ideas of "Christian conversion" (Keane 1997, 2007). This insight *TES* exploits unashamedly in its analysis of the unintended consequences at play at the historical intersection between witchcraft and Christian conversion in Buli. The pointed but still respectful critique by Todd Sanders of the "seductive analytics" that lies at the heart of modern witchcraft studies helped give a language and ethos to the critique of witchcraft studies in *TES* (Sanders 2008), while Mathijs Pelkmans' pioneering anthology helped me think more deeply about doubt (Pelkmans 2011). The four commentators are in that sense my imagined collaborators, people I would most like to convince and toward whom, more than most, *TES* is "a bid for quasi-parental approval" (the quote is taken from the dedications in Boon 1982). As a consequence, I want to take their doubts seriously, too. And like most doubts, theirs often comes in the shape of a question.

Beyond belief, really?

"What is this 'belief' against which Bubandt defines doubt?" asks Keane. *TES* erects a straw man, Keane argues, when it seems to pose "belief" as something that is "fully coherent, wholly and unquestioningly adhered to." A "looser definition of belief" would surely better reflect the anthropological use of the concept? It would also fit the

material of *TES* better, he suggests. Pelkmans agrees. Although I try to "run away from the concept of belief," I do not, so Pelkmans argues, escape it in *TES*, for, after all, I also highlight that Buli people have "belief in the police officers' beliefs in witchcraft." This is true: *TES* cannot run away from "belief." However, it follows Talal Asad in suggesting that the idea of belief "as a distinctive mental state characteristic of all religion" has a particular Christian genealogy (Asad 1993: 48). *TES* tries to trace this genealogy from Europe to Buli, arguing that "belief" came to Buli with the Dutch missionaries and here became synonymous with "hope" (the Buli word *mawláng* means both "belief" and "hope"), because of a series of productive misunderstandings between Protestant missionary theology and Buli ideas of witchcraft. "Belief" in Christianity became a "hope" for both salvation and the end of witchcraft. The same hopefully subjunctive or anticipatory attitude attended later incarnations of modernity in Buli. "Belief," in other words, is not a universal mental state but a historically specific attitude to the world. So what about "belief in witchcraft," that standard phrase of anthropology? It struck me that people in Buli always speak warily about "belief" in witches. If "beliefs" were not anticipatory or subjunctive, they were explicitly conjectural. Here people would sometimes use the word *fatailo*, "to aim at something blindly." This is the opposite of "blind faith." It is an expression of the acknowledgement that one takes aim at witches blindly and will miss as a result. It is a realization that even as one has to aim regardless, one's aim is by definition flawed. This is not a form of belief, even in a loose sense, it seems to me. It is perhaps more aptly described as a willed decision to doubt one's doubts, even as one continues to insist on them.

Explicitly propositional beliefs in the existence of witches, meanwhile, people in Buli tend to "export" to outside authorities, like nonlocal police officers. Why? Well, I think that people in Buli—like Westerners (Latour 2010) but for very different historical and cultural reasons—tend to find it easier to believe that other people believe than to believe themselves. Not Enlightenment modernity or secularism informs this tendency to export "belief" to others but a particular conversion history and the problematic reality of witchcraft itself. It is the historical and cultural conditions of possibility of this "impossibility of belief" that *TES* seeks to explore. This is not to say that people in Buli never make assertions about witches. People make pronouncements about their actions (they eat people's liver, they can change shape, they can fly, they can heal as well as kill) and about their origins (they come from the village of Maba through marriage, they are shadows that can assume corporeal human form, they tempt people in dreams). I suppose in the loose sense of the word, these are "beliefs" in the sense that they are propositions. But they are propositions that help shape the form that doubt takes. In a similarly "loose sense" I agree with Pelkmans' assertion that doubt and belief are connected, entangled even. But the problem with "belief" in this vague sense is that it quickly becomes "belief" in the strong sense when analysis takes over and the question becomes what grounds what? And I worry what this does to the status of "doubt."

Doubt all the way down? And everywhere?

For on what does doubt rest? Has *TES* not replaced, as Keane asks, "turtles all the way down with doubts all the way down?" If *TES* leads the reader to think that

people in Buli are wracked by absolute doubt about everything, it has failed. This would suggest that Buli doubt is like universal doubt in a Western or Cartesian sense, which it is not. In fact, doubt presents a comparative challenge, because the dominant models we Westerners have for thinking about doubt is the absolute and universal doubt of either the ancient skeptics or René Descartes, and people in Buli, obviously, are neither. Descartes laid the foundations for Enlightenment reason by suggesting that a rigorous method of universal doubt could found a philosophy of truth: universal doubt was the form reason had to take to lead from mere belief to the certainty of knowledge (Broughton 2002). This method that associates foundational doubt with modern knowledge (while leaving belief to unenlightened religion) is one claim against which *TES* rebels. However, *TES* seeks to rebel with equal force against the philosophical reaction to Descartes, a reaction to which anthropological studies of "belief" and "doubt" came to be heir: namely people like Ludwig Wittgenstein and others orbiting the tradition of existential phenomenology as well as pragmatists like William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, and John Dewey. These reacted, in a variety of ways, to Descartes's idea of universal doubt by suggesting that doubt, far from being the free form that reason took, was itself structured. Take Wittgenstein's point, quoted by Pelkmans, that "the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (Wittgenstein 1969: 115). So instead of arguing that knowledge was founded on doubt, Wittgenstein argued that doubt itself rested on socially specific language-games, certainty, and belief. I am too much of a traditional anthropologist not to find this social constructionism useful, but I worry that belief and epistemological certainty are too easily assumed to correlate here. When speaking about witchcraft (in Buli at least) this correlation is unhelpful. Chapter two of *TES* "directs the reader into a discussion of mythology" exactly to take the reader *to* Wittgenstein's "larger point" about doubt (rather than away from it as Pelkmans argues), but I led to this point in order to engage critically with it (including with the irony that Wittgenstein's investigation of doubt is contained in a book entitled *On certainty*). For Wittgenstein's point that the certainty of language-games founds doubt heavily inspired Clifford Geertz and the anthropological investigation of religious belief in general and of witchcraft beliefs in particular. *TES* quotes Wittgenstein's argument that "one doubts on specific grounds" to suggest that Buli myths provide the basis for thinking and speaking about witches in Buli but not in such a way that establishes belief or certainty. Myth rather founds Buli doubt, grounds "an epistemology of guesstimating," by consistently contradicting itself. Pelkmans argues that these are "'technical' doubts" that "never extend to a questioning of the reality of witchcraft." I disagree: these "technical doubts," as well as the contradictory myths, establish the premises for the not-there-ness of every instance of witchcraft. They also insert doubt into the very reality of witchcraft in general. Maybe I am a bad Kantian here as Morris implies, or maybe people in Buli are, but it seems to me that the uncertainty about any given instance of witchcraft (the empirical) points to, recalls, and brings into explicit frustrated and anguished discourse the unknowability of every instance, and thus of the general (or transcendental). Evans-Pritchard's wonderful study of witchcraft highlighted, as Morris points out, this "doubleness of the epistemological crisis produced when death arrives," but Evans-Pritchard domesticated this crisis with the ethnographic postulate that Azande are not interested in the general, only in the specific: Kantian dilemma solved!

I am not saying this ethnographic claim is wrong. Indeed, Sanders and Pelk-mans, both Africanists, testify to its empirical veracity in their comments. "For many Africans," Sanders argues, "witchcraft is not the place for intense metaphysi-cal speculation or introspection, which ordinarily occurs elsewhere." Here an in-teresting comparative vista opens up. Keane's observation that people in Sumba practice customary rituals that implicitly refer to their own failure suggests that Indonesians may be natural-born philosophers of a particular kind for which the concept of aporia might lend itself more easily than it does to witchcraft studies in Africa. Elsewhere, I have used the concept of aporia to do what Sanders suggests, namely to turn our insights about witchcraft into the tools to study "witchcraft's Others" by demonstrating that a certain aporetic logic of sorcery informs the poli-tics of democracy in Indonesia and beyond (Bubandt 2014) or that spirits might tell us a lot about the doubts of the Anthropocene (Bubandt, in press).

I make use of aporia as an ethnographically inspired analytical device to invite comparison—actually in the spirit of Evans-Pritchard. Many other similar devices that point toward what Sanders calls "other metaphysics and analytics" of witch-craft are beginning to emerge, chief among which are Peter Geschiere's fascinating ideas to see witchcraft comparatively through the lens of "intimacy," "trust," and "belonging" (Geschiere 2009, 2013), as well as most recently through that of "nos-talgia" (Geschiere 2016). But I would certainly not claim, a move against Sanders rightly warns, that aporia is a universally applicable term that somehow describes the essence of witchcraft (or anything else) everywhere. Such universalism and es-sentialism would not only run against the grain of Derrida's thinking, it would also undermine my own critique of the African(ist) epistemology of witchcraft that has seeped into witchcraft studies as dogma. Thus, Evans-Pritchard's Kantian solution to the empirical/transcendental conundrum also set up the scaffolding for a theo-retical claim, namely that given the Azande disinterest in the general epistemologi-cal contradictions in witchcraft and their interest in settling the specific instances of witchcraft by apportioning blame, witchcraft (and the doubts about it) could be-gin to serve a social purpose. Doubt was structured by the language-games, if you will, of oracles, morality, princely order, et cetera. With the African focus of many studies of witchcraft came, in other words, also a certain, general theoretical claim about doubt, namely its ultimate containment within a pregiven social certainty or, dare I say, ontology.

While it makes good common sense to see, as Pelkmans suggests, "the rest-lessness of doubt" and "the tenacity of belief" as a pulsating relationship, it is a common sense that is rooted in a particular philosophical tendency to domes-ticate or root doubt within the certainty of social convention, a tendency that is particularly explicitly in the study of witchcraft. The "tenacity of belief," one might note here, is one of four general methods of "fixing belief" against doubt for Peirce (1955: 12), while scientific inquiry into the Real is the fourth, the "bride" to whom Peirce himself is wed (ibid:21). The vague contours of a Great Divide Theory are emerging here: belief can be fixed against doubt by a variety of means, some of which stick more firmly to the Real. Pelkmans' observation that people in Buli are not impervious to state logic and internalize the discourses of disbeliefs that they learn in school and in public gatherings is well taken, but this does not mean that modern disbelief faces mythological belief. Acts of doubting

in Buli do not rest on an unquestioned belief in "the reality of witchcraft." *TES* is a pointed critique of the ontology of presence that informs the very idea of "the reality of witchcraft." Jacques Derrida's notion of aporia is helpful, for me, in keeping the "not-there-ness" of witchcraft as present as possible in the analysis, and for highlighting that the "reality of witchcraft" in Buli is hauntological rather than ontological.

So is it doubt rather than turtles all the way down? Well, no. Remember that Geertz' apocryphal story of the "Indian" who claimed the world rested on an endless series of turtles, a story that Geertz may have gotten from similar "native legends" told to Bertrand Russell and William James (read the Wikipedia entry on "turtles all the way down"), became the allegorical justification for the claim that human worlds are based on meaning (read: language-games or social conventions) all the way down. Doubt does not have to (indeed, I suggest, should not) be framed in terms of a vertical metaphor of "thickness" all the way down (or ontology "all the way up," for that matter). *TES* tries to get at the experiential conditions of possibility of doubt with a more "flat," anti-foundationalist imaginary taken from Jean Baudrillard: "No society can live without in a sense opposing its own value system: it has to have such a system, yet it must at the same time define itself in contradictions to it" (1993: 66). Doubt is rest-less in a double, hauntological sense: it stirs/does not rest and it does not (necessarily at least) rest *on* something else. Perhaps here is the relationship between aporia and doubt that Morris asks for, and that *TES* admittedly fails to state clearly enough. True: not all doubt is aporetic (in the sense of "having no way out"). After all, most doubts are allayed and put to rest, at least for the time being (Pelkmans 2011). But I would say that all aporia—all impossible experience that continues to haunt and gnaw at the scaffolding of certainty and meaning—generates doubt.

Let me try to exemplify the difference. The saying "when in doubt . . ." portrays a peculiar non-aporetic—and possibly peculiarly modern—epistemology. Doubt is a temporary phenomenon, and when a good solution to the problem "when-in-doubt" is found ("strike it out," "whip it out," "tell the truth," "add butter," or whatever), a steady state of calm and certainty is again seen to prevail, until such a time when it is, once again, momentarily disturbed. *Ada?*, meanwhile, grows from aporetic doubt, an interminable experience that is not domesticated by epistemic logic.

Too much aporia? And what about agency?

Sanders generously places *TES* within a distinguished history of anthropological theory about witchcraft, highlighting how the anthropology's persistent attraction to anthropology is based not merely on the appeal of the exotic but on its affordance to think big. Sanders diagnoses a historical pendulum swing in witchcraft studies between those with a sociological bent and those with a philosophical penchant, assigning *TES* to the latter (guilty!). Among the many pertinent questions that Sanders asks in this regard one is particularly close to my heart, namely this: "whether too much aporia disables analysts from asking pressing questions of the sociological sort, about, say, witchcraft and sociohistorical change." For while *TES* is driven by a critique of the dangers of the sociological approach, it also tries to

refuse the opposition between philosophy/epistemology and sociology/socio-historical practice, arguing that the aporia of witchcraft, far from pushing Buli people into passivity and solipsistic introspection, has generated a form of historical agency. The doubts that grow from the aporia of witchcraft are at the center of a historically traceable will-to-probe-the-world for solutions to this aporia. Although all solutions have so far failed, this has not lessened the will-to-probe. Adopting a modern disbelief, an issue raised by Pelkmans, is perhaps in Buli currently the most promising avenue to end witchcraft by cultivating a disbelief in the existence of witches. One might paraphrase the sentiment as follows: "It worked for you people in the West, perhaps it might work here, too." Disbelief in Buli is in that sense not a world historical instance of disenchantment but rather a willed self-conversion, a will that has a long historical trajectory.

Treating doubt as a particular kind of agency rebels against a long philosophical tradition in which doubt equals immobility, resignation, hesitation, and passivity, usually contrasted with belief as the driver of action. Take, Peirce again:

> Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions. . . . The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions. Doubt never has this effect. (Peirce 1955: 10)

This notion that belief is tied to action while doubt is tied to reflection and inactivity informs not only witchcraft studies but also social theory in general. *TES* tries to connect epistemology to agency through doubt. It argues that a social epistemology grounds the problématique of Buli witchcraft and drives a particular kind of historical agency. In that sense *TES* attempts to contribute to the rethinking of agency within anthropology and feminism that challenges the idea of emancipatory agency as a necessarily overt (and inherently masculine) activity (Mahmood 2004; Butler 1993). The agency that the aporia of witchcraft drives is sometimes (when people attack accused witches, for instance) of the overtly active (and arguably masculine) kind that Morris describes through the wonderful work of James Siegel (2006): violent and quickly exhausted. But *TES* tries also to get to a less apparent but no less important kind of agency: the historically sustained and vexed attempts to align the world of witches to the world of churches, schools, and mines. This agency is epistemological and historical-practical at the same time; it is a particular kind of historical self-making associated with a hopeful engagement with world history, but it is also a self-making that starts from the aporetic position that the self is opaque to itself.

TES is not suggesting, as Morris argues, that this historical effort to rid the world of witches is a world-ending vision: Too much enthusiasm and anticipatory hope underlies the Buli projects to become Christians and moderns for them to be motivated by a death drive. But the hope to put witches "out of work" (as Buli people sometimes put it) through Christian modernity has as its background the mythical suggestion that the island world on which Buli is located itself is the work of witches. And, as if that was not enough, ridding the world of witches is a historical agency that is undertaken in the awareness that one may be a witch oneself. Those are the ironies—the aporia—with which the Buli historical agency to rid their world of witches has to contend.

Hauntologically turned?

"If people don't know themselves, can they inhabit an ontology?" The question is Keane's and grows from his critical engagement with the "ontological turn" (Keane 2009). It is a haunting question, for me at least. It is also a theoretically challenging question, because it pertains to one of the keystones of the ontological turn, namely its sharp divorce of ontological concerns from epistemological ones. Thus, one of the ontological turns (for it comes in many forms) insists on "the analytical advantages of shifting focus from questions of knowledge and epistemology towards those of ontology" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 8). Anthropology's central question (and its mode of inquiry), so Martin Holbraad goes on to argue from this, "must be constructed in ontological rather than epistemological terms" (Holbraad 2009: 81). This, it seems to me, is too rash. If the "ontological turners" complain that its critics unfairly essentialize and demonize "ontology," disregarding its revolutionary potential in terms of both discipline and politics (Vivieros de Castro 2015), it seems to me that some versions of the "ontological turn" are premised on a similar kind of demonization of epistemology, which comes to equal "representation," old-school anthropology. The ontological turn presents itself in anthropology as the solution to the focus on issues of epistemology as it was shared by the "linguistic turn," the "interpretive turn," the "writing-culture turn," and the "poststructuralist turn," et cetera. I share the concerns about these earlier turns but worry about the cost of (re)turning so unilaterally to ontology. For it is worth remembering that the ontological turn within anthropology is a historical inversion of what happened in philosophy. If anthropological ontology wants to save us from epistemology, questions of epistemology were introduced by poststructuralism in philosophy exactly to address the weaknesses of ontology. What Gilles Deleuze has called Foucault's "major achievement" was "the conversion of phenomenology into epistemology" (Deleuze 1999: 109), the replacement of "ontology with a special kind of history that focuses on the cultural practices that have made us what we are" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 122). Witchcraft is a particular kind of cultural practice that have made people in Buli what they are, but this "what they are" is itself haunted, obscured, uncertain. It is this haunted ontology that Derrida's concept of hauntology helps me describe. Witchcraft, it seems to me, explodes the certainties of the ontology of being because it simultaneously is and is-not in ways that are beyond human experience and control. Before witchcraft there can be no ontological certainty . . . neither about "what is" nor about "what I am." It is this certainty about "what is" that the ontological turn seems, often at least, to presuppose.

"Ontology," Willard Quine once proposed, can "be reduced to a single question: 'what is there' and answered in a single word: 'everything'" (quoted in Heywood 2012: 143). If the task of ontological anthropology has become to describe everything that is, can there be a purely ontological account also of what is-not? I doubt it. If the authority of the ontological turn is its claim to take ideas about "what there is" seriously, is it able to take doubt equally seriously? I do not think so. Morten Pedersen, in my view one of the most nuanced "ontological turners," begs to differ. He argues that there can be (an ontology of doubt) and that it is (able to take doubt seriously):

> anthropological ontology contains everything one encounters during fieldwork—spirit beliefs and doubts about these, propositions about the nature of reality, and descriptions of such propositions, and then some—for the whole point is to never "start deciding what is, and what is not." (Pedersen 2012)

I would agree that too often anthropologists have wanted to pronounce on "what is" and "what is not" on behalf of their informants. But what if the question of "what is" and "what is not" is, in fact, central to our informants (and not just a concern of the Western anthropologist)? What if people have struggled for over a century with this question? Should we still not engage with our informants in their efforts to decide what is and what is not? Focusing on informant "propositions" and their descriptions of such propositions is the right approach to use if one wants to get at the propositional aspects of reality. But doubt comes, one might recall, in the form of a question, not a proposition. A propositional approach will capture mainly what people claim to know (about reality or about doubt) but it will subsume all questions of doubt within an ontological perspective in which the conundrums of not-knowing are made marginal to an ontology of presence. As David Graeber put it recently in a refreshingly reverent critique, the ontological turn

> makes it effectively impossible for us to recognize one of the most important things all humans really do have in common: the fact that we all have to come to grips, to one degree or another, with what we cannot know. (2015: 22)

Doubt (and witchcraft), it seems to me, presents a central challenge to the question of ontology (and to the ontological turn). For when ontology (everything that exists) turns hauntological, questions of epistemology (whether and how one can know what is and is-not) become, it seems to me, crucial—inevitable, even. *Ada*?

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