The continuous and discontinuous person: two dimensions of ethical life

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The continuous and discontinuous person: two dimensions of ethical life

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Whereas early liberal thinkers developed the concept of the ethically accountable continuous forensic modern European person in contrast to what they saw as the discontinuous and hence unaccountable mimetic person, I argue that forensic and mimetic are better understood both as ideologies of personhood and as dimensions of all persons rather than as fully distinctive kinds of persons. I present an account of persons as accountable for their acts but show that this is not limited to the maximally continuous and autonomous person of liberal ideology. I review other forms of personhood encountered cross-culturally and suggest that the mimetic dimension offsets some of the problems inherent in an exclusively forensic model.

> Sometimes the city is Leningrad, sometimes St Petersburg; sometimes both at once; never now one without the other. We cannot separate the mistakes from our life; they are one and the same.
>
> Michaels 2009: 333

> After December I become a different person.
> Overheard from a colleague about to step down from an administrative position

It is inconceivable to think of ethics without consideration of persons: that is, the beings conceived to act ethically and judged with respect to their actions and character. The concept of the person is one that anthropologists have discussed at length, usually in order to emphasize cultural difference. Yet if, as I will argue, ethics is intrinsic to the human condition, to human speech and action, and hence in some respect universal, how do we reconcile that with cultural difference? Most attempts to do so have foundered in either ethnocentrism or relativism. I try to forge a different path.

There are many ways to think of persons, and no single one that is likely to be accepted as definitive or comprehensive. In this article I offer a pair of ideal types that may prove useful for some kinds of questions. They developed in the early modern period to describe two distinct kinds of persons but I consider them as two alternative ways to conceptualize persons and finally as two dimensions of active personhood that have universal relevance but carry relative weight or salience in different societies.[1]

Starting with the concept of person rather than the biological individual or psychological subject, my emphasis is on the social in two senses. First is the idea that personhood draws on public – that is, social or cultural – criteria, concepts, models, and

vehicles for its realization. Hence I am attending more to what Stanley Cavell has called 'participation in the order of law' than 'improvisation in the disorders of desire' (2005*b*: 185). I share the wish to understand these together, but that is something beyond the scope of this particular essay. Second is the sense that the social is also the *inter*personal; persons are only persons in the context of and in relation to other persons. As the Kibushy saying goes, *mañka uluñu uluñu uluñu*, what makes a person a person is other persons; in other words, interaction and especially mutual acknowledgement is central to personhood.[2]

Although my focus is on the public side of personhood rather than the interior and reflexive life of the self or subject, I do not make a sharp distinction between them; social constructs of personhood must draw upon psychological experiences and capacities for selfhood and, conversely, the latter are influenced by the social or cultural vehicles of personhood available (cf. Mead 1934). These questions are relevant but not the main issue here.[3] The difference may be understood as one of perspective. The perspective in this article is how society describes or constitutes persons. A complementary perspective would start with individuals and how they establish their own persons or selves, drawing upon and contesting or undermining practices, models, and ideologies like those described here.

Two constructs of the person

In a recent paper Paul Christopher Johnson has demonstrated how early modern political philosophers developed the concept of the self-possessed and accountable person by distinguishing it sharply from non-European persons, unduly susceptible to imitation, as exemplified by what the Europeans came to call spirit possession and explicitly likened by John Locke to the quintessentially mimetic figure of the parrot (Johnson 2014: 37). Persons constituted through mimesis could not be accountable for their actions, could not therefore enter into contracts, and were better understood as a potential form of property (hence as slaves or, later, colonized subjects) than as proprietors.

It has given me some pause to realize that I too have been inspired by the observation of spirit possession to address the concept of person, but the lessons I draw are very different. My axis of comparison applies similar binary terms, albeit placing them at right angles to the philosophers of liberalism. I suggest two universal and intrinsic dimensions of the person. On one side, the person is understood as a unique, continuous, and unitary actor and cumulative product of the acts in which she has engaged or been engaged and for which she is held and holds herself accountable. Following Locke, I call this the forensic person, alluding here to identity over time, carrying moral responsibility for past and future deeds in the way that the law ascribes continuity to individuals with respect to such matters as intentionality, commission, and punishment.[4] On the other side, individuals draw from a set of named *personnages* or dramatis personae that they 'become', 'inhabit', 'play', 'personify', 'imitate', or 'impersonate' alternately and discontinuously, or possibly successively or simultaneously, and for which different societies provide a variety of means and opportunities. These vehicles for subjection, but also action and reflection, appear to produce discontinuous, dispersed, dividual, divided, uncontained, or non-unitary persons, a dimension I call mimetic.

Forensic and mimetic are less distinct persons than constructs of personhood. And although such constructs are differentially elaborated in local ideologies of the person (of which we may take Locke's as one), I argue that they refer to modes or dimensions of action that are relevant for all persons, everywhere, hence emphatically not mutually

exclusive. They can also each respond to the aporias inherent in the other. On the surface, and especially in a context like modernity, in which a forensic ideology has prevailed, the two constructs might seem to produce or index discrepant relations to ethics, deep and shallow, respectively, but I argue that both dimensions are intrinsic to ethical life. I will suggest that the forensic emphasizes the perspective on action I single out as practice (continuous action), whereas the mimetic draws on what I distinguish as performance (discrete, discontinuous acts).

I follow an insight I derive from an early essay by Geertz (1973a, originally published in 1966) that it is a category mistake to clearly differentiate the particular from the universal when it comes to culture.[5] The point is that in illuminating the ostensibly exotic practices of Malagasy-speakers, my aim is precisely not to oppose 'their' social or ethical world to 'ours' or to distinguish their 'traditional' world from their current 'postcolonial' one, but to clarify a common feature of human personhood, namely its intrinsically ethical nature.[6] I argue that ethics entails a judicious balance between forensically maintaining commitments in continuous practice and mimetically initiating, accepting, or submitting to new ones in discontinuous performances.

My interest in the topic has emerged in part through attempts to develop a serious account of spirit possession and specifically of the practice of spirit mediums, acting both as themselves and as spirits, as I have encountered them on the island of Mayotte and in the city of Mahajanga in northwest Madagascar. When the medium is in trance she is taken over by another being who speaks through her. The spirits are construed as persons in their own right, drawn from a set of publicly available 'characters' (or *personnages*). To be actively possessed is for the medium to perform, temporarily and discontinuously, as someone else (and hence discontinuously as herself). Such performance is clearly mimetic but it is not thereby play-acting or pretending. More to the point, such temporary discontinuities in personhood by no means vitiate the significance of the forensic dimension. The spirits themselves are understood as persons in a forensic sense, bearing singular and continuous identities and held accountable for their actions despite their discontinuous and multiple appearances. Moreover, although possession disrupts the continuous personhood of the medium, in the end it does not diminish but highlights and enhances it.

Johnson writes, that if in Locke's view contracts require

> [first] authenticity, the assurance that contracts in fact express the actual wills of contracting partners; [second] identity, the assurance that contracts made today will still abide in the future; and [third] authority, an agreement as to the common power compelling and ensuring the contract's fulfilment, [then for liberal thinkers] possession by spirits throws all of these, and thus the contract itself, into question (2014: 33).

However, possession in Mayotte and Madagascar does nothing of the kind so long as the persons of the host and of the spirit are clearly distinguished from one another – which is actually what the whole practice attempts to do. Additionally, possession serves as a kind of privileged site in which the making of forensic persons is rendered culturally explicit and the ethical consequences and limitations are made salient for participants and observers (Lambek 1981).[7]

I have addressed specific ethical entailments, capacities, and resonances of spirit possession in other essays. In this paper I forgo further inspection of possession itself, seeing it as one of a larger set of cultural institutions that draw upon what Mauss (1985 [1938]) referred to as *personnages* and that highlight or elaborate the mimetic

dimension. My presentation proceeds in three segments. In the first, I summarize and extend a recent argument (Lambek 2010a) that ethics is entailed in the articulation of practice with performative action. In the second section I rapidly survey a range of mimetic vehicles other than spirit possession evident in the ethnographic literature. In the final section I develop an ideal-typical model of the forensic and mimetic dimensions of the person.

A large question this article raises but does not pretend to answer is the following: how do our views of human being, reason, truth, and ethics shift if we take the mimetic dimension seriously and if we see mimesis not merely as a human capacity (or incapacity) but as intrinsic to human sociality? Moreover, how can ethics address discontinuity? To put this another way, what is the relationship between the perduring and the contingent in ethical action and judgement? 'Jack' is a good person but now he has done a bad thing; is he still a good person? If not, can he recover the person he was? Or more strikingly: 'Jill' has been a very good person for thirty years but then it is discovered that in her youth she policed a concentration camp; how should we revise our opinion of her? How do we determine the criteria for ascertaining and ascribing which are the continuous and which the discontinuous traits, attributions, responsibilities, and descriptions of persons? How do we acknowledge, describe, and evaluate the continuous, consistent, and possibly essential in relation to the discontinuous, contingent, ostensibly inconsistent, and relatively superficial? What is the place of distinctive cultural vehicles in this process?

The constitution of ethical persons

By 'ethics' I do not mean goodness or justice *per se*, or simply the dispositions towards them, and certainly not normative injunctions and prescriptive rules, but rather the condition in the first instance of being subject to judgement (in the broad sense of discernment): that is to say, the conditions under which criteria of goodness or justice and the like become relevant, necessary, and particular.[8] Performative acts establish criteria according to which practice and circumstances that follow are evaluated (Austin 1965 [1955]; Cavell 1979; Lambek 2010a; Rappaport 1999). That is to say, the participants in a performative act commit themselves to the criteria thereby instantiated (and, moreover, argues Rappaport, accept the larger order that constitutes performative acts of a certain kind in the first place). The commitment could be to a state of war or peace or alliance as described by Rappaport for the Maring in Papua New Guinea, or it could be something apparently trivial. If I make a commitment, say, to deliver a paper at a conference, my subsequent actions with respect to that commitment (Do I show up? With a paper? On topic?) are subject to evaluation, indexing whether I have kept my word and eventually whether I am the kind of person who *can* keep his word.[9]

Since performative acts, understood as entailed in the illocutionary force or dimension of all utterances, are pervasive, so too is ethics. This is evident in Cavell's discussion of our accountability for, and hence the immense consequentiality of, every word we utter (Cavell 1976; 1996). Performativity and its consequentiality are highlighted through formalization and elaboration in those acts we refer to specifically as ritual. Ritual thus is not simply a secondary representation and possible mystification of underlying social relations or values (as some British social anthropologists have thought), but is, at least in this respect, constitutive of them. As Andrew Walsh (2002) has put it, rituals do not only fulfil responsibility, they produce it. Ritual produces a

world in which practice and behaviour are explicit, definable, and available for discern-
ment and judgement according to the criteria the rituals instantiate. From such a
perspective, ethics is intrinsic to human social worlds.

Ethics is entailed in human speech, construed as carrying illocutionary force, and is
as inseparable from acts of speaking as mind is from body. (Hence it would be a
category error to attempt to distinguish ethics from action as distinct commensurate
phenomena or provinces of analysis.) Again, what I mean by ethics here is the avail-
ability, acceptance of, and susceptibility to criteria, not only or necessarily doing what
is right or good, rationalizing the right and good, or theorizing about them. Acts have
a temporal dimension, since those who enter into them have been shaped by prior acts
and the criteria and commitments engaged therein, and since performative acts, as
noted, cast their consequences forward, shaping the evaluation of subsequent practice
– and presumably, to a degree, the practice itself, by means of the criteria they put into
place. Actors are rendered persons through performative acts and gain thereby a
(socially) temporal existence: commitments entail the continuity of those who commit
or are committed to or through them.[10]

The question is how long such continuity lasts and whether and how it can be
terminated or disrupted. What are the criteria that justify new acts or setting aside old
ones? Persons are discontinuous insofar as they successively take on new commitments
or commitments of a different kind, as in religious conversion or remarriage, break or
acknowledge their relinquishment of past commitments, as in resigning from service or
asking for forgiveness, or are reassigned criteria, as in psychiatric diagnoses or legal
pronouncements. Do such discontinuities justify their being labelled different persons?
What cultural vehicles and mechanisms are available for producing, enforcing, and
legitimating various framings of continuity and discontinuity or consistency and
inconsistency? Any given society will have ideas or principles as to which illocutionary
effects or commitments can be broken or put aside, how, and with what meaning or
consequence, and which cannot. Likewise, over time, the ethical context in which any
group of humans subsists will inevitably become highly complex, dense with multiple
and possibly conflicting or incommensurable, continuous and discontinuous
performative vehicles, criteria, and specific effects and commitments, some of which
may be subject to misrecognition.

Such matters of the continuity of persons are culturally or humanly universal insofar
as they are intrinsic to speech, social action, temporality, and the fact that we inhabit
relatively discrete bodies (not to mention innate or developmental dispositions, capac-
ities, and limits; cf. Bloch 2012; Mauss 1985 [1938]). Nevertheless, it is evident that
human acts and utterances take place under particular descriptions and with respect to
specific felicity conditions and criteria, and such descriptions, conditions, and criteria
vary across culture, language, and time and within any given society. Hence persons are
not identical to one another. They are not the same not simply because their bodies and
minds are distinct from one another, but also because the performative acts in which
they engage or are engaged differ in their conditions, meaning, force, criteria, and
effects. I say 'are engaged' because many acts are performed over us without our direct
intention, as in infant baptism or circumcision. It is of considerable interest that the
Church of England faces a group of atheists who call for a rite of 'debaptism', much as
there exists a collection of men in the United States who claim their foreskins back.[11]
Insofar as the states of social and bodily being to which we commit and are committed
and the criteria for evaluating our being or practice with respect to those states vary

enormously, so too does the substance of personhood and whether, as in these instances, it is meant as continuous and permanent, albeit indelibly, if privately, marked in the one case and not the other.

In addition to the differences produced by specific performative acts, there are larger differences according to how such acts are articulated with one another across society and over the lifetime, the degree to which they are imposed, given, or freely initiated and how they are authorized, as well as the range of persons they engage – whether, for example, initiations are collective or individual, in what respects they are gender-specific and gender-specifying, whether initiation is a step linked intrinsically to marriage, and so forth. Rappaport was much taken by his cousin Robert Levy's (1973) account of Tahiti, where boys were responsible for initiating their own circumcisions. Very broadly, one could say that social orders can frame personhood with respect to kinds and degrees of responsibility (or 'agency') and with respect to continuity over the life-span or transition and discontinuity (and anthropologists, likewise, can follow either emphasis). Additionally, a given social order could emphasize the connectedness of persons to one another, their unity or reciprocity in acting or being acted upon in common or in relation, or their separateness, distinctiveness, and autonomy.

It was part of the transformation in European society over the last few hundred years, as well as the explicit argument of a number of European political theorists, later supported by the professional experts described by Foucault, to emphasize the temporally continuous and maximally accountable person (in various forms of essentialism and by means of various technologies, including the new ones today of forensic science and genetics) over dispersed or diffuse forms of agency and the manifest discontinuities within a single life – and yet simultaneously to emphasize the discontinuities over the continuities between persons (e.g. the celebration of birthdays rather than saints' days). Hence the rise of the modern monadic individual. One could say that the maximally socially distinct and temporally continuous individual is the ideological exemplar of the modern person.[12]

Along with parallel transformations in the religious sphere, broadly speaking, and notably a change in what Keane (2007) has called the semiotic ideology, whereby speakers and actors are understood to be linked to their words and acts in particular ways, there is the emergence of a particular kind of ethical subject, held as solely responsible not only for their acts but possibly for ascertaining the relevant criteria. Such subjects are either blithely untroubled by prior commitments to others or given to anxious self-scrutiny. These subjects are also citizens of liberal states to whose laws they are accountable, in part because the state has largely taken over authority for the order of the performative acts that constitute the person (as a citizen, for example) and that were formerly in the sphere of religion, kinship, or the community and whose performativity is now largely concealed from its own participants (Lambek 2013; cf. Bloch 1986). Bureaucracy has encroached on religious and family ritual, and law has overshadowed ethics.

In this way, the person is simultaneously rendered anonymous and placed firmly under the control and gaze of the state through its various apparatuses and discourses. Moreover, insofar as they no longer participate bodily and explicitly in rituals, people are no longer as fully constituted by, or as constitutive of, encompassing liturgical orders that authorize and substantiate ethical values and orientation (Rappaport 1999). Ethics becomes abstracted and objectified as something at arm's length, to be acquired as discrete knowledge of rules rather than assimilated and embodied as part of life.

With the decline of formerly hegemonic orders of performatively established person-hood in the arenas of kinship, community, and congregation, discourses of the indi-vidual self, and hence of self-help, and also of individual achievement and fame, rush in to fill their place. I suggest this is symptomatic of a gap or thinning out of the ritually performative realization of ethical persons.[13] We still do have the ethics entailed in ordinary speaking, of course, and I am on weaker ground if I suggest as well a decline in the everyday use of ordinary explicitly performative utterances; say from Jane Austen's world to that of our texting children. Even to raise it is controversial and I leave it to linguists to answer.[14]

To speculate further, the popularity of charismatic Christianity may reside in part in its ability to offer a public form and forum for establishing emotionally and ethically charged non- or anti-bureaucratic and somewhat less individuated and vigorously performative means of personhood, and shifting the emphasis from the relentlessly forensic to the mimetic (explicitly 'born again'). Islam, too, offers an encompassing liturgical order that grants legitimacy to particular performative acts engaged within its framework and hence provides a kind of uniformity and consistency, in which indi-viduals are identified with ethical order – it becomes an embodied part of them and they become an embodied part of it – rather than experiencing a detached externalized engagement with or against it (Hirschkind 2006).

I have recounted this story breathlessly and too broadly, but let me emphasize one further twist. It is part of the ideology of this transformation that modern persons are rendered free to exercise their rational faculties and especially the faculty of choice (whether this choice is described by liberals as 'free' or exalted by existentialists as terrifying and authentic). From such a perspective, those who submit to the rituals of their communities of kinship or religion are conceptualized as 'unfree' insofar as they are not given choice (witness the imposed baptisms and circumcisions), and moreover they are ostensibly mystified, not understanding the human sources of the performative acts in which they engage or find themselves engaged. They mistake illocutionary acts that construct the world for locutionary statements that describe or refer to it, and yet conversely assume that illocutionary acts can have material rather than simply conven-tional effects.

It is anthropological wisdom (or deconstructive foolishness) to suggest that it is equally we moderns who are mystified by supposing that such mystification is neces-sarily a bad, superficial, or unnecessary thing, as if it could be replaced by purely rational thought and transparent, unmediated procedures, as if all utterances could and should be merely constative, individual, 'freely' given statements and hence only accept-able if 'true', and as if we, too, are not partially already formed or informed by performative acts and the orders of which they are a part, as if we could be fully and exclusively forensic persons, fully accountable not only for each of our actions but for the descriptions they get placed under or the criteria they entail. I would call this the mystification of the constative. I mean by this that insofar as our semiotic ideology has assumed that our utterances are or should be constative – locutionary, referential, rational, fully intentional and sincere declarations of what is the case – it has misled us.[15] It was not until Austin (in the wake of Wittgenstein) that it became (re)apparent that utterances are not identical to referential statements, that they do not all carry truth value in the same way, that utterances have illocutionary force as well as locutionary and perlocutionary dimensions, and hence (Cavell 1976; Rappaport 1999) that we are embedded in our successive performatively engaged commitments in the

manner I stated earlier.[16] If the Rest mystifies the illocutionary basis of ritual utterances and their effects, the West mystifies the reach and powers of the constative. Hence, insofar as one wants to draw that imaginary line between West and Rest (or modern and non-modern), one might do it according to the complementary ways in which our personhood is respectively mystified, rather than opposing the rational *to* the mystified.

Whatever the source, kind, or degree of mystification, ethical personhood is constituted through an interplay of performance and practice. Performance instantiates the criteria that organize and evaluate practice, while it is from the stream of practice that new performances are enacted. By performance I refer primarily to the illocutionary acts or force of ordinary language; in ritual these performative acts are put more fully 'on stage', thereby taking on some of the connotations we associate with the idea of explicit performances. Illocutionary acts may explicitly perform deference to the authority of a liturgical or legal order or they may mark consistency with internal intention. In the latter instance, sincerity becomes a more salient felicity condition than conformity to external scenarios or modes of comportment. In each case, acts are assessed as more or less successful according to their ability to satisfy the felicity conditions associated with them. Practice is shaped and interpreted in light of the criteria established by means of performative acts but practice is also the field in which new performative acts are generated and new criteria brought into play. A simple illustration is the utterance of a promise and then whether it is kept or ignored in practice and subsequently whether a new act, such as an apology or a denial, is performed.

If persons are subject to criteria established in performance, they must find ways to live with them in practice. This raises a number of challenges insofar as criteria do not fit changing circumstances, interests, or intentions, criteria are incommensurable with one another, commitments conflict or compete with one another, and the attempt to be consistent and complete presents significant difficulties. Ethical practice requires the sustained judicious balancing of commitments and criteria, including when to engage in new performative acts.[17] Virtuous wisdom (*phronesis*) entails not only meaning what we say as an entailment of a given performance but balancing that with the entailments of other performances, knowing when and how to say what we mean and to whom in ongoing practice and when to let it go. Wisdom also entails recognizing our own and others' inability to be fully consistent and sometimes the limits of any criteria. In most human circumstances there is a complex play of judgement, desire, and discretion that does not lend itself to literal transcription. There is always a slippage between the clarity of ethical criteria established in single performances and the heterogeneity and ambiguousness of circumstances (including past performances) and hence what is realizable in practice. As Cavell notes in his discussions of *Lear* (1976) and *Hippolytus* (1996), inflexible adherence to a given criterion or commitment is liable to provoke tragedy.[18]

A person is accountable in the first instance to and for herself in light of the illocutionary acts in which she engages or is engaged. However, the understanding and experience of being accountable is not uniform but depends on the prevalent semiotic ideology: for example, whether one attends to one's accounting primarily internally and psychologically, and then whether in a Protestant fashion or a Freudian one; or by means of the body, through visceral responses like blushing, nausea, or paralysis, or by bearing; or externally, whether interpersonally by means of a simple apology or on the public stage within one's community of practice, perhaps by means of appropriate

sacrifice or penance, that is, by means of further elaborate and highly visible or audible performative acts. From the perspective of each semiotic ideology (and corresponding emotional nexus) the practices authorized under the others are ethically suspect. Ritualists can accuse non-ritualists of indecorous and idiosyncratic, if not chaotic, behaviour, while being vulnerable in turn to accusations of insincerity or mere conformity.[19]

In sum, personhood is both an entailment and cumulative product of a series of acts, acts committed towards, over, with respect to, and by the individual concerned. These include acts of naming or interpellation and of accepting and answering to names, as well as acts committed in or under those names and that bear consequences. Persons are human beings under a set of descriptions, criteria, and commitments put into place by means of successive performative acts. These descriptions render them in the first instance as ethical subjects. Again, I do not mean they are inherently or consistently good or just or honourable, but that they are subject to recognition and to evaluation, not least self-recognition and self-evaluation, according to the criteria to which they have committed or been committed. Phrased in somewhat different language, persons are granted a certain dignity by being placed performatively under a description;[20] moreover, one of the chief criteria for maintaining that dignity entails granting dignity reciprocally to others by recognizing them as persons under comparable kinds of descriptions, by witnessing their performances, by standing by one's word to them, acknowledging one's lapses (including performing excuses), and generally submitting oneself to the criteria established by means of the acts one has undergone or undertaken and acknowledging the engagements of others. The necessity, availability, production, recognition, and application of such criteria are the grounds of what I mean by 'ethics'; the intrinsic nature of subjection and accountability to criteria is what I mean by 'persons'. Note that to be subject to criteria does *not* mean that persons are determined by them, forced or 'caused' to act in certain ways.[21]

I close this section by emphasizing that all this leaves persons immensely vulnerable, both to lack of positive recognition by others (shame) and to the sense of having failed sufficiently to recognize others (guilt). We are also subject to the contingencies of history, notably to acts of violence and disruption, but also to the inability, for economic or political reasons, to carry out sufficient or required rituals constitutive of personhood and acknowledgement, and sometimes we even forget what these are. Such circumstances can produce enormous anxiety and anomie, sometimes misdiagnosed as 'trauma'. A succinct example of the failure of recognition may be seen in Adam Ashforth's (2000) portrayal of a resident of Soweto who is vulnerable both to being attacked by witchcraft and to being considered a witch (it is a considerable merit of his book to show the proximity and even ambiguity between these two subject positions) in large part because he has failed to acknowledge his own ancestors and because they, too, have failed to fully recognize him and to be present in his life. Finally and conversely, people are vulnerable at times to an excess of criteria and expectations and may need to effect avenues of partial escape into privacy.

The *personnage*
The idea of unity in continuity (*contin-unity*), as a kind of permanent identification between the person and the body, is epitomized in the forensic person of modern law no less than in the science of forensics. I think there is something deeply universal about this sense of distinctive self-sameness. But if it does not correspond exclusively to the modern individual, how is it accommodated by different ethnographic facts,

arguments, or ideologies concerning relational, discontinuous, and possibly even multiple and dispersed persons that are a feature of so many non-modern societies (including the virtual worlds of postmodernity)? The difference is first elucidated in Mauss's (1985 [1938]) concept of the *personnage*. The *personnage* is, then, a second sense of person circulating in anthropology.

Where the ideology of the modern West emphasizes the pre-eminence of the unique, self-continuous, bounded, forensic, and 'possessive' individual (Macpherson 1962), certain other societies may highlight a relatively fixed set of distinct socially recognized positions that individuals successively come to inhabit or possibly alternate among. These can be considered dramatis personae, a socially recognized, possibly permanent cast of characters whose performance successive actors take up. They are the characters that comprise the life of a certain kind of society or community. Whereas Westerners might be inclined to say that individuated actors impersonate such characters and would grant a lesser status to *impersonation* than to directly *being* a single person (despite the cult of film stars), as though the former were less authentic or less real than the latter, and as though the latter did not entail performance of its own, such distinctions would not be the case in a society with *personnages*. Performance in a Maussian world is neither excessively strategic nor somehow make-believe, but constitutive. To be or become a person in this sense is to fit the title of Ricoeur's book *Oneself as another* (1992), or perhaps *another as oneself*.

Mauss's model fits Malagasy spirit possession, insofar as mediums are possessed by one or another of a set of spirits,[22] but possession is only one of the more florid exemplifications of *personnages*. Mauss himself was drawing from Pueblo and West Coast Amerindians, where it is the circulation of names and titles, or, rather, the circulation of individuals into these names and titles (Mauzé 1994), that is critical. A comparable system is found among the British aristocracy with succession to a named landed estate and title, with associated house, income, and political office. A more complex form in central Africa is 'positional succession', as described by Cunnison for the Luapula. I quote at length Karin Barber's lucid summary of the ethnography:

> [I]n 'positional succession' ... a successor steps completely into a predecessor's role, taking over his name, property, social identity, relationships and responsibilities.[23] In the Luapula valley in northern Zambia, every married man occupied a position which, if he died, had to be taken over by a junior member of the matrilineage. The successor took over the widow, the deceased's name, role and status. 'One in heart with my uncle, I succeed him. I am just exactly as my uncle was' (Cunnison 1956: 33). 'It is the names rather than any particular incumbents of them that achieve fame and gain currency in traditions ...' (1956: 33) ... It is not that there is a *real* Magumbe whose name is *fictitiously* taken over by a successor: for the person you succeed himself succeeded someone else, and what we are looking at is an endless succession of shells or inhabitable slots, with individuals moving up through them. Children are not sons of an individual but of a position, 'whose mark is the name which is at any time the label of the man occupying the position' (ibid). When positional succession is combined with 'perpetual kinship', relationships between pairs of positions whose 'names' have been inherited through the generations are held to remain fixed. What is taken over is not just a name but the relationships that attend the name. Living people step into pre-existing genealogical slots in an unchanging structure ...
>
> These relations of equivalence may suggest an effacement of individual agency in impersonal, external social structures. Yet the peoples of the Luapula valley, as described in Cunnison's beautiful ethnography (Cunnison 1959), were intensely entrepreneurial, quick to adapt, worked alone or in small groups and were keen on individual success (Barber 2007: 111-12, original emphasis).

Barber goes on to discuss the role of praise poems and other literary genres as 'modes of making persons' (2007: 134) and argues that '[i]t is in the playing field of textuality that

the relational nature of personhood is most fully disclosed ...' (2007: 134). Such genres work by locating the person in an external form, like a name, ox, mask, or feature of the landscape. 'Names and their expansions are the kernel of social reputation, the index of self-realisation, and the vehicle of survival beyond death. Names are the nodes through which multiple links and affiliations with other names pass' (Barber 2007: 135).[24]

A converse form of personhood is found in societies where it is a non-material aspect of the person that circulates through new bodies. Reincarnation has been pervasive in many Inuit communities, where the birth of an infant is recorded as the reappearance of someone who has recently died.[25] The infant thus begins life as both herself and another. She is child of the family into which she is born but also takes the kinship position of the formerly deceased person. She is thus a double person, living life as her own person but equally reproducing another. A question is how these positions articulate in practice. The circumstances offer much room for play or 'freedom' as well, perhaps, as some hard choices of loyalty in particular situations of conflict.[26]

Reincarnation takes on a different valence in different societies. There is a quiet, behind-the-scenes, far from universal presence of reincarnation in Switzerland. In the cases I have encountered, reincarnation enables imaginative and retrospective identifications and connections between historical periods. The *personnages* in question are neither regularly circulating names or titles nor family or community members, but individuals. Like Malagasy spirits, they are 'characters' in a poiesis of history who exemplify a past epoch – an ordinary woman who resisted the Nazis in a German village (Lambek 2007a) or a well-known Jewish writer who committed suicide during the Second World War. They may be social types derived from popular culture, like a martial arts figure in a medieval Himalayan monastery.[27] These dramatis personae distance people from their ordinary circumstances, doubling or multiplying personhood, even if relatively privately.[28]

These examples reinforce two points made in Geertz's famous essay on 'Time, person and conduct in Bali' (1973b): first, that personhood and temporality or historicity are intrinsically related; and, second, that every biological individual is ascribed multiple forms of personhood, by means of such things as names (first names, family names, nicknames, teknonyms, kinship terms, etc.) and titles.[29] It thus becomes evident that the line between the forensic person and mimetic *personnage* is not easy to draw and it is even possible that their relative weight shifts over the life-cycle. This is true with respect not only to titles or office-holders (like named professorships or district commissioners) but also to kinship itself.[30]

Kinship worlds are intrinsically perspectival and persons are multiply refracted, a given individual being concurrently and alternately daughter and mother, sister and wife, and so forth. The individual operates within an indexically shifting relational matrix. Moreover, the relationship between two individuals can often be construed in multiple ways, sister-in-law and cross-cousin, for example, and these can be redoubled in practices like joking relationships in which grandparents address grandchildren as spouses.[31] In societies like the Inuit of Greenland (Nuttall 1992) or the !Kung San (Lee 2003), the relational matrix across the whole range of persons can be doubled or tripled, whereas in other kinds of societies accession to a title can serve to extract the individual from the ordinary perspectival flux and execute a shift from multiple forms of interpellation to a single one of higher saliency or authority.

One of the things that made Bali appear so harmonious, and perhaps so claustrophobic, was that the various modes of naming seemed to draw on the same underlying

model or structure and hence fit well with one another, like the cycles of the multiple calendars. In many societies, however, modes of interpellation are incommensurable, or even conflicting, subject to differing social forces or differentially to historical change.

A contemporary locus for alternate personhood is the Internet. It is available in elaborate games like Second Life (Boelstorff 2008) and in possibilities for creative disguise on dating sites, email solicitations, and blogs, like that of the Syrian lesbian in Damascus who turned out to be (also? really?) an American man in Scotland. We call these hoaxes or frauds, and sometimes prosecute them, in part because we draw such a sharp line between continuous and discontinuous dimensions of personhood. Roughly analogous issues appear with respect to gender reassignment and perhaps to gender itself (cf. Butler 1990). At the same time, many American Protestants characterize successive personhood positively in the practice of being 'born again', while popular Catholicism has encouraged mimetic identification with particular saints (Orsi 2005). Whatever the salience of discontinuity for Christianity more broadly (Robbins 2007), I hope it is evident that these examples wear away at the line between West and Rest, not least because there is a great deal of heterogeneity on both sides of the (straw) line, and not only insofar as the dominant ideology of the Western person was constructed (partly) in opposition, and hence relation, to what came to be perceived as its radical Other (Johnson 2014).

Forensic and mimetic dimensions of the person

Because my explication remains largely at the level of ideal types and cultural constructs, I want to emphasize at the outset that I consider the forensic and mimetic to have qualities that are phenomenologically and psychologically real. The forensic and mimetic are complementary and intrinsic dimensions of selfhood and subjectivity; however, the particular shape, salience, and degree of objectification vary with place and period. Hence the public *personnage* is a cultural elaboration of the mimetic dimension.

It is not my intention to draw on all the connotations and intellectual baggage that the terms carry. In particular, I have no wish to embroil myself in theories of mimesis.[32] "Mimetic" here simply codes the dimension of difference, iteration, and imitation, while "forensic" codes identity in the sense of self-sameness and unfolding over time. I use mimesis in the sense of an aesthetic, embodied realization of likeness (cf. Auerbach 1953), drawing from conventions of genre and authorization and evidenced in such things as answering to a name, cultural scenarios, comportment, dress, and styles of speaking. Mimesis often implies an embodied articulation unmediated by conscious reason but it need not entail the depth of dissociation characteristic of spirit possession.[33] It is characteristic of play, imagination, and fantasy but can also be serious. The forensic implies conscious intention and recognition (whether or not they are actually present). Linguists can track shifting modes evident in speech; the mimetic can be found in practices of quotation and de-quotation (Urban 1989), whereas the forensic maintains or asserts stability of pronominal reference, among numerous other syntactic and pragmatic markers.

The forensic model entails the linear constitution of the person as a being in time who is accountable both for past acts and for living up to future commitments.[34] Whereas the mimetic entails the ways in which what a person says and does draw from what other people have said or done, or serve in turn as examples or foils for others, the

forensic emphasizes how what a person says and does follows from what that person herself has already said and done and anticipates what she will do subsequently. Psychoanalytically, the mimetic entails identification (or competition) with and introjection of others (or being projected upon); sociologically, it concerns assuming status and role. The forensic entails the psychological unity and boundedness of the maturing self or ego; sociologically it concerns singular identity.[35]

Viewed mimetically, the person is a subject, informed by others and their representations, and susceptible to the passions. Viewed forensically, the person is an agent, characterized by her own actions and accountable for them. The mimetic dimension is ostensibly relational, dividual, specific (kinded), and iterative; the forensic ostensibly autonomous, individual, singular, and original. The forensic person is more or less narrativized and appears in the context, or as the product, of narration. The mimetic person is more or less dramatized and appears in the context or as the product of explicit performance. The forensic voice draws on tropes of intention and consistency whereas the mimetic draws on irony and ambiguity. The narrative or drama can be of suffering or victimization as well as of heroic action and responsibility. The two dimensions clash in discursive spaces like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where, as Sue Williamson (2011) put it, the idea was: if you just tell (perform) the truth, then you have no more accountability. As can be imagined, this formula led to a variety of results, some quite unsatisfying.[36]

Yet more abstractly, the distinction can be understood as roughly analogous to that between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic or between metonymy and metaphor – here transferred from the structural analysis of language or texts to the social life of persons.[37] As in linguistic or poetic analysis, these refer not to mutually exclusive alternatives but to intersecting dimensions, although one can be highlighted at the expense of another. Hence, if in Mayotte spirits are mimetically realized as persons through name, dress, comportment, dissociation, and performance as distinct from their hosts and from other spirits, they are also forensically realized through their individual names, acts, and commitments. Conversely, where the forensic dimension is salient, as in North America, persons are none the less constituted in part through mimesis, in everyday performative iteration, and by way of education, the media, taste, and fashion. Many working- and middle-class people shift between distinct public and domestic personas.[38] Ethnographers are different persons in the field than they are at home.

A central point is that the forensic dimension manifests temporal continuity in the life of the individual while relatively disregarding continuity with other persons. The mimetic dimension manifests continuity with other persons while relatively disregarding temporal continuity in the life of the person.

Western thought has at times explicitly disparaged the mimetic. I have already noted Johnson's account of the forging of the modern person through contrast with spirit possession. Nineteenth-century psychiatry consigned the mimetic to pathology. In the grand rounds of Charcot, hysterical patients were put on display and made to perform. Hypnosis became both an analogy of their condition and a form of treatment. As Ruth Leys (2000) has shown, psychiatrists have been divided ever since between upholding what she calls mimetic and anti-mimetic theories of aetiology and treatment of trauma (respectively unmediated and mediated by conscious reason), theories that, she argues, inevitably collapse into one another. It may well be that something like this tension applies as well to the non-pathologized self and, in effect, to constructs of the social person.

For early modern political philosophers, possession appeared to obviate the three features of free will as discerned by Leibniz: 'the spontaneity of action, the assurance that action originates from the one who acts; the contingency of action, the fact that other courses not taken were possible; and the rationality of action, the guarantee that it follows from the deliberation of alternatives' (Johnson 2014: 34). In fact, what spirit possession does is raise the sceptical question of whether free will in this strong sense is ever fully (completely and consistently) possible (Lambek 2003). The spirits perform in a manner that, far from obviating these criteria of free will, plays ironically, knowingly, and sometimes humorously on their ambiguity. Elsewhere mimesis challenges unilateral conceptions of personal autonomy and private property, as is evident in lawsuits about impersonation and intellectual property (Coombe 1998).

Mimetic performance is sometimes multi-layered: for example, when spirit mediums in the Caribbean imitate possession during performances for tourists. Conversely, child spirits in Mayotte pretend to be their unpossessed mediums (Lambek 1981). Sometimes there are ruptures across frames, as during a 'folkloric' performance of spirit possession in Puerto Rico observed by Raquel Romberg (2014) in which one of the players became actively possessed and the spirit rushed from the stage. Consider also the nineteenth-century American intersection of spiritualism and blackface where white men performed as southern blacks while spirit mediums were possessed by southern blacks and eventually also by blackface performers, who returned the favour by also performing as possessed spirit mediums ... (Polk 2014).

As noted, the kind of possession found in Mayotte and Madagascar illustrates the intersection of both dimensions of personhood. Spirits are themselves constituted as persons in the continuous sense, bearing responsibility for prior acts and utterances and subject to acknowledging them in much the way that Cavell suggests we must all mean what we say, although they also have more licence for departing from expectations in a way that highlights by contrast the obligations of ordinary persons. A spirit is often quite explicitly taught to make and honour a commitment to the well-being of the host.[39] The spirit is understood as a continuous person not only despite his discontinuous appearance in the body of a single medium but also with respect to his appearances in multiple mediums. Thus, when a medium grows ill or dies, clients are advised to seek the same spirit in other mediums, from whose mouths the spirit should take up with the clients where they had left off in the previous medium.

Yet, possession and dissociation mean that the host is not tethered to what the spirit says through her, and indeed part of the drama of possession (and a tacit means of legitimating it) is that host and spirit are of quite different voice and often do not agree or share all their knowledge with one another: for example, a spirit who at first does not have its host's best interests at heart, a spirit who warns a host to improve her behaviour or warns her that she is at risk from a third party, a spirit who comments in fluent French on his host's evident lack of facility in that language.

An important point is that although a host and her spirits exhibit discontinuous voices, any given host (spirit medium) is also constituted as a continuous person who must return to herself after episodes of overt possession and who is accountable more broadly for how she addresses and articulates the presence of spirits in her life. An ethically competent spirit medium is someone who can perform appropriately as a given spirit but also someone who can exercise tacit judgement as to when to enter and leave trance, by which spirits to become actively possessed, and how to manage clients

who come to her or her spirits for assistance (Lambek 1993). The medium is account-able for the articulation of the spirits in her everyday life; this is made evident with respect to maintaining the taboos associated with each spirit. A medium possessed of many spirits has to be continuously aware of such matters as the day of the week, the composition of her meals, and the identities of other mediums. Additionally, she should be available for performing as the spirit at public events or private consulta-tions. She need also ensure that her possession articulates with the needs and desires of other family members who may have claims on the same spirits (Lambek 2011).

Exemplary mediums, like Mme Doso or Kassim Tolondraza in Mahajanga (Lambek 2002), act as generous patrons or advocates, both extending their actions to the public and enabling the person of the spirit to permeate their everyday acts and outlook, and with respect not only to immediate social circumstances but also to the broader evalu-ation of an entire way of life, hence exemplifying what Cavell calls moral perfectionism (2005a: 120). They – and their spirits – become the vehicles of historical consciousness and the exemplars of historical conscience. Complementary to being responsive to the social world and the changing times, each medium has the ethical task of integrating her possession into the larger course of her life and ensuring that the breaks in per-sonhood are subsumed at some higher level of consistency.

In sum, both spirits and spirit mediums are constituted as ethical subjects. For spirit mediums their ethical subjectivity is enhanced by the ways they address discontinuity: for example, through the disagreements between the host and spirit. In effect, this discontinuity or mimetic dimension can be drawn upon to amplify, augment, or enrich the forensic dimension, seen here as the course of a whole life.

A forensic model must confront the fact that people are often undecided, ambiva-lent, or face difficult choices, do inconsistent things, or confront an ostensible absence of criteria, and that they can and do change, fantasize, experience regret, but also move on from a sense of responsibility, guilt, or grief, achieving complacency or equanimity. The courts serve to clarify and authorize forensic forms of personhood, yet even the law affords a statute of limitations for most crimes and a fixed term for most punishments. While the courts aim for conclusive judgements, the difference between first- and second-degree murder, for example, is often slippery. The forensic model has to address the limits of personal intention and agency. If we can be blamed for wrong actions, we can also understand contributing factors, such as a bad childhood or various financial or psychological circumstances. A commonly heard excuse is that 'I was not myself at the time.' To take an extreme example, in what sense is the normally loving father subject to a brain tumour responsible for the murder of his child (Laidlaw 2010: 152-3)? Are the juridical, normative, ethical, and psychological responses here equivalent?[40] As James Laidlaw (2010) notes, similar questions are raised in Evans-Pritchard's (1937) account of the Azande: is the potter able to blame witchcraft for his shoddy work? More saliently, is the witch to be blamed for his unconscious actions or is he to be exonerated for his earnest apologies? Indeed, *might we understand the witch on the lines of a discontinuous mimetic personnage*?

There are sometimes the senses that personal accountability does not satisfy justice, full accountability cannot be known, or that justice cannot be reached or served.[41] The question arises whether we can have a complete and consistent account of agency or speak decisively about it (Laidlaw 2010; Lambek 2003). Forensic accountability even-tually reaches aporias with respect to continuous (complete and consistent), autono-mous, and unitary personal identity.

The limits of the forensic are offset by the mimetic constructs which highlight temporal discontinuity and difference within the person, acknowledging that we are not always fully whole, single, consistent, or sealed off from those around us. Whether it provides distinct alternative persons to inhabit discontinuously or successively, mimesis recognizes that sometimes one is 'not oneself', 'not fully oneself', or not only oneself, and that we cannot ever fully or consistently know or be accountable for ourselves. The mimetic dimension is always potentially ironic, both insofar as it enables speaking from more than one voice (Burke 1945) and as it acknowledges that persons are partially opaque to themselves (Lambek 2003; Nehamas 1998). Mimesis affirms the heterogeneity of experience.

Earlier I described the articulation of performance and practice in ethical action. Now I can suggest that performance exemplifies the mimetic and practice the forensic mode, or at least that performance is to practice as mimetic personhood is to forensic. This last analogy reinforces the point that forensic and mimetic are not mutually exclusive; both are necessary components of lived, ethical personhood, two modes or dimensions of personhood, just as performance and practice are two modes or dimensions of action. As we offer a greeting, make a promise, or conduct a ritual, we are acting mimetically, reiterating in our words and bodies a formula, script, or scenario that has been uttered and enacted by others before us (cf. Rappaport 1999). But the practical provocations, entailments, and consequences of the performance are forensic; each successive performative act binds us to the criteria it establishes. Thus, the act of naming someone or answering to a name is mimetic while the consequences of carrying that name are forensic.

Conclusion

The distinction I have been drawing between continuity and discontinuity is less the mutually exclusive opposition that the terms might imply than two ways of looking at the same phenomenon. We are each continuous and discontinuous persons; continuity and discontinuity presuppose each other. Explicit vehicles of discontinuity are a kind of cultural artifice, but so too are those that deny it. In the end, what happens to experienced spirit mediums is that the host is partially present as her spirit speaks and the spirit is partially present in the life of the host. This is neither full dissociation nor full integration. It is an ironic, possibly playful, possibly resigned recognition of the continuous presence of multiple but not fully discontinuous persons. It is a way one can live with oneself.

If early accounts argued that mimetic personhood evades or challenges ethics, my observations are quite the reverse. This is because, first, mimetic vehicles also leave room for forensic notions of responsibility and may even highlight or double them (Lambek 2010b) and, second, there is a mimetic dimension embedded in, and necessary to, the forensic constitution of the person, in every instantiation of commitment and criteria. Whatever the cultural ideology or objectification of individuals or *personnages*, in practice the forensic and mimetic dimensions are interdependent.

To take the first point, while mimetic vehicles may offset the weight placed on the forensic, societies with *personnages* also draw on forensic accounts of responsibility. Spirits are distinguished as forensic persons even while discontinuously present and are held to account. In religion more generally we mimetically produce ostensibly forensic persons in the form of ancestors, saints, and deities; they exist insofar as they are acknowledged, prayed to, or worshipped and are deemed to acknowledge our address

and to be answerable to their commitments or else are understood as so powerful and autonomous as to be beyond ordinary morality.[42]

Regarding the second point, if the decisions to conduct performative acts and the consequences of having performed them are forensic, performative acts themselves are iterative, hence mimetic. Without discontinuous, iterated performative acts, persons and their subsequent acts and practice would have no instantiated criteria by which they could be described, acknowledged, and evaluated. Hence there could be no ethics.

NOTES

[1] My types are offered in the same spirit as Carrithers's (1985) reformulation of Mauss's distinction between *personne* and *moi* (see Laidlaw 2013 for a lucid review) and Bloch's (2012) attempt at a unified theory, albeit I ground them in action rather than cognition.

[2] Kibushy is the dialect of the Malagasy-speaking minority in Mayotte. This phrase is found elsewhere in Madagascar and Africa; in isiZulu it is *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.

[3] This has led one reader to complain that my account is rather 'bloodless' and conceals the role of persons as agents of history. In fact, my ideas draw from many encounters with individuals (e.g. Lambek 1993; 2002; 2003; 2007a; 2007b; 2011) that cannot be directly addressed here. I certainly do not discount the significance of motivation or self-fashioning for ethics. On ethical subjects, see Faubion (2011) and Mahmood (2005). For psychoanalytic accounts that could articulate with my account of persons, see Loewald (1980) on introjection or Mitchell (1988) on object relations theory more broadly.

[4] Locke put it as follows:

> 'Person' ... is a forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery. This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, – whereby it becomes concerned and accountable; owns and imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground and for the same reason as it does the present (Locke 1975 [1689]: II.27.xxvi).

For my purposes the Lockean term is preferable to Macpherson's 'possessive individual' since the emphasis is on notions of contract and responsibility rather than property: that is, of persons in relations to acts rather than objects. Thus philosopher William Uzgalis (2012) argues that

> the whole force of Locke's definition of person as a thinking intelligent being that can know itself as the same thinking thing in different times and places is designed to account for the fact that we are creatures who are capable of operating the machinery of the law. When contemplating an action we can think that in the future we will be the same being who will be punished or rewarded for the course of action which we choose. When being punished we can look back and see that we are the same being who committed the act for which we are being punished.

[5] To recognize this is not to solve the problem of how to sound the universal in the particular. It is far easier to commit the category error than to find an alternative mode of procedure, and it may be that such category errors are themselves inevitably a part of the human condition, marking limits to the capacity for reason or to the commensurability of the world.

[6] The ethical is, of course, only one transaction or formulation of personhood. Others might highlight reason, desire, existence, and so on.

[7] When spirits first come into presence, the initial tasks are to greet, identify, and socialize them. When they are called up for the first time in a given host, they must be coaxed into social engagement. A critical moment is reached when a spirit first announces its name in public in a given host and that relationship is

acknowledged by all who witness it, both other humans and fellow spirits. This establishes the basis for forensic accountability. A further theme of possession concerns the opacity of persons and ultimately the limits of acknowledgement (Lambek 1981).

[8] For lack of space I do not compare the range of perspectives now understood by 'ethics' in anthropology or philosophy.

[9] Additional criteria would apply to the quality of the presentation itself and whether a poor presentation would be attributed to an ethical lapse, like laziness or disregard for the organizers, or to intellectual inability.

[10] Compare Ricoeur (1992) on the temporality and ethics of the self.

[11] On baptism, see Pigott (2009). The two cases are not strictly parallel since not all American foreskins were removed performatively in the same manner or with similar ethical entailments.

[12] This section is highly schematic and somewhat idiosyncratic. I remain agnostic about the role of Christianity relative to other sources of these developments and do not enter discussion with such thinkers as Nietzsche, Mauss, Dumont, or Bernard Williams on the subject.

[13] My argument and diagnosis here have some similarities to MacIntyre's (1981) account of the confusion entailed by the decline or collapse of tradition, but I see this as a product more of the disappearance of ritual order than of the disintegration of a coherent system of ethical thought. Hylton White (pers. comm., 16 October 2002) notes that labour power under capitalism forms an additional 'mode of social integration that does not accord with performative bases of personhood'.

[14] Just one reason for its complexity has to do with the relation of language to class and social distinction.

[15] Such assumptions are found in varying loci, from formal truth-conditional semantics of representation through much academic writing. I am not positing 'mystification of the constative' as a mirror image to 'mystification of the performative'. Indeed, it partakes of the latter insofar as it ignores the prevalence of illocutionary force.

[16] Cavell (2005b) importantly distinguishes the performative and the passionate utterance; for outstanding interpretations see Das (2012; in press).

[17] Otherwise put, virtuous practice entails the disposition to follow the Aristotelian mean between being overly ready to take responsibility and not ready enough, or between being rigid, literal-minded, and overly consistent and being indecisive, inconsistent, unreliable, and too ready to rationalize such behaviour.

[18] As ethical disposition approximates character, it is surely no accident that tragedies are so frequently named for the persons of their protagonists.

[19] The ambivalence and double meaning of the word 'performance' in English is indicative of the fact. How do we distinguish an authentic mode of being oneself from *mere* performance? This is a question whose salience and resolution are relative to the particular semiotic ideology and mode of performance in question. Under a different semiotic ideology the more relevant question might be: how do I ensure a *felicitous* performance (cf. Keane 2007; Lambek 2007b)?

[20] I do not address here the question of being performatively condemned to lesser dignity, as in the case of slaves or forms of social hierarchy based on 'race', gender, sexuality, age, pathology, or relative competence.

[21] Rappaport, on whom much of this argument is built, distinguishes sharply between acceptance and behaviour (1999: 123-4).

[22] The set is not closed; new spirits emerge and older ones sometimes disappear. Nevertheless there are many spirits who remain active in the community, possessing a new medium just before or sometime after the death of a previous medium. Mediums possess more than one spirit and most spirits possess more than one medium. On the seriousness of iterative performance and the acquisition of conviction, see Lambek (2007b).

[23] 'For examples of positional succession, see Miller (1977) on the Imbangala of Angola, Richards (1951) on the Bemba, Wilson (1951) on the Nyakyusa ... Among the Nyakyusa "death does not break a family and its relationships, but simply alters the particular people between whom these relationships obtain ... nearly always someone is substituted in place of the one who has died" (Wilson 1951: 265)' (Barber 2007: 233 n. 4).

[24] One wonders about the relevance for evaluating political office-holders in contemporary African states. On names more generally, see vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006).

[25] My depiction draws especially from Nuttall's (1992) ethnography of Greenland.

[26] Yet another kind of mimetic doubling is characteristic of Amazonian animistic perspectivism as elucidated by Viveiros de Castro (1998), in which souls shift between human and nonhuman bodies in an alternation of perspectives as predator and prey and see themselves as human within each different body. The contrast between animism and naturalism parallels at the cosmological level the contrast between mimetic and forensic apprehensions of the person (cf. Costa & Fausto 2010).

[27] Malagasy share this culture; a spirit recently arrived in Madagascar is Burushly (Bruce Lee).

[28] On public, personal, and private, see Obeyesekere (1984). On the therapeutic aspect of recontextualizing an 'over-determined' self, see Boddy (1988).

[29] Like the Balinese calendar, mimetic personhood is multiple, punctual, and recurring rather than single, continuous, and linear.

[30] To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that mimetic and forensic persons map respectively or exclusively on contrasting institutional domains like kinship and law.

[31] For a different example, in Mayotte when their parents die, one of a sibling set may come to be called 'father' and another 'mother' by the other siblings. This is not positional succession; it is optional, context-specific, and occurs without relinquishing former attributes of personhood. It acknowledges an expansion of responsibility and care (Lambek 2011).

[32] I abstain from discussion of Girard's (1977) influential theory. Incisive anthropological accounts include Kramer (1993) and Taussig (1993).

[33] There is even a neurological level at which, 'as we interact, our brains synchronise, and thus understanding or watching another person's actions involves much the same neurological activity as doing them oneself (Rizzolatti et al. 1996). In other words, at levels which are normally below consciousness we are continually echoing each other' (Bloch 2012: 179).

[34] Significantly, Hannah Arendt (1998 [1958]) singles out the key acts of beginning, promising, and forgiving, temporally keyed, respectively, to present, future, and past.

[35] A comparable distinction to that of the forensic and mimetic is found in George Herbert Mead's (1934) dialectic of the 'I' and the me, in which the singular 'I' holistically transcends but also refracts back into the multiple 'me's' of social ascription, performance, and psychological identification ('me' the anthropologist, son, father, Canadian, etc.). See also Goffman (1959).

[36] Of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Fiona Ross astutely notes:

> Remembering and recounting harm is never simple or neutral. Alongside the value that may be derived from public processes, we would do well to remember that subject position is not uniform, and the social and cultural locations from which to speak may be fraught, saturated with discomforting customs that mould patterns of speech. They may rend testifiers vulnerable ... Legalistic interventions may result in a strangulation of voice (2003: 332).

Ross's work is original in following through with women the consequences of their testimonies and their responses to the public response of that testimony. She thus traces accounts of violence from the subjective to the public and back, offering a sober counterpoint to assumptions that narrating one's experience of violence is a straightforward matter and unequivocally beneficial. Ross points to contexts of reception, and local ideas of responsibility, reticence, and modes of narration, showing that testimony is never a purely individual matter but is social from its inception to its consequences.

[37] Further analogies may be made with diachronic and synchronic perspectives and, perhaps most interestingly, with correspondence and poetic conceptions of truth.

[38] Personas are not formally established in the way that spirit possession or positional succession are.

[39] A typical scenario at the onset of possession is that the spirit is accused of making the host ill. The spirit agrees to make her well and even to protect her once he has received assurances that he will receive public recognition in return. A contract is negotiated with the end of turning a relative stranger into a supportive member of the family. Thereafter the spirit is reminded that he is expected to conform to his word. Once the name of a given spirit has been publicly legitimated, his identity is firm and not subject to change, though he may stop visiting the host or be displaced by new arrivals.

[40] The question is drawn from Matthew Pettit's (2011) analysis of the concept of the will in treatments for alcoholism.

[41] For a captivating illustration with respect to a recent trial, see Malcolm (2011).

[42] Literature, too, is a prime site for the mimetic construction of and identification with forensically developed characters. Witness the popularity of the detective novel.

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La personne continue et discontinue: deux dimensions de la vie éthique

Résumé

Les premiers penseurs libéraux ont développé le concept d'une personne légale européenne moderne qui serait continue et éthiquement responsable, par opposition à la personne mimétique qu'ils percevaient comme discontinue donc irresponsable. L'auteur avance que le légal et le mimétique sont à envisager à la fois comme des idéologies de la personne et comme des dimensions de toute personne plutôt que comme des types distincts de personne. Il avance que la personne responsable de ses actes ne se limite pas à la personne intégralement continue et autonome de l'idéologie libérale. Il passe en revue d'autres conceptions de la personne dans différentes cultures et suggère que la dimension mimétique permet de compenser certaines déficiences du modèle exclusivement légal.

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