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Article abstract

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Graceful Exits: Spirit Possession as Personal Performance in Mayotte

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In what ways can spirit possession among the Malagasy speakers of Mayotte (Comoro Islands, East Africa) be said to be a creative performance? Situating trance episodes in the broader life context of the performer enables us to see that style is in large part a product of frame management. A good performer provides a clear and resonant articulation of her identities as character, medium, and person. Such an articulation is examined at two problematic moments—the closing of a possession ceremony and the closing of a career in old age. The focus on exits marks a departure from the epidemiological slant characteristic of much of the literature and provides a novel way of dealing with trance practice in a non-deterministic framework.

Dans quel sens peut-on dire que la possession chez les Malgachophones de Mayotte (Iles Comores, Afrique orientale) soit une performance créatrice? Le fait de situer les épisodes de transe dans le contexte élargi de la vie de l'exécutant nous permet de voir que le style est en grande partie le produit de son encadrement. Une bonne exécutante fournit une articulation claire et sonore de ses identités de caractère, de médium, et de personne. Une telle articulation est examinée dans le contexte de deux moments problématiques — à la clôture d'une cérémonie de possession et à la fin d'une carrière. L'accent qui est mis sur les issues des cérémonies constitue une démarcation par rapport au biais épidémiologique qui caractérise une grande partie de la littérature et offre un moyen nouveau de traiter de la pratique de la transe dans un cadre non-déterministe.

In an important paper Sherry Ortner (1984) charted a theoretical shift in anthropology from structure to practice. Although certain critics (Yengoyan, 1986; Stephens, nd) have worried that this will lead to the marginalization of the culture concept, and others (Bloch, nd; Gibson, nd) that it presages a fuzzy-headed American return to transactionalism, a focus on practice can enlarge rather than subvert the insights gained from a structuralist perspective. This paper attempts to move along Ortner's trajectory, from an essentially (though not entirely) structural model of spirit possession in Mayotte (Lambek, 1981) to a demonstration of the creative practice of trance performers. This practice emerges not from *a priori* notions of individual intentionality but rather from the articulation of personal concerns (desires, interests, projects) with the complexity of the structure itself.

The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among the Malagasy speakers of Mayotte, an island in the Comoro Archipelago of the Western Indian Ocean. Located approximately half way between the Swahili coast of East Africa and Madagascar, the islands share historical connections with both these culture areas. The inhabitants of the villages in which I worked are cultivators of dry rice, manioc and bananas as well as fishermen. They combine these

subsistence activities with cash crop production and varying amounts of wage labour. Mayotte came under French control in 1841, but since about the turn of the century, when the French sugar plantations failed, Mayotte has suffered neglect from the colonial power (Martin, 1983). In 1975, when I began my research, the villages in which I worked were not reached by roads and had no western schools. Only a single inhabitant, and part-time resident at that, was fluent in French. The political events of the last decade have led to marked changes in these respects. France has greatly increased her presence, and roads, schools, and various construction projects have been established. As the state has penetrated deeply into village life, so the villagers have become much more involved in the cash economy.¹

Although the people of Mayotte are observant Muslims, and despite the rapid changes in the socioeconomic sphere, spirit possession has been, and so far continues to remain, a significant aspect of social life. Approximately one third of women and ten percent of men are possessed by spirits, meaning that they are said to have a personal relationship with a spirit which at times enters their body and speaks through them while they themselves are in trance. The individual spirits can be identified by species, social type, and individual name, and they are treated, as they claim to be, as separate persons distinct from the hosts (mediums). Not all people who have ever entered trance do so frequently, but this paper considers those who enter trance on a regular basis. Spirit possession occurs at public ceremonies held on behalf of individuals developing and legitimating their relationship with a first or subsequent spirit, at various therapeutic consultations where either the healer or client may enter trance, and in domestic settings. The arrival of spirits may be a sign of serious business but it is usually accompanied by a good deal of humour as well.

As Michel Leiris (1980) has so admirably demonstrated for the Ethiopian *zar* of Gondar, spirit possession has a strong theatrical dimension which is evident not only in public displays, but in the manner in which episodes of trance interpenetrate everyday life. Rather than attempt to characterize this theatrically in overall terms, let alone to present an argument about the evolutionary precursors of modern theatre, this paper has the more modest aim to discuss one dimension of personal style in trance performances of Mayotte from the period of 1975-85. In the first section of the paper I elaborate a notion of performance appropriate to describe spirit possession in Mayotte and I demonstrate that style is partly a matter of frame management, that is, the manner in

which specific performance as a spirit or working medium are set off from—and linked to—other aspects of the performer's identity². I argue that the play with frames (no less than what is done within them, a subject not discussed here) forms a basis for the aesthetic skill of the performer.

The analysis does not cover all aspects of framing but focuses on a set of critical transitions or moments, namely exits. In the second section of the paper, by examining episodes of trance performance concerned with such closures, I illustrate both good and bad style³. The focus on closures rather than origins or onsets is useful in moving the discussion of trance practice away from overly deterministic etiological models. At the same time it keeps the interest on boundaries and movement, demonstrating how spirit possession constitutes (among other things) a supple and dynamic medium for a discourse on personhood. Persons articulate themselves through possession even as their creative performances as spirits reproduce the structure which enables the performance⁴.

Characterizations and Careers

In order to understand the practice of spirit mediums in Mayotte, a useful strategy is to situate it with regard to varieties of performance with which Westerners are more familiar. Hence, I begin with a brief discussion of performance in general and then turn to a contrast between what it is that spirit mediums in Mayotte and theatrical or screen actors in the West are doing when each of them "performs".

"Performance" is an ambiguous word in English social science. In ordinary usage it frequently refers to actions carried out on a stage, clearly framed from everyday life, with the identity of the actor distinguished also from that of the character she plays. I will refer to this kind of performance, Olivier as Hamlet, as characterization. However, through a well-established metaphor, we also use performance with reference to social role. Hence we can speak of Olivier's performance as an actor, and can do so at a level quite independent of his performance, in the first sense, as any given character. Either his activities conform to the role of actor or they do not. I will speak of performance in this second sense as career. Career performance is not clearly framed from other activities in the way that characterization may be.

Performance in both these senses is more than simply a fancy word for behaviour. What underlies the meaning of performance is a concern for the ar-

tication of the thing performed with the person performing it. The nature of performance implies a relationship between subject and action (the Oxford Dictionary speaks of "execution"), in other words that the performance refers back to the larger person or self who is performing. And thus we can speak about performance in a third, broadest, sense as the action of the entire person, Olivier's performance as a man. I speak of performance in this sense as personhood.

Performance is, perhaps, rule-governed. But equally significant is the fact that it refers back to a conscious subject, and a conscious subject is someone who can manipulate and even break the rules. Performance, in all three senses, thus implies creativity, an actor acting upon, or within the rules to enlarge on something past, to create something new.

These clarifications are necessary in order to understand the ethnographic case at hand. To delineate the ways in which actors execute characterizations (or songs, dances, etc.) in explicit, well-framed performance spaces would be to misconstrue the performance of spirit possession as I observed it in Mayotte. Performance in possession lies somewhere in between performance in the public "stage" sense and performance in the sense of acting out one's roles in ordinary life. To understand spirit possession is to articulate an individual's performance at three levels: as a spirit (characterization), as a medium (career), and as a full social person. Hence the first part of this paper is less a description and analysis of performance and style than a thinking out of what this would mean in the Mayotte context. To be perhaps overly abstract about it, in order to contextualize performance codes, we need to think about the meta-codes, the sets of rules about performing performances, or, as Bourdieu (1977:20) puts it, "the schemes immanent in practice".

I am speaking only about spirit possession here and what follows may have as much to do with the direction in which trance as a generalized human activity points as it does with any deep tendencies in Mayotte culture as a whole which precede the particular local form trance takes. There are other explicit performance genres in Mayotte, such as Sufic-inspired music and dance (Lambek, in press b), which would have to be situated somewhat differently. What distinguishes spirit possession as a kind of performance can perhaps best be summarized by this quote from Alton Becker:

trance speaking can be defined as communication in which one of the variables of the speech act (I am speaking to you about x at time y in place z with content a) is denied, most fre-

quently the variable I is paradoxically both speaking and not speaking, or speaking involuntarily or nonintentionally. Trance is a kind of incongruence between statement and intent... (1979:232-3).

For performance theory, it is hard to link up execution, in the Oxford Dictionary sense, with the non-intentional aspect of trance. The answer, perhaps, is to examine how the separation of host and spirit is established, how "nonintentionality" itself is executed.

In the Mayotte case, during trance the person (the host) is replaced by a spirit, who has a coherent social identity of its own. There are several distinct "species" of spirits (two common ones), some division of social types within each, and individual, named members of each type. These types tend to be stock characters, defined by the intersection of such obvious features as gender and age. The relationship between a host and the spirit who rises in her last beyond any given period of trance and may continue over the course of a lifetime. The relationship has continuity in the sense that each appearance of the spirit takes into account what happened during previous appearances. Two or more hosts can have a relationship with the same spirit but they cannot perform as the spirit simultaneously. Conversely, a host can have relationships with several different spirits. However, according to Mayotte theory, one and only one person, either the host or a particular spirit, is present or speaking at one time, although in practice, in the context of actual performance, there may be a certain ambiguity.

In Mayotte spirit possession the relationships between the performer and her performance in each of the first two senses discussed above, as characterization and as career, are different from those found in theatrical performance in our own society. Hence the relationship between an actor's individual characterization and her overall career is also different in the two cases. When a Mayotte person is in trance and is possessed by a spirit, her performance as the spirit is neither deliberate artifice (characterization) nor the unmediated enactment of mediumship (career), but a combination of both in a particular way. She performs as the spirit, acting out a character who is not herself, by means of a relatively restricted code of possibilities. But this performance is never without implicit reference to who she is as a medium and as herself. This is different from Western-style theatre, any given performance of which could be analyzed in terms of actors' characterizations but without specific reference to or implications for their persons or broader careers.

Meryl Streep may disguise herself as Isak Dinesen, down to the very intonations of a Danish speaker's English, and if she is successful we will forget she is acting; we will see Dinesen and not Streep⁶. The paradox is that the less we see Streep, the more we are cognizant of her artistry. But whatever our evaluation of Streep's performance, there is no intrinsic relationship established between this characterization and her prior or subsequent ones or between any of them and her career or her self. Each characterization is finite. Each successive performance forms a component of her career as an actress, but the career is more than the sum of her characterizations.

The spirit medium (or host, as I call her) is both absent from and present in her performances in a different way. Physically, she is never concealed. Her person is absent while she is in trance, but her body is very much present; the intention of costume change is to indicate the presence and status of the spirit, never to disguise the identity and status of the host. The incongruity of the presence of the host's body constantly reminds the spectator of the host's person. What the spirit does to the body is done, ultimately, to the person. More, and this is perhaps the most critical point, the absence of the person is always marked, so that everyone is reminded that it is not the host performing but someone else. Every message offered by the spirit carries a meta-message, if only through negotiation, about the host. (As a parenthesis here we may note that "style" is as much a matter of manipulating the meta-messages as the messages.) Although the host is not considered responsible for her performances in the way the actress is, and hence it is not her artistic skill which is evaluated and continuously reevaluated, nevertheless, her performances as characters have more profound implications for her identity. The fact of her performances (as opposed to her skill at them) is the very substance of her career, not a series of roles she has taken on, excelled at, and gone beyond, so many notches in her belt, but maintaining the capacity of speaking to each other, alive with implications for her future and her past.

Ultimately, for the duration of the stage performances of the great European actors and actresses, characters and performers blend together in our minds as captivated spectators, while in reality and outside the performance frame they are quite separate. Characterizations are successive; each should be dropped as the next is taken up. In watching Streep as Dinesen we are critical of her performance if it reminds us of another of her characterizations; the Polish emigrée, Sophie⁷ should not intrude

on the Danish baroness. In spirit possession quite the opposite is true. It is the actors (the hosts) who are first of all captivated. If they are not judged for the effectiveness of their performances it is because their performances have become part of them. What they are engaged in performing is not scripts of screenplays, but their very lives. Reality is to be evaluated not for its effectiveness but for its effects. A host carries around within her, ever-threatening to reemerge, and sometimes doing so, each character she has ever enacted. For the spectators, a good performance (it would be meaningless to talk about a "great" one) is one in which the identities of host and spirit (and previous spirits she has had before) are each kept in play, if only implicitly, in lively contrast to one another. The identity of the actor, distinct from that of the character, is always salient. Yet here, in reality, they are not so separate. The artifice lies in their separation, in keeping them somehow both in play, not, as in the theatre, in their identity.⁸

This means that an evaluation of a spirit medium's performance should be conducted not at the level of a single characterization, on a single occasion, but at the level of her career, whether in its entirety or a certain span of it. What is critical is how the various discrete performances as spirits are integrated into larger performances, her career as a medium, her creation of herself as herself. The medium is her spirits in a sense that the actress is not her characters. At the end of her performance the actress lifts off the mask of the character and returns to her role as actress and her identity as person, ready, theoretically, to take on any other character, or any other career. Her skill and identity as an actress, her role, is what legitimates her performances as characters. (If she is not an actress her performance has no context, hence no meaning.) In spirit possession, again the emphasis is reversed. It is her performances as spirits which legitimate her role as medium. She becomes a medium not simply by acquiring the correct performance skills (though she may need these as well), but by being one. Her performances alter her identity by becoming a part of it; she cannot take on *any* character, only those characters who have forced themselves upon her and who now have a share in her identity as she does in theirs.

Perhaps all this is clearer if we examine it from the point of view of the framing devices which serve to establish discrete performance spaces. In the theatre the actor brackets herself from her characterization in quite a deliberate, conscious way⁹. She is assisted in this by a variety of non-subjective framing

devices which, in fact, determine when the bracketing is to take place and to which it is secondary. The performance is executed in a clearly demarcated place—on a stage, in a theater—for the span of a clearly demarcated time—curtain to curtain call. (Modern theatre plays with the framing expectations of the spectators but not, generally, of the actors.) What happens within that frame has little consequence for the actor's performances of various kinds outside of it. On the other hand, the actor's performance in her career as an actor, as distinguished from her performances in the other roles, mother, wife, etc. which make up her total social persona, are not so clearly demarcated from other another. For example, professional obligations may compete with family ones for her attention.

In spirit possession the framing of characterizations occurs through a break in consciousness, the appearance of an "altered" state. This is a fairly opaque screen, through which the performer herself generally cannot see. Yet the responsibility for framing rests more heavily with the trance performer than it does with the theatrical actor; the framing is created through external manifestations of the performer's subjectivity. The performer may be assisted by objective framing devices: appropriate occasions for trance, the raising of a ritual awning, the closing of a door in a house in which a curing ritual is to be held, invocation of the spirit, as well as various sensual stimuli—incense, drumming, very hot or very cold pungent medicines, etc. But these devices are all secondary, neither sufficient nor even necessary; trance can take place in their absence and it may not occur when it is most invited. Also, the external framing devices are more critical for the onset of trance than for its termination or for the switches between one spirit character and another. In sum, staging in many instances is not established independently of performance; whenever a person enters trance she is "on stage." Trance is not limited to public arenas and it may spread beyond the time allotted. (I have demonstrated elsewhere [1980] how some of the most interesting trance performances are those which take place in relative privacy.)

A critical aspect of trance performance is thus the management of the framing process; the construction, crossing, and dismantling of frames. What spirits say and do and how they say and do those things are well constrained by cultural codes and rules (although what transpires within the frame is certainly influenced by matters outside of it.) But where and when spirits say what they say and do what they do are not so certain. The style of a given performer, what distinguishes her from other per-

formers and what has relevance for her performance as medium rather than just her characterization of the spirit, comes in good part from her manipulation of the frames of performance (including here also the appropriateness of the characterization she takes on.) These dimensions, as compared to the actual characterizations of the spirits (which may of course also be better or less well handled), while subject to considerable constraint, are more personal and idiosyncratic; they do not belong to an explicit repertory of styles, and cannot be named. A good style, playing on presence and absence, maintains the separation of host and spirit; a bad style may weaken this separation (i.e., suggest the identity of host and spirit) and hence threaten the very grounds of performance itself.

Closures and Disclosures

In examining framing more closely we can distinguish between entrances and exits. For the remainder of the paper I intend to focus upon exits. There are several reasons for this. First, as I indicated above, there are fewer external mechanisms to support the performer's exits, hence we are able to get a more direct view of her personal contribution. Second, the study of entrances has a long history, often phrased in etiological, pseudo-scientific terms as "explanations" for why trance occurs (Lambek, in press a). Exits have not, to my knowledge, received much attention and have not played a role in the construction of theory about trance. Yet in life in general, the ability to exit, to "know when to quit," as the saying goes, requires a good deal more intentional control than entrances, and this is clearly evident with regard to trance. In the Mayotte case this is quite explicit: entrances are often awkward, slow or violent, tedious or dramatic; exits can be dramatic but they are not expected to be tedious. A good exit is graceful, that is, does not draw undue attention to itself. A good exit legitimates what has gone before. We will examine exits at two levels, first the termination of an individual trance event and second, the gradual ending of a trance career. In the second case we will see how the various levels of performance—as spirit, as medium, as person—more fully resonate with one another toward the end of a career.

Let us begin by contrasting good and bad stage exits. The example I have selected of a good exit comes not from my own data from Mayotte but is reported somewhat unwittingly by Rusillon concerning the closely related Sakalava of Madagascar during the colonial period (Rusillon, 1912:90-91, also

described in Lambek, 1981:198, n13). Rusillon describes how he entered a house where a *trumba* spirit possession ceremony was in progress¹⁰. There was a single chair; occupied by someone possessed by a deceased Sakalava king. As is customary, everyone else sat on the floor. When Rusillon imperiously demanded the chair for himself, the spirit abruptly left the body of the host. The lowly villager who remained readily gave precedence to the white missionary. When Rusillon's demand threatened the authority and identity of the royal character, the performer responded by instantly breaking the frame.

The next case highlights a poor exit. In 1985 Satuvy was a woman in her fifties. Married to a man some thirty years her junior and the latest of a long series of husbands she was known for her somewhat disreputable behaviour. The scene is late morning at the dance party and ceremony that began the evening before for someone else's *trumba* spirit (and to which all spirits are invited.) All the necessary rituals have been performed and most of the spirits and spectators have gone home. Satuvy remains in trance, dancing wildly and drinking hard. Her *trumba* spirit, a male of the youthful carouser type named "Sailor Boy", is very drunk. He has no intentions of going home, he says repeatedly, and announces with satisfaction that he plans to stay for the rest of the day. "Don't leave", says Lord X the senior (male) *trumba* spirit present in Amina, the (female) curer managing the event, "the refreshments aren't finished yet". Lord X portions out another round of drinks. Suddenly Sailor Boy falls over backwards. Another senior woman in trance quickly removes the bottle that Sailor Boy has concealed in Satuvy's blouse. Lord X then hits the four corner posts and the centre post which hold up the awning which marks the performance space with his baton. The performers disband.

When centre stage is cleared and everyone else has gone home to eat the beef cooked from the sacrificial animal, it is customary for those few people who have child as well as adult spirits to be possessed by the child spirits and retire to a house somewhere to share a meal. Of all the spirits, only the child *trumbas* actually eat meat and rice, and they do so gluttonously. Everyone else with a spirit who has appeared receives a portion of the meat too, but they eat out of trance. The child spirits unwind from the previous night's exertions, laughing and joking together until one by one each goes home and quietly leaves trance. At home, they join the other members of the household and dig into a second meal, this time as humans.

On this occasion the four little *trumbas*, each with the character of a rather precocious three-to-five year old girl, but portrayed by a middle-aged matron, invite Jackie Solway and I to eat with them. No sooner have we sat down to eat than Satuvy arrives, still in trance. One of the child *trumbas* begs Sailor Boy to leave so that Satuvy might have a chance to eat, but Sailor Boy only wants a place to lie down. They give the spirit a bed in the back room, carefully choosing one without clean sheets to be soiled by Satuvy's sweat, dust, and alcohol-stained clothing. Before going to sleep, Sailor Boy asks for a cigarette, but the child spirits whisper to me to say that there are none left. Sailor Boy has a drink of water instead and a minute later falls fast asleep. The child spirits eat, sing, chat, and fight playfully over their food as is their wont, giggling over the sleeping figure of Satuvy. A couple of young men visit, one to try and exchange candy for some of their meat, another, the son-in-law of the man for whom the night-long ceremony has been held, to give them each a tin of Fanta because he is content things have gone so smoothly. The child spirits thank him, wish him well, say good-bye to each other and part. In mid-afternoon Satuvy wakes and, finding she can't get off the bed until her spirit rises, enters trance again. Sailor Boy reappears and trots off to Satuvy's house in the next hamlet.

This episode, edited from my field notes, illustrates both appropriate and inappropriate exits. Major *trumba* ceremonies often wind down gradually, the public ceremony of the adult spirits giving way to the domestic antics of the child ones. The child spirits contextualize what has gone before and, as I have argued elsewhere (1981:Ch. 12), provide a kind of indigenous interpretation or gloss on it. They also form a transition from one frame to the next. The public ceremony is closed when the curer-manager (a job shared by spirit and host) knocks on the posts which delimit the performance space. This counteracts the medicine which she placed on the spot in secret the evening before and which was designed to protect the space and render the performance smooth, effective, and energetic. In other words, knocking on the posts is supposed to break the performance; as a ritual performative it brings the disintegration into effect. While there is no specific time at which a *trumba* ceremony should end, nowadays most of the successful ones go on about as long as this one did. (In the past, it is said, they usually lasted much longer, even several days at a stretch.) We can see what prompted the manager to break up the performance when she did. Most of the performers had already departed; there was no one left to

dance or share the alcohol with Satuvy, who was very drunk and had just threatened to stay all day. (One of the questions I forgot to ask: what happened to the left-over alcohol)?

While it is appropriate for spirits to drink heavily, their hosts, as good Muslims, should not touch a drop. The framing of spirit drinking is arranged by convention: hosts do not feel the after-effects of their spirits' intemperance. Moreover, the *trumba* drink European wine, beer and hard liquor, whereas humans in Mayotte (in the late Seventies, in a moderately isolated village) drink only local palm wine. A majority of men drink for a few years in their teens but most of them give it up as they grow older. Drinking on the part of adult men is shameful; on the part of women, even more so. I had heard that some women drank, but until that morning no individual names had been mentioned and I have yet to observe a village woman drink (i.e., out of trance).

Carouser spirits are supposed to be wild and all spirits have their childish and obstinate moments. Audiences of possession expect the unexpected; incongruity is a central aspect of spirit performance. But Satuvy's performance was extreme enough—her spirit was *too* drunk—to render it virtually transparent. In a sense, she was losing the distinction of levels; the meta-message threatened to become the message. This evaluation is also evident in the way in which the manager handled the situation. On the one hand, the senior spirit attempted to avoid confrontation by telling Sailor Boy to keep drinking as long as he liked; this is fine for spirits. On the other hand, the spirit took the first opportunity to bring things to a close in order to separate Sailor Boy from Satuvy.

Satuvy's performance was ungraceful and bordered on the disgraceful. People discussed the performance with reference to Satuvy herself, an interpretive strategy which is not strictly legitimate. She was a palm wine drinker of long standing, I learned, and at a spirit possession ceremony the effect of the alcohol was thereby enhanced. Once, at a ceremony in a distant village, she had even lost control of her bladder, much to her fellow villagers' shame. These comments reflect the inadequacy of Satuvy's performance. Her style (or lack of it), and her inability to manipulate frames correctly, on this occasion to make a proper exit, break down the essential separation between the character (i.e., the spirit) and the person. Thus, Satuvy's performance as palm wine drinker is seen to reflect on that of the spirit and vice versa; although Satuvy was in trance, and hence in theory absent, in some sense it was she who urinated and therefore brought shame. The relatively poor quality of Satuvy's performance is seen,

too, from the perspective of her career. Unlike most hosts of her age, she performs only as a carouser spirit and not also as a more dignified elder. Her social immaturity is all too evident in her trance performances as in what we would call her "private life."¹¹

A performance like Satuvy's speaks to a concern everyone has, namely the confusion of presence and absence. As I indicated earlier, trance performance, in distinguishing the person of the spirit from the body of the host, always implies the person of the host as well. This is nicely shown in the wry comment of Amina, the manager of the ceremony described above, who said, "When a performance goes well, Lord X [her spirit] is praised; but when it goes badly I am the one who is blamed". Strictly speaking this is not true; the identities of host and spirit are kept distinct and it should always be clear which of the two is present at any given moment. But since it is the separation between them which is marked, both identities are always kept in play.

The issue in Mayotte is less whether the designs of the hosts will be read into the actions of the spirit as the reverse, the reflection of the spirit's performance upon the host. What concerns people is not inadvertent self-revelation, having one's own desires identified with those of the spirit, but having the motivations and behaviour of the spirit identified with oneself (cf Crapanzano, 1977). This is evident as well in the next story, which concerns a very competent performer.

The manipulation of the frame mediates between the performance as the character and the performance of the career. At any given moment it maintains their separation. Yet it reflects upon both the medium and the spirit. And the longer the relationship between a given host and spirit endures and the longer the style remains consistent, the more closely identified host and spirit become, both subjectively, toward a single coherent self for the host herself, and objectively, from the point of view of the public. As we saw briefly in the case above, the role of curer/manager is carried out jointly by a host and her spirit. The paradox is that the growth of a medium's reputation as a curer tends to undercut her performances as a spirit or spirits that constitute it.

Matters of style and attributes of performance which were once identified with the spirit become more closely identified with the host and thus may come to be evaluated differently. Simply put, what is appropriate behaviour for a spirit may not be appropriate for an aging, experienced, and respected host. The host's career as a medium, as opposed to any given performance as a spirit, becomes the central

object of consideration. This may present a dilemma for the host, who, on the one hand, would like to conform to convention and the opinion of others and so retire, but who, on the other hand, gets a good deal of satisfaction from her characterizations and her curing work and who, despite her skill at frame management, has begun herself to identify with her spirit. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in negotiating a change in the manner of the host's performances or even a termination of her career as a medium, her spirit, too must be consulted. A host may accede to public opinion whereas her spirit may not. On the other hand, perhaps after protracted negotiation, the spirit may be willing to leave, possibly by shifting itself onto a junior kinswoman of the former host. Ultimately, then, performance as a spirit is subordinated to performance as a medium, and performance as a medium speaks to, and is but a component of, performance as a person.

If Satuvy had difficulty leaving the stage, Dady ('Grandmother') Accua had difficulty terminating her career. While I am not certain of her age, in 1985 Dady Accua was a great grandmother many times over and had at least one great great grandchild. She was among the very oldest people in the village. Her husband, long since deceased, had maintained a strong career as a spirit medium and had performed in the character of the leader of the *patros* spirits.¹² Dady Accua had assisted him and since his death had continued to practice, managing numerous cures and participating in others. In fact, she was well known not to let a single *patros* ceremony go by without her presence. Inevitably, she would enter trance and spend at least part of the night dancing. Her own main spirit was a male *patros* elder.

In 1985 Dady Accua's social relationships were still strongly influenced by her interest in possession. In the first place, she had ties with the numerous mediums who were possessed by the same spirit that had possessed her late husband. Many of these mediums were his (and her) own descendents, but her closest bond was with a medium who was both the grandson of her sister and the husband of one of her grand-daughters. She consulted with him frequently and often engaged his spirit in conversation—a spirit with whom she had had collaborative and friendly relations throughout her married life. Secondly, and this speaks more directly to her own trance performances, she had ties to the other mediums who were possessed by her own spirit. At a possession ceremony she and they would alternate periods of trance, the character of the spirit shifting from one to the other with incredible speed and precision.

Her ability to calibrate her performance with the performances of other mediums indicates that she had no problem with framing trance episodes. However, she did show great reluctance at bringing her career to a close. People felt that a woman her age should not be traipsing around from ceremony to ceremony and, in particular, ought to refrain from dancing. In part, the dancing was blamed on her spirit's inconsiderate use of her old body, but at the same time it was recognized that the very same spirit had ceased dancing in the body of a male medium some twenty years her junior at the request of the man's grown children. There was a strong implication that the continued activity of the spirit was a matter of Dady Accua's own choosing.

Dady Accua's resistance to quitting was merely a rather extreme case of a fairly common phenomenon. I don't know what the situation was like in the past, but in the early 1980's young people often found their aging parents' public trance performances embarrassing. I heard young adult women entreat their parents' spirits to enter their own bodies instead of their parents if they insisted on dancing. Younger women with spirits also said it was embarrassing for their mothers to be found on the same dance ground as they. In other words, younger adults felt it was incorrect to perform simultaneously with their parents. Once the characterizations had passed to the younger generation, the elders ought to have sat back and watched.

A few scenes from the possession ceremony held in 1985 on behalf of a woman whose husband and oldest daughter each shared the same spirit as Dady Accua will provide a sense of how what we might call the "drama of closure" is carried out. One should note the consistent good humour in what follows. In part, this is because Dady Accua is not among her own kin. In fact, one thing that is noteworthy about her case and to which the others draw attention is that none of her own descendents have yet inherited her spirit. This is in sharp contrast both to her husband's spirit and to the movement of her own spirit between the husband and daughter she is interacting with here. Why this should be so is somewhat puzzling, to the performers as well as to me (Lambek, in press c); one possible answer is that although a spirit may be engaged in relationships with members of more than one generation, Dady Accua's strong attachment to her spirit has discouraged any of her descendants from attempting to claim a share.

At the beginning of the ceremony Tumbu, the middle-aged male, is in trance with the spirit that he, his daughter Nuriaty, and Dady Accua share. He

calls for Dady Accua, referring to and addressing her by her first name, something only done to one's juniors. Then, in a standard greeting fashion, he asks her how her spouse is. "I haven't one" she replies. "You haven't?" says the spirit, "He's right here!" (meaning himself). The spirit (in Tumbu) coaxes Dady Accua to dance later but she replies firmly that Nuriaty will be the one to do that. "She's the one we're raising" agrees the spirit. A few minutes later the spirit tells Dady Accua that he will be rising in someone in her family (*mraba*) as well, so as to continue there when she is gone; but he will only make the shift to her grandchildren after she is dead. She listens intently.

During the night, Tumbu and I observe Dady Accua who is now the one possessed by the spirit. Tumbu remarks that she used to be an excellent dancer but that the children just laugh at her now. At another moment, Nuriaty is possessed and Dady Accua, out of trance, dances alongside the spirit. Later, Dady Accua is in trance again and one of her grand-daughters, a young woman who has a spirit of her own, dances with her and playfully but ineffectively tries to get the spirit to jump back into Nuriaty. Dady Accua is in trance on and off during the night; she participates in the dancing and often leads one of the spirit songs. In the morning, when the terms of the cure are being negotiated with the spirit in Tumbu's wife, Dady Accua, also in trance, takes an active part.

Her spirit then has a long conversation with Tumbu. The spirit announces that it plans to stay with Dady Accua until her death but that it will agree never to dance in her again. However, it sets a condition: a final festival for it must be held at which a large male goat is to be slaughtered and quantities of cake and perfume consumed. A grand-daughter is called in and told to pass this message on to Dady Accua's sister's grandson (mentioned above), currently the leading medium of her family and someone who is likely to be sympathetic. However, it is clear to Tumbu and most of those present that the condition will never be met. The spirit then prepares its departure for "home" and, when I ask for a description of the place, tells me it will visit me in my sleep that night to take me there.

Much of this discourse (verbal and physical) is about exiting with grace: how to avoid giving in to one's children's claims that one is older than one feels, and yet to come to terms with old age, infirmity, and approaching death.¹³ Performance as a spirit mediates these things. At one point during the night while Dady Accua was in trance someone came up and said that the spirit itself was very old.

The spirit responded sharply that while Dady Accua might be old, *he* certainly wasn't! Through possession, Dady Accua can accept her old age even while enjoying periodic relief from it.

Yet spirit performance itself is one of the central activities to come increasingly under challenge and can become, in turn, a focus of resistance. In demanding an expensive ceremony the spirit is no longer really attempting to distinguish its needs from those of the old woman but is asserting her self worth. If her family cares as much about her health as they claim to, let them demonstrate it in a feast. Dady Accua's family is very poor and she knows full well the demand is unreasonable, but so, runs the implicit argument, is the suggestion she give up dancing. The identification between spirit and host is virtually complete. This is no longer threatening for Dady Accua, while for her children it has become more important than ever to distinguish who is who.

In sum: at the onset of possession histories the interests of the spirits and their hosts are represented by everyone as opposed. This opposition is not simply the deceptive manoeuvre of a political game but the device that helps constitute the structural conditions of performance, establishing in concrete terms the distinction between spirit and host, character and performer. Over the course of a successful career these interests begin to fuse. The merging of identities may be ego-strengthening for the performers but others perceive it with some ambivalence. In distinction to the Merina case (which may be taken here to represent an underlying Malagasy cultural base) where elders grow into ancestorhood through their possession (Bloch, 1986), for Islam spirits are essentially polluting, manifestations of earthly desires rather than of transcendental reality. As death approaches it becomes important to purify oneself; the only relevant status is that of Believer.

In trance performance personal style is constituted in the dialectic of self-concealment and self-revelation. Over a career this dialectic is increasingly mediated. As the performer and character become more closely identified, so the dissonance with the ideal model of the person increases in trance performance. As the status or reputation of the performer grows, so does the discordance of disclosure. Hence the external pressure for closure.

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NOTES

1. More general information on Mayotte can be found in Breslar, nd and Lambek, 1981.

2. the concept of frame derives from Bateson (1972) and has been extensively utilized by Goffman (1974). A frame is the set of cultural principles which define and organize a context, event, or situation, as well as the actors' subjective involvement in it (Goffman, 1974:10-11). As in Bateson's discussion of play, a frame of the kind discussed here is "involved in the evaluation of the messages which it contains" (Bateson, 1972:188).

3. Because the second part of the paper is developed through the analysis of concrete case materials, readers may wish to begin here.

4. The literature on trance and spirit possession is vast and this is not the place to review it. My own understanding of the subject has profited from such authors as Boddy (1988), Crapanzano (1977, 1980), Firth (1967), Kapferer (1983), Lewis (1971), Métraux (1955), Obeyesekere (1981), and Zemplani (1977) among others. The focus on practice is continued in a general discussion of spirit possession (Lambek, in press a) and in an analysis of succession to mediumship (Lambek, in press c).

5. The fullest description of the types can be found in Lambek, 1981. While necessary for a complete discussion of performance, such a description is irrelevant for the specific argument here, which has to do with the relationship between character and performer irrespective of which character is being portrayed.

6. The reference is to the film "Out of Africa"; Streep was chosen at random to illustrate the general argument.

7. The reference is to the film "Sophie's Choice."

8. The ideas presented in this paragraph owe their origins to the discussion of the contrast between Aristotelian and Javanese plot structures in Becker, 1979.

9. Of course, various schools of acting approach this in different ways.

10. *Trumba* (*tromba* in Malagasy orthography) is a common word for a possessing spirit in Madagascar. Among the Sakalava of northwestern Madagascar the *trumbas* are often deceased monarchs. The *trumbas* in Mayotte include not only the Sakalava monarchs but commoners and slaves as well.

11. Satuvy has been married more than ten times and has been known to contravene the rules of spouse selection; at the time of the event described above she was married to a man about thirty years her junior, not quite "young enough to be her daughter's grandson" as people said.

12. The *patros* spirits, local variant of an Afro-Islamic form, are said to be creatures who inhabit underwater villages along the margins of Mayotte. Unlike the *trumbas*, they are not deceased humans. *Patros* ceremonies are held independently of *trumba* ones, yet despite their different historical origins they are functionally virtually equivalent in Mayotte and they are constituted by symbolic inversion of one another (thus *trumbas* use cold medicine, *patros* hot, etc.).

13. Alternative perspectives on aging in Mayotte can be found in Lambek, 1985.

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