On personhood in public places

— John Frow

Respondent:
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I

This is the first public lecture given under the auspices of the Research Unit in Public Cultures, and I want to use the occasion to open up a set of questions around the way people figure in the public sphere, both historically and in the present. In the terms in which I want to frame it, this breaks down into two interrelated questions. The first has to do with the notion of the public sphere, its historically differential relation to the private sphere, and the historical constitution of that distinction in modernity. The second question has to do, more fundamentally, with the mode of being of persons: of individuals understood in terms of a status which is distinct from that of private selfhood, but perhaps encompasses it.

I'm going to reverse the order of these questions, and begin with Marcel Mauss's classic analysis of the Latin concept of *persona*, from which the modern category of the person develops.[1] It is in Rome, Mauss argues, that the idea of the human person as 'a complete entity, independent of all others save God' (p. 13) originates. It does so because the Latin term *persona* 'is more than an organisational fact, more than a name or a right to assume a role and a ritual mask' (ibid.): it is a fundamental legal category in a system which recognises only three entities, *person*, *things*, and *actions*.

The word *persona* is probably of Etruscan origin and is perhaps a borrowing from the Greek *prosōpon*, 'death mask' — Mauss notes that 'the Etruscans had a "mask" civilisation' (p. 15). But this primitive meaning then begins to acquire new layers. In the first place, there are traces among the Latins of 'institutions of the same kind as ceremonies of clans, masks and paint with which the actors bedeck themselves according to the names they bear': for example in the ritual of the *Hirpi Sorani*, the wolves of Soracte, which Frazer suggests is 'the remnants of an ancient clan, which had

become a fraternity, bearing names, and wearing skins and masks' (ibid.). The connection is clear between such rituals and those of the contemporary tribal civilisations that Mauss had analysed earlier in this essay. From this point, however, a decisive step is taken away from corporate identity:

> I imagine that legends like that of the consul Brutus and his sons and the end of the right of the *pater* to kill his sons, his *sui*, signify the acquisition of the *persona* by the sons, even while their father was still alive. I believe that the revolt of the Plebs, the right to full citizenship that, following upon the sons of senatorial families, was gained by all the plebeian members of the *gentes*, was decisive. All freemen of Rome were Roman citizens, all had a civil *persona*; some became religious *personae*; some masks, names and rituals remained attached to some privileged families of the religious *collegia*. (ibid.)

Parallel to the institution of the civil and religious *persona* is the system of nomenclature. Roman citizens are entitled to the use of a *praenomen* denoting, for example, the birth order of the ancestor who bore it (Primus, Secundus...), and which may be taken only from the list available to one's own *gens* (clan or tribe); a *nomen*, the sacred name of the *gens*; and a *cognomen* or nickname, referring to the attributes not of the individual but of his ancestor. The *cognomen*, Mauss writes, 'ended up being confused with the *imago*, the wax mask moulded on the face of the dead ancestor' (ibid.); the use of these masks and busts was confined to the patrician families, and 'to the very end the Roman Senate thought of itself as being made up of a determinate number of *patres* representing the "persons" (*personnes*), the "images" of their ancestors... It is to the *persona* that is attributed the property of the *simulacra* and the *imagines*' (p. 17).

What changes in these institutions is on the one hand the political movement Mauss describes whereby the right to the *persona* is extended, at least in part, to all free citizens, and

on the other that legal categorisation by which 'the personal nature of the law had been established' (ibid.) and personhood becomes detached from a rigid taxonomy of status and privileges. But Mauss gives no account of the development and the semantic force of this legal category; it's likely that what he has in mind is something like the evolution of a sense of intention or of responsibility for acts in the law, but neither this nor any other argument about legal personhood is articulated. The only elaboration of the flat statement concerning the legal category of personhood, that 'the right to the *persona* had been established', is made by negation:

> Only the slave is excluded from it. *Servus non habet personam*. He has no 'personality' (*personnalité*). He does not own his body, nor has he ancestors, name, *cognomen*, or personal belongings. Old Germanic law still distinguished him from the freeman, the *Leibeigen*, the owner of his body. But at the time when the laws of the Saxons and Swabians were drawn up, if the serfs did not possess their body, they already had a soul, which Christianity had given them. (ibid.)

Roman law allows for one individual to have multiple *personae* according to the legal role he is playing (that of owner, of inheritor, of plaintiff…), or for several individuals to constitute a single person (as when a father and son jointly inherit); a slave jointly owned by two masters may be deemed to have two distinct persons when he acts on behalf of one master in relation to the other. Thus, as the French legal historian Yan Thomas notes, 'the law composes "persons" by effecting a veritable dissociation of subjects and bodies',[2] and rather than being equivalent to a physical or psychological subject, the unity of the person is essentially that of an estate (*un patrimoine*) and is of an administrative order: 'In Roman law it is the holder of an estate who is called a *persona*, together with the agents (sons or slaves) included in it and thus authorised to represent him juridically'.[3] The Roman *paterfamilias* 'is

the only full person known to the law. His children, of whatever age, though they are citizens and therefore have rights in public law, are subject to his unfettered power of life and death. Again, only he can own property, and anything which his children acquire belongs to him alone.'[4] The Roman slave partakes only of the personhood of his master, and is categorised as a 'servile *persona*'. Orlando Patterson's account of the 'civil death' undergone by American slaves on entering their condition (a 'death' which involved separation from kin and renaming as an act of incorporation into the master's property) is a later example of this loss of personhood in the state of slavery,[5] although in practice American law in the slave-holding states remained inconsistent, criminalizing the killing of slaves but holding 'that the common law of assault and battery, which generally prohibited attacks on persons, did not apply to slaves'.[6] Roman citizens captured into slavery entered the limbo state of *postliminium*, in which their civil rights were suspended during their lifetime. If a prisoner returned, these rights 'revived automatically and retrospectively; if he died in captivity his death was deemed to have occurred at the moment of his capture'.[7] Christianity, formed in the context of slavery, by contrast fuses the legal and dramatic sources of the concept of person and thus makes 'every human being with a will, qualify as a person, in order to make them all equally qualified to receive divine judgment'.[8]

Finally, the insane have an ambivalent status in both ancient and modern law, with the criterion of autonomous will — of 'self-possession' — tending to deprive them of the status of person. It is possible to plot back from this exclusion to reconstruct the particular doctrines of responsibility and causality which give that status its force. Thus Peter Goodrich writes that

> the legal individual or legal subject is a very specialized
> and distinct rhetorical person ... a unity constructed
> upon the basis of its past actions. The legal subject
> cannot revoke or renounce its deeds, the legal subject

is the straightforward cause of its deeds (acts) and it is morally and legally responsible for those deeds — utterances, actions and omissions. The legal subject is a static unity in the sense that it cannot avoid the legal imputation of a causal relation between past acts and present responsibility.[9]

In addition to 'natural' persons, the concept of person is applied in modern legal systems to certain non-human entities — in particular, and subject to certain conditions of registration and jurisdiction, to corporations and to church and civic associations. In a classic paper, Martin Wolff distinguishes four main doctrines on the nature of the juristic person, according to which it is either a legal fiction, or it is subjectless property acting as though it were a subject, or it is the sum of the individuals who constitute it, or it is, finally,

> a real personality in an extra-juridical, pre-juridical sense of the word. In contra-distinction to the others, this theory assumes that the subjects of rights need not be human beings, that every being which possesses a will and a life of its own may be the subject of rights and that States, corporations, foundations are beings just as alive and just as capable of having a will as are human beings.[10]

Each of these doctrines entails different judicial consequences, and each corresponds in some ways to different modes of commercial practice and different conceptions of responsibility and capacity. Historically, the rise to dominance of the organicist view of the corporation as an immortal autonomous entity with an interest separate from that of its corporators and a will expressed by its management and carried out by its agents coincided with the growth of corporate capitalism in the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s, 'the personified corporation had … completely absorbed the imagery which had suited the real person/real entity theo-

rists only as an analogy',[11] allowing it to capture rights (such as the right to freedom of expression which is currently devastating American politics) which had hitherto been reserved to natural persons.

In some sense, of course, the endowment of a non-human entity with rationality is always a fiction, an artifice. But the distinction between 'legal' persons and 'natural' persons cannot be mapped onto a simple dichotomy of nature and culture, because the status of the 'natural' person is itself constituted by a juridical demarcation of the problematic boundaries of the human: boundaries between foetus and child; between the living, the comatose, the braindead, and the dead; between the bodies and persons of Siamese twins; between the normal and the subnormal. The European Court of Human Rights, overruling the legal principle of the inalienability of juridical identity, has recently recognised the right of transsexuals to reassign their birth identity.[12] Moreover, 'natural' persons are not necessarily coextensive with their bodies. They may, for example, be represented by an agent, acting as a legal extension of their status as person and able to create rights and incur duties on their behalf.

Both this constructedness of the natural person, then, and the distinction between legal and natural persons mean that there can be no general concept of 'person' with a necessary or unified form.[13] Processes of registration and certification control the 'recognition' of the status of both corporations and human beings. The natural person has distinct conditions of constitution (specific institutional and practical conditions), and is conceptually distinct from the juridically constituted person. Yet, while the clarity of this distinction matters deeply for and within the law, it has little purchase on everyday usage, where there is a constant leakage between the subject of rights and embodied individuals. As Thomas puts it, the complexity of the notion of person 'derives from the way a tool which was at first strictly juridical came over time and in its passage through Christian theology and hu-

manism to be loaded with values incompatible with the narrowness of its original function'.[14] Mauss's essay had already made clear that that 'original function' was never simply legal: the concept of person is made up of multiple histories and multiple semantic layers.

II

At the heart of the juridical conception of the person is the premise that the self is a perduring identity responsible not only for all of its past states but able to make commitments with respect to its future states. This is the contractual or promissory dimension of selfhood that is most fully formulated in the market economies of early capitalism. Yet the contract, in the form of a solemnised affirmation, often accompanied by the swearing of an oath to assume an obligation, is among the most archaic foundations of human society.

Promising is a performative transaction which commits me to act in the future as though I were to possess then the same intentions I now have.[15] It both presupposes and creates a will to act, and it thereby allows a series of consequences which include both the accomplishment (or not) of the promise and my construction as the subject in the present of this performative act, a subject which is constant and continuous with itself. It is the translation of this subject form by way of the apparatus of the law into the characteristic property relations of modernity that gives rise to what Clifford Geertz famously called 'the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background', a conception he described as 'a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures'.[16]

The juridical subject of will and intention is individual: bounded not only by its body but by its constitutive relation

to persons and things understood as external to it. What
Marilyn Strathern calls 'Western proprietism' finds expres-
sion in one of two complementary propositions: either the
person is a unitary self with the power freely to alienate its
possessions or to acquire possessions which become a sepa-
rable component of its identity; or the person is conceived as
identical with its activities and loses its unitary identity when
the products of these activities are alienated from the person.
In both cases the person is self-possessed and self-contained,
separate from the world of social others; things have a sin-
gular value in relation to the person, and it is the external
social world that gives things the plurality and diversity of
their value. This assumption runs counter, however, to the
supposition of many traditional societies 'that persons are
intrinsically plural and diverse in origin and in their acts'.[17]

That alternative supposition may be called dividuality,
and it is in some ways already a component of Western per-
sonhood: on the one hand, although personhood is conceived
in terms of a singular will expressively tied to the body, hu-
man time is nevertheless divided between the discontinuous
domains of waking and sleep, consciousness and dream; and
will is limited in sexual experience, in illness, in the drive of
the body towards aging and death. On the other hand, the pri-
mary locus of decision-making in advanced capitalist societies
is in many ways not the individual but corporate entities —
the state and its bureaucracies, corporations, planning and
administrative systems that take on person-like qualities and
may have the legal status of a person. We could also think of
the complex networks both of kinship, friendship, civic, and
work relations and of relations between persons and things
as undermining the boundedness of the individual subject.
The relation between persons and things is complicated by
the precarious nature of this distinction in the larger social
world. Pottage cites the effects of technologies of *in vitro* re-
production on understandings of the human:

> Gene sequences are at once part of the genetic pro-
> gramme of the person and chemical templates from
> which drugs are manufactured; embryos are related to
> their parents by means of the commodifying forms of
> contract and property, and yet they are *also* persons;
> depending on the uses to which they are put, the acts
> of embryos produced by *in vitro* fertilisation might
> be seen as having either the 'natural' developmental
> potential of the human person or the technical 'pluri-
> potentiality' that makes them such a valuable resource
> for research into gene therapies. In each of these cases,
> the categorisation of an entity as a person or a thing is
> dependent upon a contingent distinction rather than an
> embedded division.[18]

In general, as Chris Fowler argues, 'personhood is attained
and maintained through relationships not only with other hu-
man beings but with things, places, animals and the spiritual
features of the cosmos. Some of these may also emerge as
persons through this engagement.'[19] In the mode of dividu-
ality 'people are composed of social relations with others
to the degree that they owe parts of themselves to others'
(p. 8). Fowler distinguishes between two central modes of
dividuality which he calls *partibility* and *permeability*. The
concept of partibility is most closely associated with Marilyn
Strathern's arguments about the relation between persons
and things in the gift economies of Melanesia, where it is im-
possible to speak of an alienation of property since 'persons
simply do not have alienable items, that is, property, at their
disposal; they can only dispose of items by enchaining them-
selves in relations with others'.[20] Gift exchange must thus
be understood as a recursive process in which objects are
circulated in order to make the relations in which they can
circulate: this is a 'personifying' mode of sociality 'in which
the objects of relations are always other relations' (p. 221).
Conversely, there is both a division of interests among per-

sons and an inherent divisibility of personal identity: 'The partibility of the person (evinced in flows of wealth) is a counterpart to the person as a composite of the relations that compose him or her.'[21]

Whereas in partible relations both persons and things are divisible into metonymic states which then enter into relations of exchange and recomposition, in the mode of personhood that Fowler calls permeability the person's mode of being is affected by the flow of the substances they ingest and exchange. In Hindu thinking about persons, social transactions are formed by exchanges of what McKim Marriott calls 'substance-codes': degrees of refinement of matter that carry codes of action and conduct and are correlated with rank within the caste system. The scale runs from relatively 'gross' substances such as cooked food or garbage, through more refined substances such as grain or land, still more refined substances such as money, and the most subtle (and most abstract) substances such as knowledge. Subtler substance-codes emerge

> through processes of maturation or (what is considered to be the same thing) cooking. Thus subtler essences may sometimes be ripened, extracted, or distilled out of grosser ones (as fruit comes from plants, nectar from flowers, butter from milk); and grosser substance-codes may be generated or precipitated out of subtler ones (as plants come from seed, feces from food).[22]

All natural entities are composed of the substance-codes that pass through them and are modified by combinations and separations of these substance codes; and 'what goes on *between* actors are the same connected processes of mixing and separation that go on *within* actors' (p. 109). Human existence involves the constant transfer and absorption of particles of heterogeneous matter through relations of kinship or exchange, through the giving of alms and gifts, and through commerce, as well as through 'subtler, but still sub-

stantial and powerful forms, such as perceived words, ideas, appearances, and so forth. Dividual persons, who must exchange in such ways, are therefore always composites of the substance-codes that they take in' (p. 111), and are constantly reconstituted through these processes. The caste system is built on the basis of transactions in substance-codes between superiors, inferiors, equals, and those without a place in the system.

We might think of these relations of partibility or permeability between persons and between persons and things as the lateral dimension of social being, and it is complemented by a vertical, eschatological dimension in which persons are constituted by their relation to the generations of the dead from whom they inherit, to the gods, and to the unborn descendants to whom property and some of the components of kinship (a name, a status, a genetic inheritance) are to be passed on. These are virtual relations, which may yet possess a compelling concreteness.

All societies have at their heart the integration of the dead into the order of the living, typically through mortuary rites intended 'to keep the soul of the dead person (or, rather, his image or phantasm) from remaining a threatening presence in the world of the living (the *larva* of the Latins and the *eidolon* or *phantasma* of the Greeks)'.[23] Robert Hertz's description of the phenomenon of provisional burial, followed after a period by a set of final rites, draws attention to the marginal status of the soul between the two worlds, treated as an intruder if it ventures into the after-world, and as an importunate guest among the living.[24] The period of mourning after death corresponds to this liminal state in which the soul belongs neither to the visible nor to the invisible community. Its passage from this world to the afterlife results in the formation of new communities, in which the dead either continue to mingle with the living or inhabit a quite separate space. While some anthropologists make a clear distinction between traditional and modern societies on the basis of

the fusion or the separation of the quick and the dead,[25] this seems to me too simple a dichotomy. Funerary rites and the veneration of the dead are still a component of the societies of modernity, and new eschatological relations have emerged as the boundaries of the person have been problematised by technologies of the genetic or surgical transformation of the body, by its integration in a world populated by artificially intelligent entities and in new, virtual environments, and by its potential destruction as a consequence of catastrophic climate change (or, lest we forget, of nuclear holocaust). The body is never a simple presence: its lineage stretches into the past and the future, and those relations with the dead and the unborn, whether conceived spiritually, genetically, or socially, shape its present being.

III

The category of personhood is given by the gods, by totemic ancestors, by ancestral law embedded in country, or by a more or less secular system of law. The category designates a bounded set of capacities, and it is defined in part by a set of exclusions: it is distinct from the members of other species, and from inanimate things; it is distinct from the dead and the unborn. Roberto Esposito points to the way the *dispositif* of the person works with a kind of violence to perform an act of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion by distinguishing full persons from semi-persons and non-persons (in Roman law, the *paterfamilias* from the sons, the female members of the family, and the slaves, as well as the free-born from the emancipated; in contemporary ethics, the adult with full mental and physical capacities from children, the foetus, the terminally ill, the insane, the pathologically criminal, and so on).[26] As a positive construct, the person is bounded by the human body. It bears rights and obligations, and is the subject of will and cognition; and it is something like a place defined by a social order. Yet each of these distinctions and capacities must be qualified. Persons are, and are continuous

with, animals. Their mode of relation to the world may be individual or dividual, permeable or partible; their identity may be limited to this world, may continue into an afterlife, or may pass by a process of metempsychosis into the identity of another person. Persons are never discontinuous with things since they project their will and capacities into technological things, and their sociality is, in many ways and increasingly, a 'sociality with objects'.[27] The interaction of humans and machines can be understood as a mode of distributed intelligence, and the 'self' as no more than 'a small part of a much larger trial-and-error system which does the thinking, acting, and deciding'.[28] Persons are joined in culturally various ways to the dead who gave them birth and who live in their memories, to the world of spirits, and to the unborn to whom they bequeath their genes, their name, and the world they leave behind; they occupy a transient space between nonbeing and death. The personal body may be incomplete, is subject to constant continuous and discontinuous change, and may be prosthetically extended. The will is negated in sleep, in sexual passion, in dreams, in the logic of the unconscious; cognition is driven by metaphor and desire. Rights and obligations are subject to the play of social power and the pressure of social forces. And to the extent that the person is a place defined by a social order (a *taxis* or office), it is a different kind of thing in each society, differentially defined by a sociology, an anthropology, an ontology, and an eschatology.

How does the category of person relate to that of the self? Charles Taylor, who has written the most comprehensive account of the history in Western thought of the category of the self, speaks of its connection with 'modern inwardness, the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depth',[29] and notes that the self is necessarily experienced from within, not as 'an object in the usually understood sense. We are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts and livers' (p. 34); we are selves to the extent that things have a significance for us that is conveyed

in language and in our relation to other selves. The story that
Taylor tells is, with variations of emphasis, one that is famil-
iar from constant re-telling:[30] the heterogeneous and aggre-
gative nature of the terms designating body and soul in the
Homeric epics; Plato's assertion of an ethics of the self that is
grounded in reason rather than in a warrior ethos or an ethos
of manic inspiration; Augustine's understanding of the soul
as the remembrance of God, and of the will as perverse desire
which drives us to act against our reason and our interests;
the Cartesian turn from belief in cosmic order towards a
mechanistic conception of the universe, knowledge of which
is secured by an act of representation constructed through
clear and distinct perceptions; the domination, in Descartes's
account, of a disenchanted world of material extension (in-
cluding the body) by a distinct and immaterial rationality;
the decline of magic and of the 'orders of ontic logos';[31] the
proximity of the soul to God in Puritan practices of personal
commitment and self-scrutiny; Locke's formulation of a self
which is punctual, disengaged, and radically reflexive, and of
a rationality which is procedural and utilitarian; the forma-
tion, above all in the eighteenth-century novel, of a new, indi-
vidualist moral culture which prizes the feelings and locates
them in the intimate world of the family; Rousseau's elabo-
ration of a self which is deeply inward and radically autono-
mous; Romantic 'expressive individuation' (p. 376); and the
many mutations of the Romantic self in the modern world.

To speak of this as a familiar story is not, of course, to
say that it is wrong, and it is frequently insightful. Yet what
is striking in this narrative of the emergence of the individ-
ual, reflexive self is just how many entrances this character
makes in the process of emerging: each time a little less in
disguise, a little more like what it truly is. Despite the histori-
cal differentiations he makes in charting the course of the self
from classical antiquity, Taylor's notion of the self is a notion
of the successive mutations of a continuously developing
entity which reaches its fullest form in modernity. And just

as Mauss runs together an account of religious practices of introspection with a purely philosophical history of the self, so Taylor intersperses what is a quintessentially philosophical history of concepts of the self with accounts of changing social structures and practices. The key methodological reflection on this occurs in the following passage:

> The modern identity arose because changes in the self-understandings connected with a wide range of practices — religious, political, economic, familial, intellectual, artistic — converged and reinforced each other to produce it: the practices, for instance, of religious prayer and ritual, of spiritual discipline as a member of a Christian congregation, of self-scrutiny as one of the regenerate, of the politics of consent, of the family life of the companionate marriage, of the new child-rearing which develops from the eighteenth century, of artistic creation under the demands of originality, of the demarcation and defence of privacy, of markets and contracts, of voluntary associations, of the cultivation and display of sentiment, of the pursuit of scientific knowledge.
> (p. 206)

Ideas and practices are always linked, even if this connection does not have the form of a linear causality. Locke's version of possessive individualism, for example, is correlated with the economic practices of the capitalist market; the context for Descartes's discourses on method is the rise of neo-Stoicism among elite groups in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, seeking to remake the self by means of methodical and disciplined action and in turn applying that discipline in the military and administrative fields. Yet Taylor's attention to such practices is episodic rather than systematic; his focus is on a general and emergent philosophical category rather than on the shaping of selfhood within and as a contingent effect of networks of social practice.

IV

Let me try to sharpen my disagreement with Taylor by enun-
ciating two principles that I think follow from the story that I
have told to this point. First, I take the concept of person to be
formed less by a history of philosophical elaboration than by
sets of changing and interconnected social practices, which
distinguish human from nonhuman being and bring together
religious, legal, medical, ethical, civic, and socioeconomic tax-
onomies in a single point. In Foucault's terms, the person is
less a concept than a *dispositif*, an evolving apparatus for the
shaping of social arrangements.[32] Second, the thing shaped is
not a common human substance but is itself variable across
cultures.

   One way of thinking about how the ethical substance of
selfhood might take on a quite radically different shape even
in the broadly individualist cultures of the West is by way of
the notion of social office. The 'presupposition of office' that
Conal Condren traces from its roots in classical antiquity
through to early modern England supposes a world in which
the agent or *persona* is 'an embodiment of a moral econ-
omy';[33] this world is not divided between an 'official' form of
the self and a 'private' residue: rather, there is *only* the web of
offices to which one is called or which one assumes, and these
prescribe a space of action for the most personal spheres
(those of close kinship relations or of religion) as much as
for the public domain. Without office there is no freedom,
only the lack of a voice and of a domain of responsibilities. As
Haakonssen puts it, '*Officia* in the broader sense are … not
simply "duties", as the word is usually rendered in English.
They are the offices of life which encompass clusters of spe-
cific duties and rights, and we are bound to them by an *obli-
gatio*, or moral necessity.'[34] The office (shepherd or courtier,
king or sheriff, cleric or parent) is thus at once a kind of 'ethi-
cal habitus'[35] and a constellation of rights and responsibilities
manifested in a specified form of the person; it is 'given shape
over time, in relation to adjacent offices, and by the patterns

of its negation';[36] and it is marked by 'a degree of formality in demarcation, an expectation of social continuity and the presentation of a *persona*. In the early-modern world, these aspects were frequently signalled, by ceremonial rites of passage into and out of office, of witnessed oaths cementing office-holder to the burdens of responsibility and frequently requiring semiotic markers to sustain the *persona*.'[37]

If this description is valid, then seeking to understand the early-modern world in terms of the emergence of a self-fashioning modern subjectivity would be an exercise in anachronism. When Prince Hal brutally renounces Falstaff ('I know thee not, old man'),[38] he is stepping fully into his kingly office: the dramatic moment is not a psychological one but a matter of exploring, as the Henriad as a whole does, 'the interplay and problematics of office-holding'.[39] And the point of such a description is just to make it clear that the world has changed: that the autonomous and reflexive self of modernity, with its strict demarcation between public and private space, has no place in the office-based culture of early modernity.

How should we describe the displacement of that culture of ethical personhood? Condren's answer is essentially philosophical: the eighteenth-century belief in developmental malleability, together with Kant's universalisation of one sense of office, such that '*Persona* became person because it had to be a coherent moral singularity',[40] came to complement and then replace the 'modal or official' world.[41] A more satisfactory answer would look beyond the history of ideas to the evolving arrays of practice and institutions associated with the onset of capitalist modernity in which traditional office-based ties of status, of kinship networks, of relatively closed community, of religion, and of patronage were slowly and unevenly shifted off their central axis by systems of contractually-based social relations, by the temporalities of the commodity form and the capitalist technosocial, and by new affective structures and a new distinction between the public and private spheres corresponding to these forms. That story can be told from many

different angles, and it runs the constant risk of setting up too simple a dichotomy between the modern and the premodern, as though those earlier structures had simply disappeared in the singular temporality of modernity.

V

In moving now to discuss the modalities of selfhood and of their public circulation that I take to be characteristic of the emergent structure of the privatised public sphere, I want to suggest both that genuinely new forms of personhood have evolved in late modernity, and that these forms nevertheless retain or even reinvent some of the characteristics of an office-based ethos. The first part of my argument has to do with what I call the malleable self; the second has to do with the shaping of the self in practices of digital intimacy and in the process of privatisation of the public sphere.

The concept of an emergent form of reflexive and malleable selfhood is now widely posited.[42] At the most general level, a number of theorists have argued that the organisation of selfhood has been significantly reshaped in the modern era.[43] Anthony Giddens puts it this way: 'In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems.'[44] This is to say that selfhood ceases to be a datum of existence and becomes not only a project (since an understanding of the self as an occasion of work is characteristic of many earlier societies) but a relatively contingent form chosen from an array of possibilities, none of which has a more compelling moral logic than others. Who and what I am is a 'lifestyle' choice: a matter of aesthetic presentation as much as it is of inherent moral properties.

The distinctiveness of contemporary understandings of

the malleability of the self is perhaps most clearly evident in relation to the cultivation of the body:[45] in the suffusing of everyday culture by regimes of bodily shaping that involve working out in the gym or in the home, the use of diets to control body shape, and intensive training for sporting activity, including the routine use of performance-enhancing drugs.[46]

Management of food intake in order to increase or maintain health, to control weight, or to negate or mortify the body, has a long and primarily religious history. In Turner's brief sketch, dietary management 'emerged out of a theology of the flesh, developed through a moralistic medicine and finally established itself as a science of the efficient body'.[47] The characteristically modern forms of dietary practice have their origins in nineteenth-century processes of individualisation, secularisation, and rationalisation of the disciplines of the body, in the course of which 'the idea of diet as a control of the soul in the subordination of desire gradually disappeared',[48] to be replaced by the generalised aim of 'the preservation of life to enhance the enjoyment of pleasures, the increase of sexuality and the extension of enjoyments'.[49]

Weight-reduction diets — by far the most widely practised form of dieting in Australia — are organised around a structure of value in which a set of practices, a set of ideal body images, a metaphorics of the body, and an 'expert' paramedical language come together in a charged relation to the gendered self. Bordo suggests that the slender body's function as 'a metaphor for the correct management of desire' is directly connected with 'the figuration of female sexuality, power, and desire as *hunger*'.[50] This 'slender body' involves the reconciliation of at times contradictory norms: thinness on the one hand, and muscularity and athleticism on the other. These two ideals, writes Bordo, 'though superficially different, are united in battle against a common platoon of enemies: the soft, the loose; unsolid, excess flesh'.[51] The firm, developed body has now 'become a symbol of correct *attitude*; it means that one "cares" about oneself and how one appears

to others, suggesting willpower, energy, control over infantile impulse, the ability to "make something" of oneself'.[52]

Dieting is thus an 'ethical' practice in the sense that the ascetic figure of the slender body 'is designed to produce an acceptable social self, particularly a self that conveys sexual symbolism…. The modern soul or psyche is expressed through the body, that is, through a sexually charged body image which is socially good.'[53] The notion of being 'in shape' is one of conformity to a kind of Platonic ideal, and it entails a series of *moral* virtues: 'organisation, competence, and good time-management, as well as self-confidence, assertiveness, and high self-esteem'.[54] Indeed, despite Turner's argument that there has been a turn from ascetic spiritual discipline towards a 'calculating hedonism',[55] it is arguable that weight-control practices continue to be informed by what we should properly call a spiritual force. At the extreme, the language used by anorectics

> includes Christian/ascetic themes, with a dualistic construction of mind/matter and spirit/appetite coded in terms of purity/contamination, and the ultimate goal of cleansing the soul of desire/hunger. Thus, certain foods are seen by the anorectic at times as tainted, contaminating, and dangerous, while the practice of self-denial and, at times, self-mortification, is seen as purifying.[56]

But these extreme values are, in a more subdued form, identical to the routine understandings of those who struggle with a body seen as other than the self, as recalcitrant to control, and as subject to outbursts of hunger.

Like weight-control diets, exercise has become an increasingly formalised and institutionalised activity in the last few decades, underpinned by an industry which expanded dramatically during the 1980s.[57] Amongst the conditions for this transformation of exercise were shifts in the nature of work towards more sedentary forms of occupation; the development of a discourse which turns this change into a *problem*,

and proposes as its remedy a systematised programme of activities anchored in a 'lifestyle'; and finally, a new sense of the malleability of the body and of its subordination to the will.

The analogy between exercise and weight-reduction dieting is a revealing one: both contribute to that new combination of beauty and strength ('curvaceous muscularity') which, in the early 1980s, replaces the ideal of thinness that had been dominant since the 1960s. Like dieting, exercise works 'from the inside out, requiring an assertion of will over the body'.[58] But Morse makes the distinction that, 'while dieting shrinks the body and its power both literally and metaphorically, exercise prepares a freely-moving subjectivity which can be active in the world. As such it contradicts long-prevailing notions of feminine passivity and stasis.'[59] More generally, dieting and exercise are forms of secular ascesis, working by means of the repetitive imitation of an ideal body form which can never be completely or finally achieved. Both of them collapse the distinction between work and leisure:

> At the postmodern health club — filled with glimmering machines which disaffirm their modernism by being labour-*making* devices ... leisure is work, impulses are harnessed into repetitions-per-minute, and the conscience [is] now of the body as much as it is of the soul.[60]

And both are crucial components of an imaginary of the body which segregates and defines the genders, revalues and restructures the aging process, and turns the body into an instrument of social achievement.

VI

I take these practices of care of the body to be exemplary of a broader transformation of the care of the self which can be understood only in the context of the technosocial and cultural networks that underpin moral selfhood: the control of fertility, the experience of virtual selfhood, the explosion of

a digital public sphere, and a plethora of quasi-religious doc-
trines to do with the shaping of an 'authentic' self all feed into
the 'spiritual' dimensions of self-shaping. The organic condi-
tions of human life in late modernity have been transformed
by the medical and bio-engineering technologies that have
enhanced the lifespan (to the point that it is now the norm
for four rather than three generations to co-exist), made it
possible for discrete body parts to be replaced or renewed,
made the body continuous with its prosthetic supplements,
and rendered biological reproduction independent of direct
sexual activity. The ageless patterns of birth, reproduction
and death have suddenly become historical, while, on another
plane, the secure placement of selves in bodies has been dis-
rupted by the increased salience of expert systems, the mul-
tiplication of disembodied identities in cyberspace, and the
availability of past modes of self-shaping for present use.

   The counterpart at the level of the person to the bodily
regimes of dieting and exercise is a range of techniques of
reflexive self-shaping which take the self as a deficiency to
be made good.[61] These techniques are expounded by coun-
sellors and therapists and in self-help manuals and manuals
of spiritual instruction. Like older forms of care of the soul,
they seek to bring the self to a state of perfection, or at least
to cleanse it of its failings; yet because they take place in the
absence of a single order of spiritual or moral authority, they
offer an array of divergent models and ethical frameworks.
The deep infrastructure for this array is the diversity of me-
dia technologies, of genres, and of structures of narrative
identification (the star and celebrity systems, for example) in
relation to which selfhood can be performed. Selfhood is no
longer necessarily singular or 'authentic'; it is a serious but
fluid process, formed as an adaptation to what Bauman calls
'a society in which the conditions under which its members
act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consoli-
date into habits and routines'.[62]

   At the heart of those transformations of the conditions

of possibility of selfhood is the formation of new modes of public circulation of selves, and indeed a dismantling of that division of the world into private and public spheres which McKeon charts through its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century emergence and consolidation in *The Secret History of Domesticity* [63] and which received its canonical, and in a strictly historical sense mythical, formulation in Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. [64] In Habermas's account, the eighteenth-century public sphere marks the moment of separation of civil society both from the feminised domain of private life and from the workings of the State; but already inscribed in the ambiguity of the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* — the 'public domain', but also 'publicity' — is its later shift into something like its opposite: the publicness not of rational discourse but of the commodity form in its manifestation as the pseudo-rationality of advertising and as the abstract product of advertising, the brand: that is, a semantic matrix which is to a large degree autonomous both of the products it subsumes and of the corporation which owns and controls it, and whose 'imaginary significance' [65] can thus be advertised independently of particular products. [66]

In the late-modern sphere of publicity, brands circulate as though they were persons, and seek a recognition effect — an imaginary identification — from the aggregated singularities they address; in Laplanche and Pontalis's precise definition, the brand Imaginary 'is characterised by the prevalence of the relation to the image of the counterpart (*le semblable*)'. [67] Conversely, persons circulate in this sphere as though they were brands: imaginary selves distributed in public places. As the supposedly common space of the traditional mass-mediated public sphere disintegrates into a thousand cable channels and ten thousand gossip magazines and a million blogs, a quite new mode of publicness takes its place. This is the sphere of digital intimacy: the world of the social media, pre-eminently today Facebook and Twitter, where an activity of continuous micro-blogging constructs a

public face of the self from the most private and above all the most banal of details. Reducing the transaction costs of disclosure,[68] social networking sites allow the modelling of a self in a disaggregated space, typically of a few hundred 'friends' but at times erupting chaotically into quite different scales when a feed or a clip goes viral in an unpredictable surge of energy. That self which is modelled is carefully constructed as a form of confessional truth: tweets, posts, profiles, photos, clips, timelines, and changes of status construct a *persona* at once deeply private and deeply public: a *persona* which is the point of convergence of a privatised public sphere and a publicised private sphere;[69] the point of convergence, too, of singular personal desire and the data-harvesting machines that comb it for the seeds of a potential commercial value.

Much of the discourse that purports to understand this convergence is moralistic: the ambient intimacy created by continuous micro-blogging can seem profoundly narcissistic, and profoundly at odds with the reserve required of a Habermasian public rationality. Yet there are ways of making sense of it without resorting to moralism or nostalgia. One is to think of the continuous interactions through which digital intimacy is constructed as a kind of social tact, a touching across the dispersed and impersonal spaces of urban life. Clive Thompson notes the paradox that, while each update on a social networking site is insignificant and mundane in itself, 'taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends' and family members' lives, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting'.[70] In that sense, social networking is a version of face-to-face sociality, closer to talk than to writing and played out across a public domain composed of myriad mediated interactions.[71]

One of the most helpful tools I've found for thinking in a non-moralistic way about digital intimacy is Lauren Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere. Designed to describe the presence in American popular culture of the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries of a market in 'sentimental' narrative directed specifically to women, the concept works to express the fantasmatic structure of an alienation overcome in an imagined sharing. When such markets take hold, Berlant writes,

> participants in the intimate public *feel* as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and emotions. Their participation seems to confirm the sense that even before there was a market addressed to them, there existed a world of strangers who would be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent, with all that entails: varieties of suffering and fantasies of transcendence; longing for reciprocity with other humans and the world; irrational and rational attachments to the way things are; special styles of ferocity and refusal; and a creative will to survive that attends to everyday situations while imagining conditions of flourishing within and beyond them.[72]

On the one hand, such markets generate a fantasy of mattering, of 'becoming somebody to each other…'.[73] On the other hand, they are precisely markets, and 'more often than not … in mass society, what counts as collectivity has been a loosely organised, market-structured juxtapolitical sphere of people attached to each other by a *sense* that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who have been marked by the historical burden of being harshly treated in a generic way…'.[74] The feeling, the sensing, the imagining is of an ethical place with ties of likeness between those who come together in its mediated forum. Those imagined and imaginary ties are of the kind that we may have with the fictional characters of sentimental narrative or with the imaginary friends whom we know on a first-name basis in gossip magazines, or with the friends to whom we are bound by ties of weak intimacy in the social media.

In the rapidly developing intimate public sphere of the digital world, new protocols of ethical obligation are emerging, both for the circulation of our 'true' selves and for those other selves we engage through avatars and through alternative online identities. Indeed, rather than speaking of a singular and privatised public sphere, we should speak rather of a plurality of public spheres, a plurality of worlds of fact and value, a plurality of modes of personhood — with all the losses and all the gains that that dispersion entails. Just as the many offices I might have held in early modern Europe were meshed together in overlapping but also differentiated spheres of ethical obligation, without any hierarchical distinction of public and private, so do the forms of office — the *personae*, the distinct places with distinct rules of engagement, the forms of ad hoc ceremony — that are coming to organise the digital world converge and diverge in ways we have not yet fully understood. Older forms of care of the self — the ethos of the warrior, Stoic or Christian asceticism, norms of ethical civility governing interactions, ceremonies of power and submission, codes of fidelity or friendship — are reinvented in chat rooms and posts and gaming logs. Rather than being obsolescent, those earlier, office-based forms of personhood actively survive into a mode of malleable selfhood which treats them as retrievable and decontextualised options in the multiply layered temporality of the present. It is in some such terms as these, I suggest, that we can think, now, of the figuring of private persons in the public sphere, and of the dismantling and reinvention of that distinction.

As fire burns: a response to John Frow
Justin Clemens

There are three major elements of John Frow's presentation that I would like to comment upon here. The first regards the dialectic between law — as the entrée to the political establishment of the historically variable distinction between public and private — and the diverse ethical practices that come to trouble this distinction. The second involves Frow's quiet-but-definite theoretical polemic against philosophy treated as a history of doctrines of the subject. The third engages his redescription of everyday practices as modes of public self-fashioning at the contingent point of convergence of diverse forces. I want to read Frow's presentation slightly against the grain, as suggesting another story that he doesn't really want to tell, yet which links his key claims in a way that gives them a different sort of consistency and import. This 'other story' concerns the vicissitudes of the enforced extraction of discourses from the body, the story of the slave becoming a person and the person becoming a slave.

   Frow begins with a crucial legal concept, that of *persona* itself, which derives from a fundamental category of Roman law. Drawing on the work of Marcel Mauss, Frow rightly argues that the public/private distinction cannot simply be mapped onto the culture/nature distinction, not least because legal definitions already presume something about the boundaries of the human, and because such legal definitions are constantly troubled by the 'leakage between the subject of rights and embodied individuals'. Yet accounting for leakage is itself already part of the legal operations. In Chapter XVI of *Leviathan*, titled 'Of Persons, Authors, and Things Personated', Thomas Hobbes draws on a histrionic etymology of the term — the actor's mask — in order to emphasise that 'it is the unity of the representer, not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one'.[75] A person is legally and logically a unity; what is behind the mask may well be a

multitude, but such a multitude has its legitimate public actions restricted to that of its representative. A 'person' is by definition a public entity. Thus the restrictions on who can come to wear such a mask, and how, are determining. Slaves cannot be persons in their own right; they are only countable insofar as they are 'covered' by another. Frow also mentions exclusion of madness from the public realm, to which we could add the further classical sequence of children, women, foreigners and beasts. Indeed, the definition of *persona* by negation is more determining than I think Frow would like to make it (of which more below).

I have some sympathy with Frow's understated polemic against standard modes of history of philosophy, represented here by the work of Charles Taylor.

I agree with Frow that such projects suffer in two inter-related ways: first, that philosophy tends to treat the history of the subject as best delivered through an examination of canonical philosophical accounts of the subject; second, that, in doing so, they threaten to reintroduce a progressive teleology of self-revelation. Not only do such accounts mistake the status of philosophy itself (does it really represent real political/social/economic changes in doctrinal form?) and not only do they misconceive the relation between their own history and the links to changing social situations (Frow's word for Taylor's procedure here is 'episodic'), but they pass over the heterogeneity of the things that people do and the circumstances in which they do them. Even the attempts by theorists of social office, such as Conal Condren, for whom early modernity is characterised as a complex network of offices to which are attached circumscribed rights and responsibilities — and not as a world of self-fashioning Hamlettes — tend to over-emphasise the modern rupture in personhood in abstract philosophical terms.

Certainly, today we don't have simply a supplantation or proliferation of publics and of public offices, but a transformation of the public–private distinction itself under condi-

tions of a new globalised media situation. In Frow's exempla of contemporary personhood — diet, exercise, and psychological regimens — there is a shift from the pressure upon individuals to decide upon a life-project to the injunction to make lifestyle interventions upon their own body. This renders contemporary practices aesthetic, not moral; patently contingent, not legally directed; 'naturally' embodied, yet entirely artificial. Frow's interpretations are persuasive correctives to the usual moralising accounts that are given of such practices (e.g., as hedonistic or narcissistic). Our own globalised digital situation is, in Frow's words, characterised by 'a persona which is the point of convergence of a privatised public sphere and a publicised private sphere; the point of convergence, too, of singular personal desire and the data-harvesting machines that comb it for the seeds of a potential commercial value'. But there is an element here which precisely reproduces one of the key aspects of ancient slavery.

In *The Human Condition*— a work which Frow would presumably find still too-philosophical — Hannah Arendt expends an extraordinary amount of effort on elaborating the origins of the public sphere by showing it can only be understood by reference to ancient slavery.[76] Privacy in ancient Greece is first and foremost a privation, insofar as it is an index of necessity: economic, familial, vital. Its emblem is the slave, whose 'unhappiness', testified to across a range of literary, legal and philosophical documents, does not depend on his or her actual physical wellbeing, but upon his or her inability to have any time of their own. In Aristotle, the phrase 'as fire burns' occurs at least twice. It appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle comments that: 'Some people think that all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas a law of nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary.'[77] The second place is in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle asserts: 'we think the manual workers are like certain lifeless things which act in-

deed, but act without knowing what they do, as fire burns —
but while the lifeless things perform each of their functions
by a natural tendency, the labourers perform them through
habit'.[78] The Aristotelian phrase bears in each case upon the
relation between 'nature' and 'culture', between inherent and
acquired automatism, between action and knowledge. The
figure of the slave is therefore from the first a paradigm of
privatised, naturalised techno-economics, a living automaton
which labours by habituation, without asking or knowing the
causes of its labour. The discourse of the slave could only have
a public bearing if extracted by torture — not simply because
pain was determining *per se*, and not simply because such
pain was inflicted in the service of truth — but because the
expropriability of slave labour had to be publicly staged as
part of the self-structuring of public life itself.[79] What a slave
might give away freely and easily could only count if it were
publicly expropriated. The slave was likewise unable to give
testimony on oath, which is reserved for the citizen.

If our new privatised publicity today is in principle indef-
initely pluralisable, giving rise to an incommensurable diver-
sity of public spheres, one crucial condition of it becoming
so is that so-called 'communicative rationality' has become a
form of expropriated labour. Of all the innovations effected in
the contemporary post-convergent media situation, one com-
plex seems politically determining: the base interactivity of
the new media, their operational requirements for sociality,
their enregistration of every keystroke, enable an unprece-
dented expropriation and exploitation of immaterial labour.
On Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and all the others, we work as
fire burns. It is significant that the examples that Frow gives
are simultaneously examples of how life itself, our own lives,
has become integrated with symbolic violence and command,
to the point that, as Arendt herself put it, 'the objective, tan-
gible difference between being free and being forced by ne-
cessity is no longer perceived'.[80] As Frow also notes, digital
intimacy is linked with the dissolution of the distinction be-

tween life, labour and leisure, between the body and its direct instrumentalisation by imagos of social advancement.[81]

So what is exposed as a kind of remnant in all these genuinely novel contemporary phenomena is something primordial, the unspoken foundation and underlining of all human communities: there must always be a category of persons who can become public agents on the sole condition that their (communicative) surplus is forcibly and involuntarily extracted from their bodies and repurposed to uses that are not theirs. Today this operation has been universally actualised by means of the digital expropriation of the means of communication itself, and the concomitant effectuation of an irreducible zone of indistinction between 'public' and 'private'. It is not just that, today, *servus habet personam*, but that *servus est persona*, the red thread that runs throughout the otherwise-incommensurable and -incommunicable privatised publics of the present.

1   Marcel Mauss, 'A Category of the Human Mind: The
    Notion of Person; The Notion of Self'. The essay was
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    Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, ed., *The Category
    of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*
    (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985),
    pp. 1–25. I have consulted both translations but followed
    the later one, which is clearer at several key points; page
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    Le Débat 100 (1998), p. 99, my translation.
3   Ibid., 100.
4   Barry Nicholas, *An Introduction to Roman Law*
    (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 65.
5   Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death:
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    University Press, 1982).
6   'Note: What We Talk About When We Talk About
    Persons: The Language of a Legal Fiction', *Harvard
    Law Review* 114: 6 (2001), p. 1749.
7   Nicholas, *An Introduction to Roman Law*, pp. 71–72.
8   Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 'A Literary Postscript:
    Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals', in *The
    Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty
    (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 310.
9   Peter Goodrich, *Reading the Law: A Critical
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    (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 204.
10 Martin Wolff, 'On the Nature of Legal Persons', *The
    Law Quarterly Review*, Vol. 14 (October, 1938), p. 498.

11 Gregory A. Mark, 'The Personification of the Business Corporation in American Law', *University of Chicago Law Review* 54 (1987), p. 1479.

12 Yan Thomas, 'Le sujet de droit', 90–91.

13 Paul Hirst, 'Introduction to Edelman', Bernard Edelman, *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law*, trans. Elizabeth Kingdom (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 13–14.

14 Thomas, 'Le sujet concret et sa personne: Essai d'histoire juridique rétrospective', in Olivier Cayla and Yan Thomas, *Du droit de ne pas naître: À propos de l'affaire Perruche* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 125 (my translation).

15 For an overview of the paradoxes involved in the promise's demand for 'assertiveness, commitment, and certainty at precisely the point where we are least able to give it', cf. William Vitek, *Promising* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); the citation is from p. 1.

16 Clifford Geertz, 'From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 59.

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20 Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, p. 161.

21 Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance and Effect:
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    the evolution of the category of the self as mythical.

Roy Porter, 'Introduction', *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 8.

31 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 192.

32 Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 194–5; cf. Giorgio Agamben, 'What Is an Apparatus?', *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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35 Condren, *Argument and Authority*, p. 24.

36 Ibid., p. 29.

37 Ibid., p. 25.

38 Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II*, V, 5.

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40 Ibid., p. 347.

41 Ibid., p. 23.

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81 As O. Bradley Bassler underlines, Arendt was exceedingly hostile to attempts to think of models of intimate communication as able to become paradigmatic for the public sphere. See *The Pace of Modernity: Reading with Blumenberg* (Melbourne: re.press, 2012), esp. pp. 61–67.

Notes

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Educated at Wagga High School and the ANU, John Frow lived and worked in South America in 1970 and 1971 and then did graduate studies from 1971 to 1975 in the Comparative Literature Program at Cornell University, including a year at the University of Heidelberg. He worked at Murdoch University in Western Australia from 1975 to 1989, and was then appointed to a Chair at the University of Queensland, where he worked from 1990 to 1999. From 2000 to 2004 he was the Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, before returning to take up the Chair of English Language and Literature at the University of Melbourne. He has held visiting research and teaching positions at the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago.

Justin Clemens gained his PhD from the University of Melbourne. He publishes primarily on psychoanalysis, European philosophy, and contemporary Australian art and literature. Recent books include *Minimal Domination* (Surpllus 2011), *Villain* (Hunter Publishing 2009) and *Black River* (re.press 2007), illustrated by Helen Johnson. With Christopher Dodds and Adam Nash, he is the creator of several online artworks, notably *Babelswarm* (2008) and *Autoscopia* (2009). He is former Secretary of the Lacan Circle of Melbourne.

Acknowledgements

The Research Unit in Public Cultures is based in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. It focuses on transformations in public culture produced by new intersections of knowledge, media, space and mobility, within Australia and internationally.

It brings together scholars from four faculties at the University of Melbourne who are collaborating on projects with a wide range of industry partners. The Research Unit's agenda is to develop projects that address four fundamental trajectories:

- how cultural knowledge is shaped by and against the global forces which articulate Australia's place in the world;
- how developments in digital technologies alter the protocols for inclusion and exclusions within public cultures;
- how new practices of mobility impact on the constitution of public knowledge and cultures; and
- how public space is created, managed and accessed, specifically within networked urban environments.

The Research Unit plays a role in facilitating scholarship, enhancing research opportunities and enabling collaborations between creative industries, cultural institutions, research institutions, academic research centres and public communities. It houses a number of collaborative research projects across various disciplines, such as: education for a multicultural society; digital networks and participatory public space; art as a platform for global culture; transnational cinema practices; aesthetic cosmopolitanism; mediated public spaces; and cultural citizenship.

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On personhood in public places

John Frow & Justin Clemens

In this first publication for the Research Unit in Public Cultures, John Frow sets about asking, how do people figure and perform themselves in the public sphere? One answer to this question has to do with the offices by which people are defined in traditional status systems, and the gradual dissolution of those office-based ties of status, of kinship networks, of community, of religion, and of patronage in the passage to modernity and to contract-based individualism. Professor Frow will propose a different kind of answer, however, which thinks about the legal and religious underpinnings of personhood across the discontinuities of tradition and modernity, and which explores the status of the person in new modes of public circulation of selfhood, new modes of public intimacy, and a new malleability of the self and its boundaries in a world characterised by a plurality of public spheres and of the ways of being a person that they make possible.

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