Fakecraft

Paul Christopher Johnson
paulcjoh@umich.edu

Abstract

The essay defines and explores the dimensions of 'fakecraft'. It unpacks authenticity in relation to problems of identity, the aura of the original, and commodification. It then shows how notions of authenticity and the fake generate centers and peripheries in the study of religion. The essay explores how traditions of African descent in the Caribbean and Brazil have long been marginalized in the study of religion as lacking depth or authenticity. The essay then takes up a specific example of fakecraft and its prolific work, namely in early modern Christianity's process of purification and self-definition through evaluations of demonic possession as 'real' or 'fake', terms that were then applied to the west coast of Africa. In the broadest terms, the article argues that fakecraft – discourses of the real versus the merely mimetic – is basic to religion-making.

Keywords: fake, fakery, authenticity, African religions, demon possession, mimesis, religion, Christianity

Fakes disguise their tracks. Their origins are uncertain. The term 'fake' may be related to the folds of nautical lines and sails, or to street slang for theft. As a verb it at one point implied 'to clean away'. To 'fake someone out and out' in the early 1800s meant to kill them. In every sense the term conveyed transformations, though of diverse kinds. Much later, in the 20th century, jazz musicians used 'fake' to play notes other than those on the printed sheet – to improvise. Jazz artists kept their own dossiers of chord changes for standard tunes, called fakebooks. Another variation still active in the dictionary but otherwise retired is 'fakement' – an early term for an efficacious forgery.

Despite the range of uses, all the etymologies suggest doubling, a visible effect pointing to a reality below. Every forgery points toward an original, like a visible fold of rope that implies many coils beneath the surface, of unknown reach. Every improvisation riffs on and calls to ear the notes of an absent musical score, even when only the fakebook is visible on the stand.

Some of the old glosses related to the fake are faded or gone, but others ('fake news') have sprung to life. 'Fakelore', first penned by Richard Dorson in 1950, was coined as an inversion of folklore. Dorson (1950:336) called the stories of 'fake lore' inauthentic because they were produced by entertainment industries like Disney, or by states rather than living communities. Dorson's fiery invective was directed especially against a post-WWII spate of popular Paul Bunyan books, and against nationalist claims invoked through such works and their overlarge footprint that buried the tracks of more genuine backwoods hero-tales, like those of French Canadians, Finns, North Michiganders, Poles, Chippewa, or of labor groups like lumberjacks (Dorson 1950:336-337). More distantly, Dorson was concerned with fascism's use of fake lore. Authentic folklore, Dorson insisted, must be alive, told by actual people in groups (Dorson 1950:342). Abstractions like nation-states do not sit rapt around a fire, or even any longer (one can imagine Dorson saying) in the shared glow of a television. By 1959 he joined the term, fake lore, into one, 'fakelore' (Dorson 1959:4).

David Chidester (2005:191) points out that fakelore, like fake religion, produces real effects in the world. In Alan Dundes' diagnosis, for example, it fills a national psychic need in times of crisis when folklore fails, or in the face of national insecurity (Dundes 1989:50-51). Dundes adds the intervention that fakelore is material and spatial as much as verbal or textual, and that fakelore can easily *become* folklore. Just so for Chidester, who argues that fake religion veers easily into 'real' religion in its effects. This is largely in keeping with the 'invented tradition' idea (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), pointing to the functions of allegedly age-old histories of only recent coinage. Only think of how versions of the home depicted in Laura Ingall Wilder's *Little house on the prairie* – a work of fiction only loosely drawn from her own life – are now the most visited historical sites in the middle U.S. (McClellan, In Press).

While Ranger and Hobsbawm, like Dorson and Dundes, were concerned with the nationalist risks of invented traditions – the ways they use ritual to impose 'tacitly accepted rules' to 'inculcate certain values' (Hobsbawm 1983:1) – one might also think of fakery in relation to play. In the

lighter terms of pretend or fabrication, and following the lead from jazz, one can also see fakes as improvisations. Children are terrific fakers, including of ritual. Children in Cuba 'fake' Santería possession events as a way of marking aspiration and their future trajectory (Palmié 2013:296). Children play at ritual as a way of learning it, including faking spirit possession, all over the African Americas (Landes 1947:174; Richman 2012:283; Segato 2005:103; Opipari & Timbert 1997; Halloy & Naumescu 2012), just as elsewhere they play at Mass or masking (Caillois 1961:62). There is a dark side to the question of the fake – say, the fascist invented traditions of Aryanism, or the 'epistemic murk' blurring of truth and fiction that births a culture of terror (Taussig 1984:192-193). And there is a lighter side, presented in the creative play of children working out the craft of ritual. This lighter side is often apparent in popular culture too. Still, as Adorno writes, it is precisely the appearance of superficiality that can make popular culture dangerous, including religion – astrology, like racism, provides a useful 'short-cut…bringing the complex to a handy formula' (Adorno 1994:61).

Chidester (2005:2) signals the relation between the serious work of religion, engaging the sacred, the transcendent and questions of ultimate meaning, and the 'comparatively frivolous play of popular culture'. Elsewhere he blurs the line between the sacred and play, by noting that 'religious' work is also done by popular culture (Chidester 2005:231), whether in the form of baseball, rock 'n' roll, or Burning Man. His point can even be taken further in order to say that religion itself is often quite unserious. The play and the pop even *within* devoted ritual practice is part of its *modus operandi* and its appeal. Adorno (2000:78-79) went so far as to call this constitutive of the 'religious medium' as such, whose 'sentimentality, blatant insincerity and phoniness' are part and parcel of good performance. These qualities fulfill the 'longing of the people for "feigning" things'. Here Adorno steers toward the longing for the fake.

We need not fully indulge Adorno's cynicism to nevertheless pursue the point: People like to play, blur categories of performance, and suspend disbelief. So much is this the case that the lines dividing play or pretend from 'real' ritual are difficult if not impossible to discern. From this perspective, the crafting of ritual scenes and procedures that undo the distinctions of fake and real ritual is a central part of the work of making and maintaining a religion, as 'the play of presence' (Taussig 1999:142). It is a refined art, a *techne* in

Heidegger's nomenclature; the art of bringing forth, of causing something new to appear (Heidegger 1977:184).

The first half of this essay explores key dimensions of what I call 'fakecraft', including the way it plays on and against issues of authenticity. Authenticity is unpacked in relation to problems of identity, the aura of the original, and commodification. The ways in which notions of authenticity and the fake have generated centers and peripheries in the study of religion, are also considered. Traditions of African descent in the Caribbean and Brazil, for example, have long been marginalized in the study of religion as lacking depth or authenticity – as syncretic – though that has by now begun to change. The second half of the essay then takes up a specific example of fakecraft and its prolific work, namely in early modern Christianity's process of purification and self-definition through evaluations of demonic possession as 'real' or 'fake'.

I. Fakecraft

Fakecraft is basic to religion-making. The term 'craft' in the conjunction is suggestive for my purposes because it joins at least three meanings from its Germanic etymology and its English vernacular use: 1) a power wielded and deployed (*Kraft*); 2) a skill that is honed and practiced; and 3) a vessel of transport. These three senses – as power, skill, and transport from one bodily state to another, or one vision of the world to another, usefully summarize the kinds of work often gathered under the usefully fuzzy term 'religion'. Fakecraft gestures toward the craft of making multiplicity visible – the forgery that implies a real; the top of a coiled rope or sail that conveys many more loops or folds below; the improvisation that plays off – always imply an absent written score.

Note, though, that religious traditions constitute their notions of fakery, as well as the margins and terms of opacity and indecipherability, in very different ways. For example, the notion of the fake as a lack of sincerity – the mismatch between external appearance or words and a putative internal state – has a distinctly Protestant character, both in the nature of the question and in its particular linguistic form (Keane 2002). The centrality of sincerity to Protestant ideas of the fake even poses severe challenges for Protestant

expansion in New Guinea and elsewhere. There, the effort to intentionally know the internal states of others is considered terribly impolite and improper. This is the 'opacity of mind' problem (Robbins & Rumsey 2008). In other traditions, meanwhile, a 'fake' is someone who does not enjoy proper authorization (Chidester 1996:33). This particular notion of fakery requires a level of bureaucratic rationalization perhaps typical of only a narrow range of religious groups. African diasporic traditions in Brazil and the Caribbean, meanwhile, are often oriented around discerning authentic and fake claims of deep African knowledge, or valid spirit possession performances in ritual compared with those deemed mere 'acting'. This is because spirit possession events always suppose a gap between the forensic claim of a god's true presence and the inchoate means and measures of determining authentic presence. The possibility of the fake is ever-present. However, while accusations of fakery may be intended to deauthorize or discredit spirit possession, they also help to constitute spirit possession as eventful, through the 'interpretive ferment' (Wirtz 2007) its opacity marshals and calls into being. The ambiguity and uncertainty of genuine spirit-presence lend frisson to the ritual gathering. Working in the Cuban city of Santiago, Kristina Wirtz explored what she calls the 'aesthetics of sensibility', the ways practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions develop particular techniques of discernment, and skills of perception beginning with bodily sensations like shivers or prickling on the skin and ascending to full-blown sensations of possession (Wirtz 2007:130-135). 'To discern spirits', Wirtz writes, 'requires being inculcated into a culturally-specific phenomenology in which the material effects of immaterial agencies become sensible experiences' (Wirtz 2014:100).

In addition, Afro-American religions and elsewhere are often heavily invested in questions of spatial authenticity, or proximity to a putative original in what one might call, following Benjamin (1970), an auratic mode. Is it genuinely 'African'? The question sometimes is attached to racial authenticity. Thus, Roger Bastide, writing on mid-century Brazil, sees commercialized and 'whitened' Afro-Brazilian ritual events as necessarily 'fake' (Bastide 1978:230):

> I am not speaking of the fake candomblés or macumbas opened up nowadays to exploit tourists, sanctuaries that live on the superstition of whites and concentrate on expensive magic rituals for sensation seekers and night club patrons. Although these centers may be directed

by mulattoes and offer their sophisticated clientele a ballet performed by girls who are quite likely to be black, culminating in simulating African rites, they represent white rather than black religion.

Bastide saw fakeness and authenticity in candomblé in racial terms, and presumably he was not alone, though it is by now clear that the question of Africanity may or may not be tethered to social Blackness (Palmié 2002:197; Johnson 2007:217-219).

II. Authenticity

Let's turn now to authenticity, a term Chidester foregrounds as indispensable to the problem of the fake (Chidester 2005:xii). Chidester observes that fake religion does 'authentic' religious work (Chidester 2005:vii) and, citing Lawrence Grossberg, that there can be (and indeed the U.S. may be essentially characterized by) 'authentic inauthenticity', public and even prideful artifice rather than covert fraud or dissimulation.

As Chidester (2005:3) notes, authenticity can work under various guises: As transparency, or as a cipher for earnest earthiness (rather like *terroir* for wine), the latter a burden under which especially so-called 'primitive' societies, and perhaps African societies in particular, have long labored. Many groups compete for prestige in those or similar terms. Scholars of religion played a heavy hand in reinforcing this kind of status competition over African authenticity. Melville Herskovits (1941; 1945) famously invoked a dubious comparative register called 'the scale of intensity of New World Africanisms'. In Herskovits' dangerous game, the Maroons of Suriname won first prize, followed by those of Guiana and, in third place, practitioners of Haitian Vodou. Many scholars in Brazil as elsewhere, similarly, endorsed the Yoruba-derived practices in the New World as 'more authentic' than Kongo-descended ones, often based on specious Eurocentric analogies of the Yoruba pantheon, or sculpture, to those of classical Greece or Rome (Johnson 2007:205-214; Capone 2010:206-210; Dantas 1988).

While it is true that this version of authenticity is recurrent in the African Americas, it seems also typical of diasporic situations in general. The lurking question of the fake (as adjudicated in relation to the alleged distance

from an 'original') always hovers over and around replicant Sikh temples, Catholic grottos, and traveling Zen masters. Are they real *enough*? And by what criteria? Corrosive accusations are likely, especially when there are venues of both touristic and 'actual' ritual performance (Chidester 2012:115, 202; Capone 2010:206; Johnson 2002:9, 177), genres that, at least in the African Americas, in fact are often merged (Hagedorn 2001; Van de Port 2011; Wirtz 2014).

The idea of authenticity gauged as legitimate replication of an original model is perhaps less at issue, though, for so-called 'world' or overtly 'mission' traditions – classically, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity – which necessarily imagine their traditions as replicable and detachable from spatial versions of the authentic local. They embrace artifice as part and parcel of their global extension. In this sense, Jonathan Smith describes the Reformation as first and foremost a shift in how ritual makes and communicates meaning in detachable ways. Ritual for the 16th-century reformed Christians was not 'real' in a literal, material, and spatial sense; it was rather a matter of 'signification' (for Zwingli), or 'metonymy' (for Beza). A wedge now divided symbol and reality in Christendom (Smith 1987:100). It narrowed the gap between the fake and the real with a bridging middle term, 'the symbolic'.

The point to reinforce here is that different traditions summon distinct versions of authenticity, and attribute authenticity with varying levels of value. In so doing they inscribe particular contents and edges of the inchoate, in relation to given ritual processes. In spite of this diversity, though, one should not lose sight of a key comparative hinge: Potential fakery is part of the furniture of every religious enactment. In fact, it is a necessary prop, the empty box in the middle of the stage. The box is built to different specifications depending on the tradition. Learning how the box is built is part and parcel of understanding and interpreting a given religious practice. There are at least two parts to this hermeneutic problem: One is learning how specific versions of fakecraft help to make and maintain insider definitions of shared terms of a tradition; the second is seeing how the different constructions of the box are used to mark and patrol the boundaries *between* religions.

Identity

Let's consider several versions of authenticity available for activation in religious practice. One kind of authenticity is continuity over time between

something in the present and in the past (Is that authentically Victorian? Is this truly biblical?), or a relative identity across space (the authentic Turkish song; the genuinely African initiation). Either something *now* is sufficiently like it was *then,* or something *here* is sufficiently like things *there*. Authenticity may also describe the relative degree of conformity between *outside* appearance and an actual *internal* veracity. On that score, Lionel Trilling calls Wordsworth's protagonist in the poem 'Michael' a first exemplar of literary authenticity (Trilling 1972:93): As he sits grieving the death of his son, he radiates nothing but grief. There is no dissimulation or distraction, no mask. He is transparent, authentic, 'truly himself'.

All of the above senses of authenticity-as-identity raise the question of the relative continuity of an object, idea or person with an original (Benjamin 1970:220). Yet even that notion of 'originality' is fluid. Raymond Williams, to wit, describes the key transition from the term 'original' as denoting a point in time from which all things arose, to the denotation of that which is *singular* – a shift that took place in the late 17th century (Williams 1983:230). Williams shows how singularity carries both temporal and spatial connotations. It marks a thing, person or event as utterly discrete, as thoroughly situated. Such notions of singularity, originality, and realness are expressions of spatial power; they found and justify 'centers' and 'peripheries' (Long 2004:92).

Authenticity as originality or as singularity supposes a need for continuity maintained across time and space by reference to singular beings and spatial centers. As a discourse, however – and to follow the familiar foucauldian argument – it presupposes rupture, a crisis of continuity overcome only with the labor of memory and language. Authenticity is a noun that only thinly veils a question or a wish.

Aura

Another vector of the fake and the authentic applied in religions is the question of sufficient likeness or, in other terms, the adequacy of mimesis (Taussig 1993). Walter Benjamin's essay, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (1970) remains the touchstone essay on this problem. The essay treats the dislocation of art objects from a denotation of situated, local things to a series of reproducible and transmissible images. Benjamin's primary data was the move from the painting to the film, but here I seek to draw an analogy

to the move from indigenous to diasporic styles of ritualization, *vis à vis* Benjamin's problematic of the aura.

In Benjamin's description, 'the presence of the original [object] is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity…The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced' (Benjamin 1970:220-221). (This is roughly what Max Weber referred to as 'authentic transmission', delivered 'by a closed chain of witnesses' – Weber 1954:206.) Benjamin's argument proceeds: With the dislocation of paintings from the sites where they were embedded, in a given church for example, to reprints, authenticity shifts from being a relatively given temporal essence to something achieved and authorized. It becomes a special effect. The crisis that may result, derives from the fact that even as authentic objects must now be authorized to achieve their effects, 'history' itself is anchored by nothing but those once-authorizing objects – objects that authorize history by virtue of their singular originality – such that history and authenticity comprise a dialectical relation. 'Historical testimony' suffers when substantive duration, or temporal authenticity, ceases to matter. When historical testimony loses value, the authority of objects (in what Benjamin calls their *cult-value*) declines as well (Benjamin 1970:221). The special effect of authenticity is all that remains, an aura that guides a sense of history, but now only as a present absent.

The *aura* of a thing, then, is its authenticity. A thing is authentic in so far as it generates an authoritative effect of duration in time, in relation to a place and moment of origin. History, as the sense of continuity in time, must rely upon the aura acquired by authorizing procedures, whether by carbon dating or by tradition; hence the danger posed to 'history' when aura is reduced to a special effect. It is this vulnerability that gives a palpable sense of loss to Benjamin's essay. History is rendered dangerously surreal, from his view, as indeed it had already become when Benjamin penned the essay in 1935. Still, the tone of irretrievable loss is not one-sided. If the mechanical reproduction of authoritative objects, based on a desire to overcome distance and hold uniqueness near, diminishes aura, it also brings a democratic 'emancipation' of the object from its original place and ritual meaning (Benjamin 1970:223-225). Ritual gains its capacity to be resignified against new diasporic horizons (Johnson 2007). It is able to generate new histories.

For Benjamin, the image's mechanical reproducibility in mass media leads to the auratic decline of its authoritative temporal force. Paradoxically, it

is at that juncture that 'the authentic' becomes fetishized as a social and historical need. The temporal authentic – the question of continuity in time – is eclipsed by the authentic artist or author – the question of an object's original, situated authorship. Authenticity from this point entails a persistent need for its persuasive effect in the social process.

There is, then, a triangular relation here linking the aura of uniqueness, the historical sense of embeddedness in time and space, and the use of objects in social practice (Benjamin 1970:223-224). When the located, ritual quality of objects loses ritual force, it may become mobile in space and re-embedded in another kind of political or ideological practice (Benjamin 1970:224). The problem of authenticity is related to the condition of exile; the copied object, detached from any single location, now meets its users in their own particular situations, reactivating the object in infinite new ways (Benjamin 1970:221). The reproduced object links and distinguishes its users. It links them in a shared orbit of practice. At the same time, it distinguishes them through distinct procedures and terms applied to the same object.

Religion, Inc.

One of the dominant terms of the mass-reproduction of the art-object is as a commodity. On this front, many scholars have extended Benjamin's insights to analyze the ways 'cultures' or 'religions' have become saleable. In *Ethnicity, Inc.,* John and Jean Comaroff point out the tension between the commonly held idea of 'cultural identity' as inalienable, the essential aura of a given society, and the plain evidence of its commodity value and merchandized production (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:22-23). Adorno's reflections on authenticity are, they argue, turned into a farce. Adorno's 1973 *The jargon of authenticity* casts authenticity as a linguistic fetish utterly detached from objects. If it once expressed genuine location in place – cultural homelands – now it is words, or jargon, that bestow the aura of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), as compensation for the loss of a real sense of history and place. In Adorno's view, just as Benjamin invoked aura when it was cast into crisis, so the existentialists' discourse of authenticity invokes its absence. Adorno casts the post-World War II jargon of authenticity as a subjective mystification, a reification of emptiness, and itself a form of alienation. Authenticity is a quixotic quest for origins when none can be found.

In the assessment of David Harvey (1990:87), 'the preoccupation with identity, with personal and collective roots, has become far more pervasive since the early 1970s because of widespread insecurity in labor markets, in technological mixes, credit systems, and the like'. Harvey's comment helps explain why today, when perusing a *Pottery barn* catalogue, consumers gain unlimited historical opportunities: There is the *Weathered wood table and file cabinet*: 'The appeal of vintage painted farmhouse furniture lies in its rustic simplicity and the subtle wear patterns created by years of use'; or the *Nostalgic diner chair*: 'American diners of the 1950s seated a steady stream of families on chairs just like ours'; or the *Vintage map*: 'This map of North America was reproduced for us from an original dated 1864, when work on the Transcontinental Railroad had just begun'. Don't forget the *Manhattan leather collection*: 'New York nightclubs of the 1930s had opulent furniture that was rich in comfort and style'. It is not only history that is regained in such purchases, but space: '*No vacancy*' *rustic sign*: 'Straight off the old highway, a weathered, timeworn sign evokes long drives across rugged country'.

This is not just authentic leather chairs for sale. As John and Jean Comaroff write, authenticity is now 'the specter that haunts the commodification of culture everywhere. If they have nothing distinctive to alienate, many rural black South Africans have come to believe, they face collective extinction' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:10). This authenticity-stress produces ethnicity in the forms of 'real' and 'fake' Bushmen (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:52, 92, 143). The authenticity market at the Religion Hall is surely no less cutthroat than at the Ethnicity Store. It is only by being recognized as an authentic religion, after all, that subaltern traditions can gain legal rights. This requires marketing work. As examples, consider the practitioners of Santería in Hialeah, Florida, who made themselves into the 'Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye', founded in 1974. This rebranding helped them win their U.S. Supreme Court case on animal sacrifice in 1993 (Palmié 1996; Johnson 2005). Similarly, Amerindian peyote users sought incorporation in certain states in 1918 by renaming their group as the Native American Church. Becoming a 'church' helped these groups gain authenticity and then legitimacy. They became 'real religions' through the adept mimicry of U.S.-style churchness (Johnson, Klassen & Sullivan 2018:4-8).

This work of multiplicity, of selective mimicry, is a kind of agency. Judith Butler describes agency as 'the double movement of being constituted in and by a signifier, where "to be constituted" means "to be compelled to cite

or repeat or mime" the signifier itself' (Butler 1993:167). But it is also to then be able to apply that citation to new acts, in what Butler calls the 'hiatus' of iterability. Similarly, William Sewell defines agency as 'the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts; the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array' (Sewell 2005:142). In so doing, one becomes 'capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed…to transform those social relations' (Sewell 2005:143). The most sophisticated analyses of agency always invoke its doubleness, the taking of a schema from one scene and transposing it in another. The agentive performance points to two sites at once: A current iteration and an 'original' elsewhere – much like fakecraft.

The trick, though, is that the agency gained in fakecraft can break in different directions. Subaltern groups use it to shape themselves into 'churches' and carve out a space in which to work. Colonial agents applied discourses of fakery – another genre of fakecraft – in order to discredit African and Afro-American religions, as is shown below.

Caribbean authentic

If the 'authentic' does well in sales, it is also ever-present in language, as an intentional adjective that always begs the question of positionality and intentionality: 'Authentic in relation to what?' In African diasporic religious communities, that question motivates much wringing of hands and internal dialogue. For if such questions are typical, even constitutive, of diasporic situations tout court, they have especially been important in the Caribbean, a polyglot, multiracial region allegedly lacking roots or enduring identity. In the history of the study and teaching of religion, after all, the Caribbean was for decades pressed into service primarily as a site of absence: A void of authentic, deep-rooted religious traditions. That void – marginal even to the categories of order/utopia/savage (Trouillot 1991) – was so-called syncretism.

In *Hamlet*, Polonius famously admonished, 'To thine own self be true'. But what would Polonius' advice have meant to Prospero's slave, Caliban, in *The tempest*, who neither enjoys the pleasure nor suffers the burden of any 'true' self at all? *Caliban* is written by Shakespeare as a synecdoche of the Caribbean, 'a freckled whelp, hag-born, not honour'd with a human shape' (Caliban Act I, Scene II). The figure of Caliban shows the Caribbean's

inauthenticity from the view of 17th-century Europe in both racial and cultural terms: The Caribbean was sinister because of primitiveness, but even more because of its promiscuous mix[1]. Any 'deep Caribbean', in the bodies of the indigenous Ciboneys, Tainos, and Caribs, succumbed to diseases delivered by the European landing. Thereafter it was all Calibans on the stage, Africans and Europeans and Asians; Black Caribs, Creole *metissages*, and *gente de color* – turtles all the way down.

Caliban is indexical of the exogenous inauthenticity of the Caribbean, both standing for it and comprising part of it. Such inauthenticity begins with the chronic lack of roots, as described by Fernando Ortiz under the neologism of 'transculturation' (Ortiz 1995:97-103, 153). Ortiz's term 'transculturation' was born of Cuba. It took account of the experiences of exile and loss, rather than long duration and deep tradition, as constitutive of Caribbean-ness[2]. One might pose transculturation and authenticity as opposed if related terms. They rub against each other. If the invocation of 'authenticity' points to a sentiment of loss (Benjamin 1970:244; Adorno 1973:9; Trilling 1972:93), transculturation hails and celebrates a distinct Caribbean singularity.

African diasporic religious communities in Brazil and the Caribbean wager claims of African authenticity, then, with high stakes in play. They must grow roots from a land seen as lacking in subsoil. Much depends on their claims' success, in terms of the reputation that attracts devotees, in the legitimacy conferred by the state, as 'heritage' or in other forms bestowing resources along with cultural capital, and, not least, in the particular African diasporic experience of religious meaning. The claims are also notoriously competitive. Articulating a tradition's 'authenticity' is a means of finding a voice and presenting a public face. But the *need* to do so, often incurs from the posture of a minority group of color in a plural society, as Chidester proposes is the case for many African religions. Subaltern groups, one might say, are

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[1] Frantz Fanon wrote of 'the Prospero complex' (Fanon 1967:33, 83, 107), citing Dominique Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of colonization* (Manonni 1964). Invoking the same founding problematic is Paget Henry's *Caliban's reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean philosophy* (Henry 2000).

[2] 'I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture' (Ortiz 1995:102).

forced to perform their authenticity, to 'emit signs' (Foucault 1979:25; Bourdieu 2000:173). Moreover, subaltern religious communities must perform authenticity in terms recognized by the state and its publics. This by necessity leads to distortion and static. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, 'experiences undergo nothing less than a *change of state* when they recognize themselves in the *public objectivity* of an already constituted discourse' (Bourdieu 1977:170; original emphasis).

This idea of distortion caused by translating a tradition into ready-made formulas was already proposed by Max Müller in 1862, albeit for quite different purposes, as Chidester (2004) reminds us. According to Chidester (2004:75-76), Müller wrote that the 'continual combustion' of language becomes bound by 'literary interference'. The context was different – in our time the 'literary interference' includes religion's commodity-value, which is material as much as literary, economic, or linguistic – but his broader point on the risks of translation still stands.

While religions of the African diaspora have had to perform the authentic to find and defend a place (legal, spatial, social) whatsoever against accusations of shallow mimicry and *mélange* – of being mere derivative and syncretic copies – colonial religions deployed discourses of the real and the fake to patrol, police, and purify their own boundaries. Christianity did so, in part, by exiling demon possession from Europe to Africa and the African Americas.

III. Fakecraft and inter-religious boundaries:
Or, how Christianity cleansed its soul

Fakecraft works internally by establishing a tradition's parameter of the given and the unknown, and the discursive terms of debate about the inchoate remainder at the center of every ritual event. Afro-American traditions have a developed internal fakecraft. Internal discourses of the real and the fake are part of the lifeblood of Candomblé, Umbanda, Santería, Palo Monte, Vodou, Garifuna, and other communities. As mentioned above, the objects of debate are often related to the authenticity of spirit possession. In 1938, Zora Neale Hurston wrote of the abundant fakecraft in Haiti, in which people spoke in the idiom of being possessed – *Parlay cheval ou* ('Tell my horse') – in order to

'express their resentment general and particular' (Hurston [1938] 2009:221). The dancer Katherine Dunham (1969) describes a U.S. Marine, Doc Reeser, who remained in Haiti after the occupation, who 'set himself up' as a horse of the Vodou deity (*lwa*) Guedé, governor of the dead and the cemetery, and performed a 'seeming state of trance'. 'It was convenient for Doc because he could drink as much clairin – raw white rum – as he wished and indulge in certain extravagances of behavior and obscenities which most of the gods of the pantheon would not tolerate in their mounts' (Dunham 1969:19). Cuban santeros distinguish *santos*, the legitimate presence of possessing saints (orichas), from *santicos*, 'little saints', here meaning fakes (Wirtz 2007:124). Jim Wafer describes false trance as a familiar phenomenon in Brazilian candomblé, known as *equê*, 'a type of theater' (Wafer 1991:34). Many more examples of internal fakecraft in the Afro-American traditions could be cited.

Without any central authority or canon, authenticity is an ongoing social process. Yet there is an ample consensus about what to disagree *about*: Spirit possession, roots, Africanness, commodification, respect, hierarchy, orthopraxy, or the efficacy of a given ritual event. The shared terms of fakecraft and debate form and constitute the religious community. Note what the terms are mostly *not* about in this set of traditions: Belief, the soul, sincerity, institutional authority, the afterlife, or the text. If every tradition applies discourses of the fake and the real, they apply that hinge to different sets of concerns – to different doors and windows, so to say. To continue the metaphor, the doors and windows open out to religious worlds pocked by distinct landscapes of value, aspiration, and healing. These varying notions of the fake and the authentic also constitute and maintain boundaries between religions.

Christian fakecraft

How has fakecraft been applied to making and maintaining boundaries *between* religions? The ways early modern European Christians wrote about their own fakecraft were consequential for African and Afro-American religions. Elsewhere I have given close attention to the transfer of European ideas of demonic possession to the idea of Africans as possessable and enslavable (Johnson 2011). Here, the early modern English and French Christian fakecraft are discussed, in order to better understand the terms in which they first read

and classified African religions in relation to possession, and African persons in relation to their 'porousness' or permeability (Taylor 2007).

If the possibility of sham was integral to the making of the category of 'religion' whatsoever, the problem of deciphering internal spiritual states was a key part of the spread of Christianity in particular. What did the Apostle Paul mean in Galatians 2:20, when he wrote, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'? The sentence seems to acknowledge multiple possible interior guides. At the very least two agents in one body are named: A self and another being. Chidester shows how the control over (bad) spirits, as well as the difficulties of working out doctrines of flesh and spirit, were central issues in the founding and expansion of the early church (Chidester 2000:19-22). Indeed, early texts stabilizing and disseminating the term 'religio', like Augustine's *Of true religion*, made the question of spirits plain. Augustine works out 'true' religion not only *vis à vis* Manichaeism – his stated target – but also in relation to the ambiguity of interpreting human internal states – 'crowds of phantasms', and 'the things which deceive dreamers and madmen' (Augustine 1953:50, 258).

The issue of spirits and internal discernment recurred. St Ignatius, writing between 1522-1524, was shaken to his core by the challenge of recognizing the diabolical spirits and the angelic spirits at work in his own body. In *Rules for the discernment of spirits*, he described the capacity of the evil spirit for duplicity: To console, and even to disguise itself as an angel of light (Ignatius of Loyola 2000:119). This is an example of divine fakecraft, and there are many others. Jean Bodin's *Démonomanie* (1580) observed that ones who write to protect those accused of being possessed by Satan are *themselves* probably possessed. Yet, as his enemies noted, that statement itself could have been ventriloquized to throw even careful observers off-track. Bodin, a public alarmist against demonic possession, was himself suspected of witchcraft, and his home searched for incriminating objects on 3 June 1587. As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, 'If Satan can counterfeit counterfeiting, there can be no definitive confession, and the prospect opens to an infinite regress of disclosure and uncertainty' (Greenblatt in Almond 2004:12). Thus, Milton's *Paradise lost* has Satan impersonating a good angel in the world, and indeed, the story is a constant confusion of spirits in matter (Milton 1667).

The radical uncertainty inspired fear. The porous self could always be taken over and possessed (Taylor 2007:35-36). It also motivated the refining of diagnostic tools and terms. Cotton Mather wrote that, in one case,

'enchantment' by evil spirits seemed to be growing very far towards an actual 'possession' (Mather 1684:9). 'Possession' and 'obsession' were distinguished during the same period. It was during the 17th century, argues Ernst Benz (1972), that the beatific versus demonic notions of possession were firmly divided, *Ergriffenheit/Bessenheit* (*pneuma/daimon*). Through the refinement of terms interpreting and evaluating the body's surface, true possession was distinguished from the counterfeit. The problem of spirits in Christianity peaked in the 17th century (Thomas 1971; Gibson 1999; Caciola 2003; Sluhovsky 2007; Ferber 2013). During that period, debates about possession and fakery circulated widely in so-called 'possession pamphlets', which established a clearly delineated demonic paradigm, script and template (De Certeau 2000:21).

According to that script, the problem of fake versus real possession was central. Being *legitimately* possessed was not merely a subjective experience. It had to properly persuade. Through the refinement of terms and techniques to determine its authentic presence, or not, possession as a phenomenological object was interpolated from the beginning through the prospect of the counterfeit. Indeed, fakery had to be part of its discourse, not least because possession required matching thoroughly underdetermined symptoms whose source was finally unverifiable against a scale of judgment. For Ignatius of Loyola, it was only by the closest observation of the after-effects of spirits' comings and goings in his own soul that it could be determined whether the visitation had been evil or good[3]. For Puritans, reading possession against scripture was the proof-test. Thus the convicted Puritan pastor, Darrell, in his pamphlet defense of the 'genuine' possession of William Sommers, concedes after his long summation: 'It followeth not that he is possesst, because he is not counterfeyte, and this will we do out of the Scriptures, for *by them only* can we discern, and know when one is possessed'

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[3] Fifth Rule, *Greater discernment of spirits*: We ought to note well the course of the thoughts, and if the beginning, middle and end is all good, inclined to all good, it is a sign of the good Angel; but if in the course of the thoughts which he brings it ends in something bad, of a distracting tendency, or less good than what the soul had previously proposed to do, or if it weakens it or disquiets or disturbs the soul, taking away its peace, tranquility and quiet, which it had before, it is a clear sign that it proceeds from the evil spirit, enemy of our profit and eternal salvation (Ignatius of Loyola 2000:65).

(Darrell 1599, image 31; emphasis added)[4]. In Catholic France, by contrast, it was typically the number and status of witnesses, the 'large number of Gens d'honneur and de piété', that defined and justified approved possession events (Aubin 1693:51). Multiple codes for authorizing authentic versus fake possessions were in play, and in competition.

The most frequent method of establishing legitimate possession, though, and which crossed sectarian bounds, was by reading the surface of the victim's body to verify a set of symptoms. Was the patient diseased, or fraudulent? (Schmidt 1998:30). How to know if they were truly possessed? The diagnoses focused especially on the skin, eyes, and mouth. Verification procedures were onerous, including the burning of flesh, or presenting the embodied demon with fake holy objects, in order to gauge the bodily response. Only a fake demon would offer a visceral reply to a fake holy object, or flinch at burned skin. Through such physical tests, often spectacularly public, the cues for an authentic possession became widely known. They included a standard set of symptoms marking the body's perimeter. Symptoms were concentrated on the border dividing interior from exterior; the visceral drama of the body marked and defined the just-visible edges of the hidden soul.

In a series of well-documented examples from England, for example, the skin and the mouth were key *foci* of interpretation. The skin would sometimes turn black in places (Darrell 1599) or reveal a moving lump just beneath its surface. A captive spirit's force within sometimes pressed outward to reveal the outline of a cross on the skin, as in the case of Joyce Dovey (Dalton 1646:3). The skin's surface was often unusually sweaty (Barrow 1664), or emitted a foul odor (Hooper, Hooper, Sky, Eglestone, Westgarth & Egleston 1641), or felt cold to the touch (Barrow 1664; Darrell 1599). In some cases, the evidence for true demon possession lay in the fact that the skin neither bled when pierced nor burned when held to the fire (Darrell 1599; Dalton 1646).

Torture was important in determining authentic possession, because it established deviance from 'normal' skin's reaction to burning and piercing. As to the mouth of the authentically possessed, it foamed (Hooper *et al.* 1641),

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4   The statement is also noteworthy because it expands our purview from merely the really possessed and the fakers, to include those who truly believe they are possessed but who are misguided. They are credible persons, but not credibly possessed persons.

produced bizarre variations in voice, or was incapable of emitting speech whatsoever, remaining mute (Kirby 1693). The mouth of the truly possessed could make sounds without moving the lips, perfectly ventriloquized (Darrell 1599), but it could *not* say certain words at all – like 'Christ', in the tale of Thomas Sawdie, instead producing animal sounds liking neighing, or the croaking of a frog (Anonymous 1664; Barrow 1664). The loss of humanness, as indicated by convincing animal sounds, was key to determining a demon's occupation of the body.

Striking on this score were observations of the tongue in the mouth of the possessed: The tongue was always very large or could be doubled (Barrow 1664); sometimes hanging out (Kirby 1693), sometimes immovably fixed inside, or in other cases completely retractable into the throat (Darrell 1599; Kirby 1693), like the tongue of a frog or eel. There were additional physical signs that traced the line of the internal and external, like those of bodily waste or clothing: Urine containing black dust and rags of brown paper (Anonymous 1664), for example, or the unexpected removal or tearing of clothes (Barrow 1664; Anonymous 1664).

Next, genuine possession was often reported to have begun after physical contact with a mysterious figure. Several cases described an exchange with a man in black offering money (Anonymous 1664:5; Kirby 1693). One case included an allegedly demonic figure who posed as a Master of Arts offering quick and easy comprehension of difficult topics, and admission to the University of Padua (Dalton 1646:5). Other possession narratives described contact with persons or animals of a specific color, usually black, increasingly the patina of possession *par excellence* – 'an ugly black man with shoulders higher than his head' (Thomas 1971:480) – or, also common, as a black dog (Kirby 1693).

The proper manifestation of bodily codes was key to verifying real possession, but bodily comportment after a given episode of exorcism was often remarked in case descriptions. Following the cessation of demonic signs, true victims appeared reliably calm, rational, reverent, and *self*-possessed: After the spirits that had afflicted him were cast out, observers described Thomas Sawdie as 'demeaning himself soberly and modestly' (Anonymous 1664:14). Following the departure of a fifth spirit, the possessed boy in Barrow's account 'sat very still, with a very sober countenance, lifting up his hands and eyes, as though he had a matter of praise on his mind' (Barrow 1664:16).

Despite the detailed criteria for the physical verification of real possession, exorcists were aware that many patients exhibited symptoms that merely appeared demonic, but were not, and that the discernment of true fakes was key to their own reputation and status: One exorcist recounted that,

> the Doctor told him, he could take him up into his Chamber, and shew him the appearances of Spirits: I desired the Doctor he would do so, and I would stay-below; but, to put me off, he called for a Latine Bible, and read some words in Latine to him; with that he told me, that thereby he knew he [the patient] *dissembled*, because he did not roar as at other times, when the word God is read in Latine (Barrow 1664:12; emphasis added).

The possibility of sham was integral to discernment, and this seems to have added a quality of theater and spectacle to the entire process. Accounts of discernment circulated widely, as a class of popular literature called 'possession pamphlets' (Gibson 1999; 2015; Almond 2004). Such pamphlets were often penned by exorcists, who invoked accusations of fraud precisely to defend against them. They countered with detailed descriptions of their own evidence, and lists of named witnesses to the possessions and exorcisms. The circulated stories' hearsay status only added to their value, as revealed gossip. James Dalton's letter to his brother on 14 December 1646 offers a glimpse of how this market worked. In reference to the case of Joyce Dovey he wrote, 'It is the property of humane nature to desire newes' (Dalton 1646:1), even if that news is 'received at the second or third hand' ('yet by such persons, as I nothing doubt the truth of').

If the purpose of the pamphlets was in many cases a defense against accusations of fabrication, such defenses merely opened further questions: Who, exactly, was taken to be dissimulated: The victim? The exorcist? The pamphlet's author? The publisher? The devil? Accusations of fraud and fakery were lodged against all of the above, and legal claims levied against all but the devil himself. For Protestants especially, exorcists were something like witches themselves, frauds applying the same kind of magic as the afflicted (Thomas 1971:478, 485). There were charges levied against simulating victims, as well against fraudulent exorcists accused of seeking to enhance their own reputations (Thomas 1971:482-483, 492). Puritan pastor John Darrell was convicted of training his patients to *appear* possessed, in order to best

showcase his power over demons. The printer of the pamphlet defending Darrell's dramatic dispossession of Thomas Darling was likewise imprisoned for confirming and amplifying such theatrics with his pen (Thomas 1971:483-484).

Purification: Controlling possession

When the Anglican Church dismissed possession whatsoever, in 1604 (Canon 72), with the position that the biblical 'age of miracles' was past, accusations of fakery still circulated widely, now typically turned against 'sect' Protestants, especially Puritans and Quakers. The proliferation and relative standardization of the possession narrative made particular cases dubious even to those who in principle accepted their veracity. Thus did the Catholic Church begin to regulate and standardize possession and exorcism techniques in the Roman Rite of 1618. The star exorcist of the Loudun possession spectacle, Father Surin, was withdrawn and reprimanded by the Jesuit superior general in 1636 for 'giving himself over to spiritual inventions' (De Certeau 2000:212).

While different branches of the Christian church restricted and rationalized possession, states did too. In the wake of the massive possession cases at Aix-en-Provance, Loudun, and Louviers in France, official support – including payment of a royal pension to its enactors – for possessing spectacles waned after 1634. Spirits continued to be manifested in British North America for at least another half-century, most famously that of Salem (Boyer & Nissenbaum 1974), and indeed they continued perforce everywhere, but never with the same public weight as before. As a spectacle of the public sphere, *démonomanie* – to take Jean Bodin's title of 1580 – was losing its sponsors and its audience.

The popularity of possession cases had grown by ricocheting between performance, representation, repression, and defense. Possession as a phenomenological object was interpolated through the foil of its testing and the prospect of counterfeit. It was in light of this insurmountable indeterminacy, Foucault suggested, that the progressing medicalization of demonology engendered a novel hermeneutics of the self. Determining who, and what, possesses you, required an articulated system of interior life (Foucault [1962] 1999:76). Here we near the inaugural moment of the 'modern' individual, where Descartes began his 1641 *Meditations* with the question of his own possession: 'There is some unidentified deceiver…who is

dedicated to deceiving me constantly. Therefore, it is indubitable that I also exist, if he deceives me' (Descartes 1641:24). Alongside the standard Cartesian quip, 'I think therefore I am', we must take account of this other Cartesian line of thought: 'I may be *deceived*, therefore I am'.

Into Africa

Outside of Europe, on new colonial frontiers, possession was everywhere found and floridly described, and this was especially true in Africa and the Americas (e.g. De Léry [1578] 1990; De Marees [1602] 1987). The transfer and translation of European demon possession to spirit possession phenomena encountered on faraway shores was a complex operation of colonial semiotics. It required pivots or hinges to link otherwise disparate phenomena of indigenous Amerindian or African ritual procedures to familiar if polemically disparaged rites in Europe. One way the linkage and transfer were made was through the codes of color. As mentioned above, European demonic events were in various ways narratively coded as 'black'. Many famous possession cases, widely circulated in Great Britain, described an exchange with a man in black, offering money (cf. the Thomas Sawdie case, Anonymous 1664; Kirby 1693). Others described contact with persons or animals, usually black, the patina of possession *par excellence*. In fact, the color black was central to persuasive possession narratives: The tongue turned black (Aubin 1693:79), urine turned black, and the skin turned black. The skin would turn black in places (Darrell 1599). Black dust and rags are named, along with the sight of a black dog, a black bird (Baddeley 1622:50, 65), or contact with a man in black, a black man or black child. In British America, Increase Mather documented that many in the Morse family, in Newberry, Massachusetts, reported seeing a 'Blackmore Child' while hearing spirit voices (Mather 1684:153-154). In Flanders, 1649, Antoinette Bourignon witnessed 32 cloistered girls with 'a great number of little black children with wings' flying around their heads, a sure sign of their compact with the devil (Hale 1693:24).

Demonic blackness as a mark of possession was simultaneously discerned on the west coast of Africa, sometimes in non-human signs and ciphers, sometimes in the skin-color of Africans themselves. Pieter de Marees' 1602 description of West Africa described dancing, drumming, and other possession-like 'antics', during which a black dog appeared (De Marees [1602]

1987:66, 71), recapitulating a standard prop of the European *mis-en-scene*[5]. The French cartographer, Reynaud Des Marchais' account repeats the appearance of the black dog by the 'fetich tree'. He asserted that the Marabous tell the people that this is their God (who is black) (Labat 1730:341).

Describing possession required attending to possession's components – a proper story with key elements for recounting and dissemination and comparison. That is to say, possession was scripted. As script, it was mobile and could be carried around the world to match local ritual action to its conventions. It could also be fantasized and imposed, according to prismatic conventions that governed not just ways of writing, but even ways of seeing.

By the mid-18th century, according to some of the earliest proto-anthropological texts that generated a vocabulary for comparative religion, such as Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1759) or Charles de Brosses' *Du culte des dieux fétiches* ([1760] 1970), possession had become a freestanding, objective morphological class that could be applied to the purpose of advancing comparisons of rituals and beliefs across groups, and yoked to the task of defining religion as such. These proto-anthropological descriptions usually marked the alterity of African practices. It is equally important, though, to recall possession's use as a hinge with which others' ritual practices were first named real religions whatsoever, by being routinely classed as similar to Christian ritual practice – especially via Protestant-Catholic polemics on the status of magic and ritual – and so drawn into a comparative field. The chief merchant of the Dutch West Indies Company, Willem Bosman, summed up this translation in describing the port of Ouidah in West Africa: 'To conclude the Subject of their Religion, I must add, that they have a sort of Idea of Hell, the Divel, and the Apparition of Spirits. And their Notions, concerning these, are not very different from those of some People amongst us' (Bosman 1705:384), or elsewhere: Their priests exorcise demons 'like a Pope' (Bosman 1705:123). Noteworthy is how Bosman's discovery of African 'religion' depends first of all on locating its likeness with European practices. He found a resemblance in their overlapping repertoires of spirits, demons, apparitions, and exorcisms. If possession signaled Africa's ultimate difference (e.g. Atkins 1735:34), spirit possession also provided a

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[5]   Also the color *black*: '[T]hey say their God is as black as they are, and is not good…We answered that our God is as white as we are, is good, and gives us many blessings' (De Marees [1602] 1987:72).

shared intersubjective domain of truth. Des Marchais' report, another key text used in De Brosses' classic, stated that

> the inhabitants of the Gold Coast say that their God is black, and their Marabouts assure that he often appears at the foot of the fetish-tree in the figure of a great black dog. They have learned from the whites that this great black dog is called the devil; one needs but say that name before them and add some imprecation such as 'may the devil take you and ring your neck', to make them tremble and faint (Labat 1730:341)[6].

Texts like Bosman's and Des Marchais' serve as a reminder of how comparative categories misrecognize and distort, even as they are necessary to the constitution of meta-frames like 'religion' whatsoever.

I've described the emergence of a possession script that was applied as a hinge term for the colonization of the Americas and the African coast. 'Possession' as a comparative category was forged at the crossroads of early modern demonology, the proto-anthropological colonial descriptions of the ritual practices of 'others' – above all Africans and Afro-Americans – and, not least, the prospect of the fake. West European Christian fakecraft produced a purified occidental idea of the rational individual, on the one hand, and possessed Africa, on the other. The two projects were closely bound up together.

IV. Conclusion: Fake Africa

From the early modern period forward, 'religion' was increasingly defined in relation to Africa, as Chidester (1996; 2014) has vividly described it. One of the oft-registered features of African religions was 'spirit possession'. The trope of the possessed person was transferred from European to African shores

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[6]   'Les habitans de la côte d'Or dissent que leur Dieu est noir, et leurs Marabous assurent qu'il leur apparoît souvent au pied de l'arbre des Fetiches sous la figure d'un grand chien noir. Ils ont appris des blancs que ce grand chien noir s'appelle le Diable; il ne faut que prononcer ce nom devant eux et y joindre quelque imprécation, comme le diable t'emporte et te torde le col, pour les faire trembler et tomber en défaillance'.

by around the year 1700. The geographic shift marked the move toward Africa, and then the African Americas, as the possessed places *par excellence*. The extension of the possession script to colonial shores created further problems of distinguishing between real and fake, between authentic possession and its fraudulent enactments.

Western travelers' descriptions of African phenomena of spirit possession were almost always accompanied by the question of authenticity. As European Christians were purified, or subjected to rationalized procedures of spirit-presence, the profile of allegedly permeable African persons only became clearer. S/he was analogous to 'fetish-gold', composed of unknown and potentially false contents (Pietz 1988). The guts of persons, like the value of metals, could only be measured through the technology of outer signs – by scales and filters – and, of course, through discourse about the fake[7].

Even though possession was taken to be bizarre, dangerous, primitive, and ultimately 'false' as a religious practice, observers of Africa also detected true and untrue falsehoods, real and faked fakery. The distinction between them lay in the attribution of intent: Intentional chicanery versus unknowing error. The confusion stemmed in part from the problem of the fetish, again linking economic considerations (gold of unknown internal content; the fetish as an object used to seal business deals; the fetish as a form of property – Atkins 1735:84); aesthetic ones ('fetishing' women – Atkins 1735:61)[8], and 'religious' ones – random objects or sites attributed with special powers, both personal and public (Pietz 1988).

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[7] De Marees' 1602 description of the Gold Coast already closely allies false gold, false religion, and untrustworthy business partners: 'We once imprisoned a Black or Negro in the Ship to atone for bringing false Gold. Every morning he took a Tub of water, washed his face in it, then scooped up handfuls of water and threw them over his head, saying many words to himself, spitting in the water and doing a lot of Monkey-buffoonery. We asked him why he did this. He answered that he was praying to his god that it might rain and that his people might find much Gold, so that they would come to ransom him and he might soon go home' (De Marees [1602] 1987:73).

[8] Atkins reports that the women in Sierra Leone, for example, love fetishing, 'setting themselves out to attract the good Graces of the Men' (Atkins 1735:61; cf. 88, 95); and that, at Cape Apollonia, the Natives are 'better fetished than their Neighbours' (Atkins 1735:73).

Paul Christopher Johnson

Charles de Brosses' 1760 work carried extraordinary influence for the comparative study of religion. De Brosses, crucially, located spirit possession as closely proximate to fetishism and dubiously permeable personhood. For De Brosses, fetishism became a stage in universal human progress, presaging the well-known narratives of Comte and then Tylor. Yet in this universal progress of necessary deceptions, Africa was exemplary. Within Africa, it was the serpent cult at the slave port of Ouidah that represented fetishism *par excellence*. It was here that De Brosses described the faking of possession ('hysterical vapours') by women otherwise under the control of men (De Brosses [1760] 1970:26). His gloss, derived from Bosman's description, reads as follows:

> He being a Stranger to the Religion of this Country, had a Wife of this Nation, which fell Mad and pretended to be seized by the Serpent: But he instead of sending her to the Snake-house, clapt her in Irons; which so enraged this She-Devil…that she privately accused her Husband to the Priests; who not willing to make any publick Attempts on him, because he was a *Gold*-Coast *Negroe* who differed from them in Religion; yet secretly Poison'd him (De Brosses [1760] 1970:375-376).

What is worth noting here is that Bosman goes well beyond the fakery of possession to note the imposture of the woman – thus, faked fakery – and even the presence of those who *know* that 'this is all nothing but a pure Cheat' (De Brosses [1760] 1970:375) but act otherwise. Thus Bosman gives us nothing less than Africans performing *faked belief in faked fakery*. This is offered here as an apposite concluding example of how Europe honed its 'possessive individualism' (MacPherson 1962) over against its 'discovery' of African spirit possession and imagined fickle, porous persons.

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Marcel Mauss's classic 1938 essay, *Une catégorie de l'esprit humaine: La notion de personne celle de 'moi'* (*The notion of the person* Mauss [1938] 1985), suggests a sequence in which the *personnage*, a traditional role that

possesses a tribe-member[9] then (after detours to China and India), yields to the legal category of the *persona* or citizen (as in Rome), and then to the Christian 'person' – a being combining both civil status and interiorized conscience. His story's protagonist is the human spirit itself, moving from the so-called primitive to the citizen, to the Christian person, and finally the psychological being, a 'self' with metaphysical and moral value; a body inhabited by a bounded, buffered soul. Mauss locates himself and his readers among the heirs and protectors of this special heritage: 'Nous avons des grands biens à défendre. Avec nous peut disparaître l'Idée' (*We have great possessions to defend. With us the idea could disappear*). In this fable, human consciousness ends its journey magically evacuated of social and material relations and possessed of *the Idea*[10] – powerful fakecraft indeed.

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[9] Mauss characterizes the *personnage* as including ecstatic 'danse et possession'. The English translation adds the adjective, *demoniacal*, hence *demoniacal possession*, but for Mauss that qualifier was not necessary in the original.

[10] The original French has 'Idea' capitalized (cf. Mauss 1938:281).

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Paul Christopher Johnson
Department of Afroamerican and African Studies
Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
paulcjoh@umich.edu