

Afterword

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Afterword: porosity, corporeality and the divine

Focusing on porosity, embodiment and the relationship to the divine highlights the wider pertinence of the concept of dividual personhood. The dividual has conventionally been opposed to the individual as an alternative conceptualisation of personhood (e.g. Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988) or thing (e.g. Klee 1922; Deleuze 1986). Although this is widely acknowledged as a heuristic, the literature repeatedly reifies it, treating different cultural regions and/or historical periods as essentially dividualist or individualist. However, religious experiences, ideals, performances and theologies highlight the significance of non-individualist orientations in diverse times and places, including those archetypally associated with the individual.

Our articles, stressing the links between human relationships to the divine and porous corporeal being, focus on cultural ideals of openness to human or non-human forces and substances and the interplay of dividual and individual being. In such contexts, the person is often conceived as characterised by bodily, including sensory and emotional, openness. This may connote volition, as when the young woman in *Aditya Malik's* account of possession opens herself to a goddess's visitation, or desire such as when the viewers of crucifixion performances, described in *Jutta Vinzent's* contribution, expose themselves to the art work, or embodied intersubjective porosity as described in *Harry Maier's* analysis of the communication between the apostle Paul and his associate via a slave. The question of the extent of volition is raised by the different accounts of possession that are found in ancient Greek sources, as *Esther Eidinow* shows. By contrast, we encounter also widespread belief in vulnerability to forces like the evil eye. Therefore active and passive openness may co-exist, as in *Christine Dureau's* account of Methodist missionaries' simultaneous solicitation of, and surrender to, the Holy Spirit. As these examples suggest, porosity can include intersubjective, divine, experiential, cultural, aesthetic and emotional dimensions. It can involve a host of intercommunicative, interpenetrating forces that result in the emergence and constitution of in/dividuals, as well as their unmaking and remaking.

These understandings challenge the typical markers of modernity as characterised by, even dependent upon, the pre-eminent ethical value of the bounded autonomous individual who, while enmeshed in social relationships, participates in them as a single unit. As these articles demonstrate, not only do we need to consider these dynamics in themselves, but also the ways in which they

have been presented and the power of their contextualisation. While Christianity has been widely associated with the emergence of this putatively modern person (e.g. Mauss 1985[1938]; Weber 2001[1930]; Dumont 1985), the three contributions on Christianity in this section, ranging from the religion's earliest days, through high imperialism to contemporary art works (Maier, Dureau, J Vinzent), suggest a historical trajectory of simultaneous in/dividuality. Eidinow's article raises the range of scholarly explanations, which, over time, have been put forward to explain the Pythia's experience of possession, and which can be seen to reflect contemporary concerns about women's social role. And, as Malik demonstrates, modern subjectivities can be profoundly resistant to colonialist and progressivist associations between being modern and being individual.

Indeed, the religious domain shows that surrendering self-containment – in possession, altered states of consciousness, responses to sacred imagery – is equally characteristic of the modern person. It is easy to relegate South Asian spirit possession to some kind of premodern remnant, for example, but it is crucial to recognise that such practices are prevalent in modern conditions and express contemporary forms of religion. Such practices are not different in kind to the effects on viewers aimed at by crucifixion performances or Methodist emotionality in an empire that proudly celebrated its modernity. Similarly, when we contemplate our futures, is our sense of the limits of our own agency and vulnerability to unseen forces and events so different from that felt by ancient Greek men and women? Acknowledging facets of personhood otherwise ignored or misrepresented in modernity's master narrative of the emergence of the sovereign subject as modern person, challenges not only the idea that moderns are definitively individuals but also presumptions that the modern West alone has claim to the idea of the individual: a dividual approach breaks this cultural script and unmasks its political and ideological power to privilege one cultural formulation over others.

Porosity suggests the possibility of constantly shifting modes of being, of openness to others, to the divine, to things. For example, Harry Maier's article deals with a New Testament text which understands porosity as a quality of relationships between God, humans, people and the natural world as well as material objects. Additionally, it conceives of correlative interpenetrating relationships entailed in various forms of institutionalised sociality such as between masters and slaves. Paul is simultaneously slave, father, son. The experience of oracular consultation, whether as prophet or consultant, similarly institutionalised porosity, demanding acceptance of the presence of supernatural forces within one's life. Greek literary descriptions of these events suggest that they, too, appreciated the resulting intersubjectivity, and the ambiguous status of personhood, moving between dividual and individual. A person who opens herself to becoming a

medium of a deity, as in Malik's article, may be simultaneously divine and human or move between the two states. Similarly, the artists who perform a Crucifixion do not merely represent the crucified Jesus as, for example, in paintings of the Crucifixion, but are the crucified one because they themselves embody it. But this also delimits their dividuality: ultimately, they either substitute their body with that of an animal or stop the performance in order not to die. In other words, the artist moves between dividual and individual personhood. Similarly, Methodist missionaries oscillated between individualist and dividualist modes, promoting individualism and welcoming emotional intersubjectivity and the Holy Spirit's bodily-spiritual penetration.

The performances and collective experiences outlined in these examples highlight the affective, transcendent sense of divinely-inspired openness of religious being. They suggest that porosity and corporeality are profoundly co-constituent, insofar as the body offers the 'route of entry' for outside influences. Here, we include emotions, bodies, roles, personae and responses to places or locales which render bodily being as intersubjective, inter-physical processes. These accounts aim not only to write about material being, but also to explore, in turn, how cultural scripts, patterns of memorialisation, narrativise the body. The embodied dividual can be refracted, given to possession, gifted, immersed in the collective, corporeally redefined, spread out, while remaining an individual under negotiation and construction.

The literature on the dividual stresses embodiment, but often in a paradoxically disembodied, immaterial, abstract manner. In Strathern's work, for example, the dividual is constituted out of the totality of relationships to others as expressed and conveyed through bodily fluids and food, itself a transformation of embodied work. Yet the sheer physicality of these exchanges is strangely missing from her account. By contrast, our contributions suggest something much more immediate. Maier's article looks at embodiment as a gift to others. Eidinow's contribution emphasises how the process of possession may also have been explicitly corporeal, involving changes in voice and bodily state, perhaps also accompanied by pain, with the possessed person thrown into an alternate state of embodied consciousness.

Emotional states often seem central to these dividual – divine relationships. Oracular consultations occur at moments of profound uncertainty, even crisis: they demonstrate clearly how individuals have the potential literally to become new in a reinvented universe. Methodist missionaries' accounts of suffering provoke emotional responses, creating an intersubjective oneness with readers who are swept along by an imaginative empathy in which the missionaries' experience becomes their own. Crucifixion performances depend on a similar sympathy, aiming at an emotional, bodily resonance in the viewer.

The emotional intensity described above can include surrendering the control that is ideally a constituent of the modern person, undermining the problematic binary chain of West – rest; individual – dividual (self-control – lack of self-control; rational – irrational). Notions of the divine since at least the Enlightenment have measured and normalised human divine relationships in terms of ontological otherness; noumenal beings are other than human, dwell in alternate realms, are beyond the natural and are subject to rational dismissal; humans are of the real world, the world of nature and the empirically verifiable. The concept of dividuality undermines this strong division, highlighting understandings of the divine as entangled with/in the human and the cultural, capable of penetrating, even making, individuals and selves.

Aesthetic forms offer powerful modes for achieving intersubjectivity. Viewing art aims at a fluid divide between the self and the art object; with religious art, the object has the potential for spiritual reconstitution. In ‘playing’ the divine or performing divine scripts (J. Vinzent, Malik), the self ‘becomes’ divine, embodying it for the moment of performance and enacted identity. Shared cultural narratives of possession or oracular consultation both expressed and shaped the experience of intersubjectivity.

For scholars like Strathern, the concept of the dividual challenges claims that particular forms of relationality necessarily express stratification; indeed, some forms of dividualism can be interpreted as egalitarian modes of personhood: the dividual implying that all of its constituent parts are of equal value. By contrast, the concept of the individual, as Jutta Vinzent puts it, favours inequality, because it involves eclipsing, suppressing or encompassing parts for a unity, therefore producing hierarchies. This is not to suggest a blunt binary: porous religious embodiment can be horizontally inclusive, directed towards sociality, or vertically hierarchical, as when it is oriented towards deities. Sometimes it is almost coercive. Paul rhetorically obliges his readers through his evocation of kin and emotive relationship; the goddess *possesses* her avatar.

Ritual and performance thus potentially dislocate and relocate the individual. The self who is not/divine is in/dividual even as the god is in/dividual by virtue of their simultaneous unique identity and unified relationships with other agents. Thus, Maier conceives of Paul as inhabiting a divine spirit, while the same spirit resides in others. Eidinow evokes the ritual of oracular consultation as an embodied process, marked by a series of ritualised actions, which begin with preparations for travel to a sanctuary. Jutta Vinzent considers contemporary Christian iconography whose objective is to establish a relationship between the viewer and the divine. In Dureau’s account, Methodist missionaries ideally approached the divine by accepting suffering in emulation of Calvary and emblematic of the need to transcend the self by gifting life experience in inadequate recompense for the gift of salvation.

Porosity, corporeality and relationships to the divine are thus intertwined. What does it mean to leave ‘myself’ behind and be open to other forces? Is porosity necessary to transcendence, which calls for the impossible to enter the realm of the possible? The sacred world is one of interpenetration, of openness, of the possibility of being within another. Historically, scholars have found this difficult to understand or accept with regard to the Pythia. Paul feels his heart and gives it to Onesimus who carries it within him. Such doubled being often entails empathic pain, as in the Methodist missionaries’ shared accounts of the sublime anguish of child loss. In performance art, the nature of this empathy is ambiguous. The pain of the crucified affects the viewer – *you feel what you see* – but can I, as artist or onlooker, embody Christ?

Gifts such as Paul’s leave deep traces, or perhaps wounds that paradoxically relieve profound pain, carving out meaning in a world occupied by imperfect bodies, slaves, masters, prisons, God. The emulation of a likeness again represents an opening, one that shares in a being or self which is, however, incessantly under construction. One *is* this and one *is* that. These are neither mere roles, nor acting nor mere representations, but the act of profoundly *being* something. The corporeality of the person is marked by emotion, fragility, and uncertainty, seeking solid ground within the disappearing horizon of time and existence. A pervasiveness of *being* permeates the body of God and the woman who is Devi, the goddess. A person surpasses herself or himself by being ‘possessed’, which itself is an act of surrender that involves fervently believing in the possibility of being open to the unknown. We know so few of the Pythiae by name.

Dividuality, in conclusion, points toward open-ended, processual realities that exceed single definitions, cultural performances or scripts. It points toward dynamic lived individuality under permanent construction and in perpetual flux. To argue that under such conditions there are no individuals but only roles and cultural scripts is not only to run roughshod over the immense diversity of human experiences, understandings and histories, but also to suppress aspects of the modern self, which is similarly in/dividual under its own particular cultural and social conditions.

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