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Challenging personhood: the subject and viewer of contemporary crucifixion iconography

1 Introduction

Vanessa Beecroft's *Black Christ* (2006) is a relatively large digital c-print (230 x 180 cm) of a black Sudanese teenage boy (Fig. 1, see appendix). At first sight, it represents exactly this: a black teenage boy. However, is this really the case? The title hints at the representation of something else and the body's pose confirms that this is not simply a photograph of a boy, but a representation of the crucified Christ. Such iconography brings into question two issues: first, as a photograph, it presents (rather than represents) corporeality of a boy who is not, as in painted or sculpted crucifixions scenes, an imagined figure and thus seemingly removed from the reality of a human being's fleshly body as a model for the representation of Jesus Christ. Second, the art work's title and the body's pose assume an art object that brings into consideration spiritual perception. In other words, one may ask: Is this photograph really an autonomous art work representing an individual person characterised by being male, black and adolescent or a personhood which is marked by plurality, representing something other than itself but, at the same time, presenting a black body? And is this other not existent in a relatedness essential to its understanding rather than being simply a replacement? Differently from painted crucifixions, does not the art form in which the work is executed make it more complex than perceiving the image just as the crucified Christ?

Despite many differences, performance art and photographs of the body have in common that they play with corporeality. As such, the art works are not only objects, but their corporeality (re-)presents and constructs personhood. Previous literature has argued that they do so regarding identity or self, assuming that what is represented is an autonomous individual (Biro 2007; Simpson 2004; Watt 2001). In light of recent discussions in anthropology, which have problematised the conception of the individual, this essay asks to which extent one can speak of the representation of personhood as individual or, as such conceptions in anthropology suggest, as dividual, whose characteristics remain pluralistic, conflicting, competing, antagonistic and intersecting, mostly because they foreground that a person is part of something else or consists of diverse parts

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rather than being a unit of oneness, completeness and sameness which neglects partiality (Sökefeld 1999).

The urgency of this question is underpinned by literature which deals with modern and contemporary art, that knows of the term dividual. Differently from anthropology, however, this literature has not been applied to personhood, but objects. It was particularly Paul Klee (1922) and Gilles Deleuze (1986 and 1992) who developed a theory of the dividual in the light of painting and early cinema. Scholars, such as Joanna Latimer (2009), Glenn Peers (2012) and Michaela Ott (2015) have used the term dividual in view of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, Byzantine art, and new technologies, respectively. Hereby dividuality is defined by fragmentation and fragility, unstableness and leakiness (Latimer 2009). Peers uses the term to describe 'quasi-objects' that are only superficially objects as opposed to 'discrete entities like individuals' (Peers 2012). Ott has based her book on Deleuze's concept of partiality. She interprets 'dividual' as part-taking and cites particularly new technology as a reason for the end of the 'distinctiveness and authenticity of the art work' (Ott 2015, 62). Consequently, she then applies the term 'dividual' to digital art works circulated over the Internet, such as Ursula Biemann's *Egyptian Chemistry* (2012), a multi-channel video installation, with which the artist attempts to penetrate real and virtual realities (Babias 2012). Some contemporary artists also call their work 'dividual', including Victor Timofeev, who explores hybrid worlds (Hoare 2011).[1] Furthermore, an artist couple under the name *Dividual Notes*, collaborating on Facebook, produces and publishes digital photos from everyday life (Dividual Notes 2017). Here dividual (though not specifically defined) is understood as being produced by more than one artist and able to be shared with others who can contribute to the work via the Internet. These publications illustrate how widely the term can be used. A common denominator, however, is the foregrounding of partiality rather than wholeness in the sense described above.

The Christian iconograpy of the crucifixion has received a large number of publications; contemporary crucifixions scenes have usually only been considered regarding their sincerity, which has led to polemics often dismissing entire art works without allowing any second look. For James Elkins, contemporary Christian art is characterised by two types, existing simultaneously side by side, namely 'serious' religious art and that which he describes as 'sceptical, ambiguous, anti-religious, mystical, spiritual' (Elkins 2009; 2004; Elkins, Morgan

1 The Latvian-born, Berlin-based artist Viktor Timofeev (*1984) grew up in New York, studying at Hunter College, New York from 2002 to 2008. In 2011, he titled one of his works (ink on paper) *192.128.13.15 [Residual Dividual]*, a work which exploits the basics of digital pictures. For his website, see http://www.viktortimofeev.com.

2008). These types also differ in their materiality (including original versus reproducible versus original). In response to Elkins, Aaron Rosen assumes one type of contemporary religious art, emphasising the works' complexity and providing deeper interpretations to some of the most contested ones (Rosen 2015, 18).[2]

The reason for this essay's focus on crucifxions in photography of the body and performance art is that their corporeality heightens in particular the issue of enacting personhood as dividual or individual. Such art works play not only with the doctrine of the crucified Jesus as part of a Trinity with the Father and the Sprit, but also with notions of art and spirituality in a sophisticated and complex manner. This is not to say that dividuality in art objects cannot become visible through other art works; however, I would argue that crucifixions in art forms which foreground corperality provide a body of works which openly aim at something beyond being simply an individual art work, an image representing Christian iconography or an object revered – candidly manipulating the viewers' spirituality, religious beliefs and aesthetic expectations. The analysis of such works in the light of personhood will provide insights into conceptions of the dividual and individual. In the following, I will first outline anthropological understandings of the dividual, then apply such personhood to the represented in crucifixion art, before exploring the viewership constructed by such art works.

2 Anthropological understanding of personhood

Individuality has been defined as 'indivisible', and in terms of society, the smallest unit to which society can be reduced. It also has been described as fixed, autonomous and self-reflective. In recent years, scholars have increasingly questioned whether subjects are self-contained or rather can be broken down and thus deserve to be called dividual. In this light, dividuality has been described as permeable, relational and positional. They, therefore, usually do not speak of 'subjects' but 'personhood' or self (Smith 2012, 52). As the discussion about the individual and dividual has so far been dominated by anthropology, dividual personhood has often been associated with pre-modern, non-Western con-

2 Rosen also suggests that the soaring number of such themes in art has to be seen in light of the increase of 'charismatic groups'. Rosen refers to scholars who even suggest that we may enter a period of 'desecularisation' (Rosen 2015, 18).

cepts (e.g. Strathern 1988; Fowler 2016; Smith 2012).[3] Although there are several definitions of dividuality, the term is not a synonym for deindividuation, if the latter is understood as a defiance of individuality or mourning of the loss of the self-contained individual. Instead, dividuality would rather celebrate the partiality of the self, either as division of the self in a process of constant segmentation or as the abandoning of or detaching from a self-contained individuality.

Anthropological approaches, such as that of Marilyn Strathern, posit that the idea of the individual involves that any plurality is encompassed or eclipsed, so that the person is characterised as whole and holistic, self-reflective, 'complete' and autonomous (Strathern 1988, 13–5). Dividual personhood, instead, brings plurality to light by detachment of the self. Therefore, the dividual can be understood as divisible, permeable and mutable. This means really two different perspectives on personhood. For Strathern, this difference has an impact on power relations. While the first produces hierarchy, the second leads to egalitarianism. Strathern's definitions are primarily concerned with the formation of social relations through cultural artefacts and rituals. However, as shown below, her ideas on personhood can also be applied to depicted personhood and to the viewership which the art works bring to the fore. Although the following is not about social systems at large or rituals in an anthropological sense, the art works under discussion represent, construct and form social relations and as such are acts that mark society. In a narrower sense, the kind of art form chosen for discussion involves particularly two subjects or personhoods, namely the represented crucified.

3 Dividual personhood in crucifixion

Images of crucifixions executed in such art forms arguably offer a number of possibilities in which dividuality can be discussed, of which two seem the most obvious, namely the meaning of dividuality for the Christian iconography of the crucifixion and for the corporeality of the person who represents the crucified.

3 As Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, Strathern had herself portrayed as two half-length figures, one reading and one gazing out of the portrait, seemingly illustrating her concept of dividual personhood (see Daphne Todd, *Portrait of Marilyn Strathern*, painting, Girton College, University of Cambridge, 2001). Feminist studies are interested in the dividual, because it can be argued that the individual is constituted as a discrete person, as 'somebody', whereas the dividual would be 'anybody' or even 'nobody'.

In Christian belief, Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings. He is the Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit forms the Trinity: one God in three divine persons. How that relationship has been formed, whether hierarchically, relationally or correlationally, has been the topic of centuries-long discussions in Christian doctrine. In light of the understanding of dividual and individual as outlined above, one can assume a dividual God, divided into three. Jesus, however, can be described as an individual, historically real. However, the crucifixion scene pinpoints that the personhood of Jesus can also be seen as partly human (embodied in Jesus's suffering) *and* divine, because he is the son of God. Hence the iconography of the crucifixion itself is a topic that addresses dividual personhood.

Apart from the iconography, crucifixions executed in body and performance art play with personhood as dividual because of the art form. In photographs, such as Beecroft's *Black Christ*, and in performance art, it is a real person (either the artist or another person) who represents Jesus. Usually it is the artist himself. In performance art, the person representing Jesus is part of the art work but also a real person who continues to live on and has lived before this art work. The person presented in the art work can therefore be seen as becoming part of something else, namely the art work representing Jesus, but is also part of a lived reality. Such type of presentation (rather than representation) has been related to the dividual by Peers, though not for photography or performance art. According to him, Byzantine culture knew of what he terms 'quasi-objects', objects which did not 're-present' but were understood as 'presenting' reality. Peers calls this 'quasi-object' dividual (Peers 2012, 437).[4] Such understanding is reminiscient of Hans Belting, who has been credited as the first art historian to provide insights into the role of Christian iconography being perceived as presentation rather than representation by medieval spectators (Belting 1994). However, he assumes that the image (regardless of the art form in which it is executed) presents subjects without acknowledging the partiality of the figure, who belongs to both the image as object and to the divine, if one were to follow Peers. In this way, one could differentiate in terminology two

4 Peers illustrates his argument by quoting from Michael Psellos, an eleventh-century Byzantine intellectual monk, who described a painting of a crucified Jesus not as a Platonic shadow, but as a medium through which the viewer can enter 'that other body and know with one's own body the painful sacrifice of Christ' in his writings. This process is 'contradictory, for the audience [...] is still embodied, and his viewers have their sense perceptions intact, but the eyes desire to see the crucified Christ to such a degree that each viewer would rather be nailed to the cross also' (Peers 2012, 438).

ways of describing not only the art work, namely as presence and likeness (the latter of which involves representation), but also the viewer as either dividual or individual.

Surely, imagining partiality might be more difficult for art forms which involve painted or sculpted figures than, as in our case, those which are based on corporeality of a real person who is both part of the art work and of a lived reality. Furthermore, surely, one can stress both the wholeness and the partiality, as also mentioned by Strathern and outlined above, particularly, as this discussion shows, when corporeality is involved. Individual or dividual is arguably a differentiation in perspective rather than in facts as such.

There are, however, art works which drift such perspectives further apart, because of the challenge of how far the artist goes in (re-)presenting the iconography of a dying Christ. This is illustrated by Sebastian Horsley's *Crucifixion* (2000), a performance which was undertaken by the artist in preparation for a series of paintings on the topic (Fig. 2, see appendix). Horsley, who travelled to the Philippines for his performance, was nailed to a cross and passed out (Bräunlein 2009). He only avoided serious injury because by-passers interrupted the performance (Kerr 2015; Horsley 2004; 2016). In this respect, it reminds of performance artists of the 1970s, such as Chris Burden – who performed *Trans-Fixed* at Speedway Avenue in Venice, California, on 23rd April 1974 – and Andrew Drummond, whose *Crucifixion Performance* took place at the CSA gallery in Christchurch, New Zealand from 1978. The artists in these works did not want to die as a self-sacrifice like Christ. They only accepted the suffering which made them part of something else to a certain degree, but they finally decided to remain alive. This decision marks the transition from a dividual experience (or an attempt to have such an experience) to becoming 'just' a human being, which foregrounds an individual personhood characterised by wholeness and reflection as described above. Schechner differentiates most usefully between a performance as theatre/entertainment or as efficacy/ritual (Schechner 1993, 621). While the former is characterised by individual creativity and an audience who watches, appreciates and critiques the performance, the latter refers to the performer being possessed or in trance, includes audience participation, and discourages criticism. Accordingly, ritual relates to a dividual personhood, while theatre to an individual. While Schechner's differentiation is most useful, offering a clear distinction between the two forms of performances, the examples of Horsley, Burden and Drummond illustrate the transition from one kind of performance to the other.

Differently from Horsley, Hermann Nitsch's series of *Crucifixion* performed together with the Orgies Mysteries Theatre, of which the first took place at the artist's estate in Prinzendorf, Austria from 3 to 9 August 1998 (Jarosi 2013; Karrer

2015; Grant 2011; Jones 2011), seems rather theatre than ritual.[5] Nitsch uses actors and his performances are highly staged, indeed theatrical: for example, a crucified and blindfolded man was held still under a bloody calf carcass, substituting the person, in a performance of the piece at the Fondazione Morra in Naples in 2002 (Fig. 3, see appendix). In other performances of his piece, Nitsch replaces the crucified body with animal bodies. Both kinds of performances, however, the ritual and the theatrical, demonstrate that the Christian iconography of the crucifixion is a particular challenge to the crucified's personhood as dividual. It brings matters to a head more than experiences of self-sacrifice as described by Dureau in this publication, or of being possessed, the topic of Malik's essay in this publication.

Body art executed in the medium of photography, such as Beecroft's *Black Christ* (Fig. 1), does not count as performance art in a narrow sense. Peggy Phelan would even deny any link to performance, as for her, only in the immediate present does performance exist (Phelan 1993, 146). In contrast to her, Jones argues that performance art does not only consist of the act as such, but is interrelated with its documentation (Jones 1988, 16). She goes so far as to say that without its documentation, there is no performance art as such (ibid.). If such a close relationship exists, one may conclude that Beecroft's c-print is the result of a performance. The boy must have been asked to pose, so that the artist could take photographs, of which this one has been selected. As arguably with all art using the body or body parts as media, though particularly in film and photography, the moment of performativity is still oscillating through the print.

4 Permeable viewership: reflection, transcendence and embodied affection

Beecroft's *Black Christ* does not only shape the personhood of the represented, but also that of the viewer (Fig. 1). However, what kind of personhood? Conventional literature on perception assumes the viewer as an individual, despite some of the publications acknowledging that the process of looking involves a detachment from the self. On the basis of these approaches, the following section asks whether and how the viewer's personhood can be seen as dividual, foregrounding its partiality. For this purpose, Deleuze's model of the dividual, which he applies to film stills, will be appropriated, because it offers a solution as to how the dividual as partial (namely the film still) is related to the whole (the film)

5 Nitsch had already acted out such performances as early as 1957.

(Deleuze 1986, 18). For Deleuze, it is not a question of perspective, but the dividual is related to the whole in a process bound together by movement, as also described in more detail at the end of this essay. Therefore perception is assumed as consisting of moments (like film stills) distinguished from each other, while at the same time, these moments stand in a relationship to each other (through movement between them, forming a whole as perception). In the context of religious iconography, one can identify moments of reflection, transcendence and embodied affection, as the viewing experience arguably reacts to pictures' effects (Mitchell 1998; Bredekamp 2010). To underpin this argument, I will first focus on contemporary crucifixions which are seemingly unproblematic and then on those which have been discussed as controversial to the extent of having led to iconoclasm and socio-political upheavals.

Brian Catling's *Processional Cross* (2013), produced for St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, consists of a simple cross (Fig. 4, see appendix). Two pieces of wood are tied together by a string, alluding to St. Martin who tore his cloak in two to give half to a beggar. The cross' rough pieces of wood, used as a reminder of Jesus' cross, are covered but still noticeable under the cast of a strong yet lightweight aluminium, gilded in white gold leaf. As such the cross is not only without a body, but also abstracted and enriched in a way which allows for a trace of emotional perception, as the viewer envisages Christ carrying and dying on the cross. For the artist, making the cross was 'overwhelming, both in the excitement of the concept and the enduring nature of its meaning [...]. Design is not enough, I need the struggle and tension that only ever comes through deep feeling, prolonged thought, and the work of the hands' (Catling 2017).

The artist believes he has created an object which is not only the product of reflection, but also of personal affects, namely touch and feeling. He emphasises these affects, because of the religious character of the art work. Although the object's singularity and exceptionality play an important role for the artist, for the name of the artist is still mentioned by the church, *Processional Cross* aspires to create a relationship between object and viewer by which the object, an abstracted cross without a body, becomes the mediator of a perception which aims at a spiritual experience. If one follows research which has aligned the spiritual with the aesthetic, one can also call it an aesthetic experience (Kuspit 2009; Koss 2006).[6] In any case, it signals a relationship between the viewer and

6 Discussing the relationship between the aesthetic and spiritual experience, Kuspit draws on a number of critics (Clement Greenberg), artists (Piet Mondrian and Barnett Newman), philosophers and psychoanalysts (Jacques Derrida, Rudolf Otto and D. W. Winnicott, Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm and Silvano Arieti) (Kuspit 2009). See also Juliet Koss (2006), who describes *Einfühlung* as the 'reciprocal experience of exchange and transformation – a solitary, one-to-one experience

God (or the sublime), in which the object becomes only its mediator. In this religious (or aesthetic) experience, the viewer is not self-reflective. By referring to Kant, Deleuze describes the sublime in view of the individual and of God: The sublime

> unleashes in our soul a *non-psychological life of the spirit*, which no longer belongs either to nature or to our organic individuality, which is the divine part in us, the spiritual relationship in which we are alone with God as light. Thus the soul seems to *rise up again* towards the light; but it has rather rejoined the luminous part of itself, which only had an ideal fall, and which fell upon the world, rather than being engulfed in it. The blazing has become the supernatural and supra-sensible. (Deleuze 1986, 59f.)

In other words, the viewer experiences personhood as detachment from the reflective self (Mosko 2010).[7] As such the art work shapes the personhood of the viewer, torn between spiritual belief and reflecting upon the art work in a process of constant negotiation. Understanding viewership as such stresses the dividual, partial character of the viewer's personhood rather than the perception of a self-contained individual as presupposed by the long and substantial body of scholarship on perception theories (e.g. Mulvey 1975; Mitchell 1986; Kemp 1998).

In assuming viewership as dividual, one has to differentiate two different types of partiality in this process: firstly, the moments of reflecting versus believing, held together by movement of the mind; and secondly, the moment related to the religious/aesthetic experience which produces a movement between viewer and God (respectively the sublime), detached from a self-reflective, cognitively ordering mind: namely what Hartmut Rosa, who has recently published a book on resonance and sociology, has called the decoupling of emotion and resonance (Rosa 2016, 289). Although one may argue that any religious or aesthetic experience aims at such a decoupling of the self, I would argue that spiritual art makes these two types of perception more visible.

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created, as it were, by both viewer and object, destabilizing the identity of the former while animating the latter. Physical, emotional, and psychological, the process of *Einfühlung* placed the spectator at the center of aesthetic discourse'. In the same article, Koss argues that this experience (*Einfühlung*) was always thought of as an individualistic experience and not as something that could be experienced as a group. She cites a work by the filmmaker Peter Kubelka from 1971 which was addressed at a spectatorship simultaneously individual and communal; communal, as the film was shown in a cinema to several people, and individual because the viewers could not see each other, but only the screen.

7 Mark Mosko describes this vertical experience as becoming part of Him and He becomes part of onself (Mosko 2010). For him, this is a dividual relationship, whereas I would argue that it is not only a detachment from the reflective-self (and thus dividual), but also a belief in a unity with God.

Some contemporary art works with religious subjects play with the viewer's resonances. The viewer can reflect upon such images in the discourse of contemporary art, but because of the religious iconography, these images also play with the expectations of the believing viewer, arguably hindering a truly felt dividual experience, as, for example, of those who undergo what Malik describes as being divinely embodied (rather than possessed) in his essay in this publication. Religion can arouse strong affects, even if (or perhaps because) contemporary art only fashions Christian iconography. Regarding representations of the crucifixion, Gilbert & George's mixed media print *Was Jesus Heterosexual?* (2005, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo) was described by a then British MP for the Conservatives as 'blasphemous in the extreme, as [they] will find out when finally they stand before the Son of God' (cited after Rosen 2015, 9). Andres Serrano's *Immersion. Piss Christ* (1987, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina), consisting of a photograph of a small crucifixion replica submerged in urine, has been the focus of verbal and physical attacks, suffering vandalism during an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne in 2011, which was discussed particularly in the tabloids (Anon. 2011). Many examples could be added that demonstrate that such art may only use Christian iconography to provoke, so that artists benefit financially and in reputation from their works being widely reviewed (Rosen 2015, 15). Such strong reactions result in many (mis)readings and (mis)uses of works with a religious theme through political and religious fanaticism. For example, while Serrano's *Immersion. Piss Christ* has offended Christian viewers, who felt that the image was blasphemous, Rosen argues that it can also be interpreted as a work that meditates on 'the torments and degradation of Christ' by using urine (Rosen 2015, 15). In similar lines, Wendy Beckett, the Catholic nun who became well known as an art critic, viewed the work as a statement on 'what we have done to Christ', that is, 'the way contemporary society has come to regard Christ and the values he represents' (Beckett 1998). Similarly, Damien Hirst's *God Alone Knows* (2007) can not only be defamed as contemptuous, but can also be seen as an installation that 'underscore(s) Jesus' humanity, emphasising the raw, bestial nature of his torments. Indeed, Hirst's crucified sheep carcass simply provides an unusually visceral embodiment of Christ's identity as the Lamb of God' (Rosen 2015, 49).

Differently from Rosen, who disregards the polemic of these images in order to understand them on a deeper level, Elkins views such images as in a category different from 'serious' Christian art, creating therefore two kinds of religious art objects which exist simultaneously, but with distinct differences in aims and strategies: namely polemic and 'serious' religious art. Following Elkins, one wonders how to account for historical and contextual factors. There have been several art works whose religious iconography has created dispute in the past

(and thus would belong to Elkins' 'other' History of Art), but which have now been firmly accepted as 'serious'. Furthermore, who says that reproductions of art works, a feature ascribed to polemic Christian art by Elkins, are not taken 'seriously'? What about those reproductions of works produced by famous artists such as Durer and hung in Christian households for the purpose of veneration? Is it not a question of the relationship between object and viewer rather than the object *per se* as to whether an art object is serious or polemic? I would therefore suggest a model that is based on mental spaces and gaps in the process of perception.

This model begins with the observation that religious works, because of their iconography, raise certain expectations by the viewer. Secondly, viewers recall mental images of religious iconographies from pictures seen before with which the viewers compare the image in front of them, both as images and conceptions.[8] This produces a gap, which can be explained with the play between reference, deference and difference, a mechanism which Griselda Pollock has ascribed to the avant-garde (Pollock 1992, 14). Although in relation to a different subject, her concept explains well how the art works in question *refer* to Christian iconography, even sometimes to a specific image by a specific artist. Their rendering, however is *different*, but only by *deference* – a term which recalls Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* – sometimes also referred to as *espacement* or 'spacing', because the difference is between binary elements (Derrida 1963). And the larger this space, the difference, the gap between the image in front of the viewers and that of their mind is felt by the viewer, the deeper the aggravation. Such an explanation would not need an assumption of two different types of religious art. In addition, spacing as a form of distancing and approaching is a model whose ingredients remind us of the way in which the viewer's dividuality can be explained.

The use of the body, body parts and bodily fluids in art works seemingly enlarges this gap between images and therefore the aggression against works, particularly when exploited in works of Christian iconography. For example, Catling's *Processional Cross* discussed above does not use any body at all. Therefore, it does not produce such a gap. However, why? It can not only be explained by Christian doctrine which renders human identification with Jesus as God suspicious, but also with Julia Kristeva's notion of the 'abject,' which leads to the topic of embodied viewing.[9]

8 Arguably, this viewing process is general and thus also applicable to ideas about beauty and taste as well as religious works.

9 For embodied viewing, see also discussion of emotions and the relevance of suffering in Antje Linkenbach's essay in this publication.

Unlike many depictions of the crucified Christ, the body in Beecroft's *Black Christ* is strangely intact, almost aestheticised, emphasised through the cracked, marmorised and almost plane background (Fig. 1). There are no signs of pain and wounds, as one might expect from a crucifixion. The cross is even missing, so the viewer's concentration is solely on the body. This depiction prompts a voyeuristic view that searches the body for such signs, only finding the white loin cloth, which, typically of many crucifixions, is to hide the genitals. But instead of having a desexualising function, it awakens the body's eroticism (Steinberg 1996). This eroticism is underpinned by the young age of the boy, unusual in view of conventional representations of a much older Jesus on the cross. The viewers, becoming aware of their gazes, are shamefully reminded of their criticism of the artist, because the artist has lured the viewers into doing the same as what they accuse of the artist, namely treating a Sudanese boy as inferior and an object and voyeuristically abusing his teenage body, aggravated by being a white artist. As this is a representation of the crucifixion, Beecroft achieves, in her execution of the body as black, exactly the treatment of Jesus before and during his crucifixion: namely as being laughed at and despised, as described in the New Testament and in the interpretations in patristic readings. Differently from many crucifixion depictions reminding us of Jesus' suffering, Beecroft also achieves an effect whereby the viewer is not only an on-looker, but an accomplice of those who treated Jesus that way, perhaps not even realising and not repenting his/her own action.

Beecroft's *Black Christ* plays with the viewer who is used to identifying pain with the iconography of the crucifixion. Represention of the wounded and suffering Jesus, but also those by Serrano and Hirst, make use of what Julia Kristeva has called the 'abject' (Kristeva 1982; Fletcher, Benjamin 2012). Urine and flesh confront the viewer with a corporeal reality, which breaks down the distinction between the self and the other, as the viewer is drawn towards his/her own body, according to Julia Kristeva's theory. This is interesting in our context, because abjection describes a process by which the viewers are detached from their self-reflective selves.

While any art work using indexical signs can lead to abjection, contemporary art with religious themes arguably articulates the relationship of abjection loudly. Indeed, Beecroft exploits racial stereotypes for her purposes, which some consider problematic. The artist seemingly restores superiority of the white – for whom the black was object and possession in the colonial past – in contemporary art. The viewer is baffled because s/he assumes a different kind of treatment of such iconography, as described above. This is what the artists play with: they provoke, shock, because their imagery recalls a certain way of portraying Christian themes which are present *in absentia* (namely in the mind of the viewer who 'compares' them with what is in front of him/her). Serrano's *Immersion. Piss Christ*

encompasses this 'difference' not only by appealing to imagined pictures, but by using a photograph of a replica crucifixion which he then modifies with urine, a substance that many cultures identify with uncleanness, filth and assault. The religious iconography produces a gap between the image and the viewer's expectations, as explained above. The urine as fluid of the body, spilt over the represented Jesus, lets the viewer identify bodily with the image, experiencing the image as abject, because its corporeal reality (the urine in this case) breaks down the gap between the viewer's self and the presented image. The viewer feels with the body of the image and detaches from his/her own body.

Thus, religious iconography using corporeality produces two movements: the religious/aesthetic aspect distances the viewers from their self containment through aspiring to something higher, while the corporeality detaches the viewer from their self horizontally, breaking down the barrier between viewer and image. These movements are in constant negotiation.

Corporeality can mobilise senses other than the visual. Regarding representations of the crucifixion, smell is dominant in Cosimo Cavallaro's *Sweet Jesus* (2005, in possession of the artist), which is made of chocolate and thus following the iconography and medium used by artists such as George Heslop's *Jesus on the Cross* (2006) and Richard Manderson's *Trans-Substantiation 2* (1994). Differently from them, however, Cavallaro sexualises Jesus; his genitals are not hidden with a cloth as in Manderson's sculpture, or sculpted less pronouncedly as by Heslop. Even if one rejects these works as kitsch because of their material, one should, nevertheless, be reminded of the existing Christian iconography of the Sweet Jesus, which is based upon the Bible. Psalm 119, for example, reads: 'How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!'

Returning to the senses, sound is particularly exploited by video art, such as Mark Wallinger's *Via Dolorosa* (2002, Israel Museum, Jerusalem), which uses a part of Franco Zeffirelli's film *Jesus from Nazareth* from 1977. The scenes, which tell of the passion of Christ from Jesus' presentation in front of the people until his crucifixion, are blacked out by a rectangular pane. This hinders the view of the film, which is only visible beyond the rectangle's border, reducing the film to a small frame. In Mulvey's terms, the 'pleasure' which lies in looking is denied. Such refusal leads to 'a sense of separation and playing on their [the viewers'] voyeuristic phantasy' (Mulvey 1975). Despite her assuming an 'individual subject', she still speaks of a 'separation' that happens in the process of viewing. This separation, as I would argue, is the reason for understanding the viewer's personhood as dividual rather than individual, because the viewer's perception becomes part ('dividual') of something else, instead of being self-contained.

Of course, as images, moving and still, these art works are primarily directed at the visual; thus, the felt, smelt, tasted and heard experiences are always

multi-sensual, further detaching the viewer from his/her own body by feeling with the represented crucified Jesus.

Both types of affected moments, the religious and the sensual, can also involve 'real' corporeality: embodied viewing has in some cases led to the destruction of art work (as has been mentioned above) and the literal turning away or closing of one's eyes to distance oneself from the image in an attempt to protect the unity of the personhood. Furthermore, Christianity embraces a belief in incarnation, heavily discussed in theological doctrine as to how God can become a human being. Moreover, the Catholic Church has canonised stigmatists, including Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, who have experienced sores in locations of Jesus Christ's wounds created by his crucifixion (Davidson, Fritz-Morkin 2009; Giovine 2009; Nickell 1993).[10] Such stigmata have also played a role in contemporary performance art by artists such as Franko B and Bálint Szombathy (Richards 2008).

Crucifixions exploit both moments, the religious/spiritual as well as the abject. However, they seem to defer the viewer in different directions: while the former is a striving towards a vertical resonance, the latter is a yearning towards the self as body. Yearning and striving increase the space of deference. They also seemingly tear apart the viewer who attempts to negotiate cognitively bodily and spiritual experiences. Indeed, the viewer is denied a split of the self through religious/aesthetic moments and forced to a self-split because of the abjection. As the perception consists of two movements in different directions, images with religious iconography and corporeality produce a wider gap than those that are abstract, such as Catling's *Processional Cross*, a work in which corporeality is missing (Fig. 4). The wider gap, however, can lead to the viewer's frustration, which may result in some of the reactions to religious images as described above.

The issue here, however, is, that contemporary religious art plays on the notion of viewerhood as an indivisible individual. If Western personhood (and I would add, particularly that of the white heterosexual man) only sat in

10 See also Therese Neumann von Konnersreuth (1898–1962) who has been venerated for her stigmata and for whom the Catholic Church began the process of beatification in 2005.
For the meaning of partibility and permeability, see also Emma-Jayne Graham (2017), who explores their significance for body-part votives at Etrusco-Latial-Campanian sanctuaries in Late Iron Age central Italy. Her findings seemingly have parallels with the Catholic rituals mentioned above. Graham argues that the power of the divine beings to heal the living permeated the assembled body-part votives and the bodies of the living, while the practice of deposition shaped the divinities as 'multi-authored persons, composed of the bodies, prayers and offerings of human supplicants'.

relation to modern Western ontologies which have tended to privilege indivisible understandings of the world, as, for example, argued by Philippe Descola, religious art would not provoke anything spiritual or aesthetic, nor would body and performance art be abject (Descola 2013). Indeed, artists creating religious works can only play with different moments of perception, if one assumes any viewer's perception as consisting of dividual moments. If the white heterosexual viewer is understood as a person with a perception which only knows of self-reflective observation, religious art works would not have the power with which these are seemingly equipped in a Western world dominated by monotheistic religions. Particularly the experience of embodied viewing runs contrary to anthropologists' ideas of Western personhood – by which the individual presupposes a detachment from the body to see things 'objectively', enabling the subject to produce a clear and distinct view of what is – namely a 'complete' and autonomous individual (Latimer 2007, 53). It would be impossible for the viewer as individual to experience transcendence and abjection. Instead perception seems to be rather like what Strathern describes for the dividual personhood, namely as a self who is constructed as 'the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce' it (Strathern 1988, 13). In other words, anthropological scholarship may well assume a dominance of self as a self-reflective individual in the Western world, but the West also knows of moments in perception other than reflective, namely the spiritual, the sublime and the abject, as shown above. This would mean that crucifixions in particular and religious works in general presuppose and create a dividual viewerhood in the sense coined by anthropology. The outcries against and shock about contemporary religious art as described above, produce an understanding of viewership denying any pluralistic perception. Interpreted only bodily (by ignoring reflection and spirituality), such works foreground individual rather than dividual perception.

Because of using a body, the image is a literal sign, what Peirce would call indexical (as being the Sudanese boy), is iconic (the body of the Sudanese boy as image), and is a symbolic sign (as Jesus) all at the same time. Such representations have therefore particularly raised critics' eyebrows. Baert and Van Gelder begin their book on *Fluid Flesh* with the question as to whether and how are 'we able (and allowed) to think of the divine in a corporeal way? [...]. From the very center of the "body-religion-art" triangle, a force is pulsating between taboo and embrace' (Baert, Gelder 2009, vii). One could therefore conclude that Beecroft's *Black Christ* establishes a relationship to the viewer that is different from that of other representations of crucifixions. The art work seemingly defies any fixity and thus also questions in which way one can speak of dividual *or* individual personhood as mutually exclusive, which brings me to my last point.

5 Constituting personhood as an enacting dynamic process

As shown above, the dividual can be understood as permeable as well as divisible in view of crucifixions executed in photography and performance art in which corporeality is foregrounded. Art works as such create a viewer-personhood, which brings something else into question, namely the role of a dynamic process in defining personhood, which also helps overcome a problem created by anthropological conceptions of personhood that perpetuate dividing the world into the West and the rest. Although Strathern wants to avoid the mistake of Western views on feminism being simply extended to indigenous cultures such as the Milanesians (Strathern 1988, 7), her perspective draws a black-and-white picture of the world with stark contrasts, introducing a neo-Primitivism in which Western societies are characterised by individuality and indigenous societies by dividuality. The latest scholarship in anthropology has asked whether the dividual and individual are not necessarily only opposites, but aspects which are both necessary for the forming of personhood. Chris Fowler, for example, does not dismiss the oppositional properties as such (indivisible and divisible, fixed and mutable, permeable and impermeable, individualist and collectivist, essential and contextual), but puts them in an 'axis of relationality' (Fowler 2016, 402).

Furthermore, Fowler advocates against merely stating 'whether personhood is divisible or indivisible', but to bring to the fore 'the extent to which each can be identified, through what media, in what contexts and assemblages, and so on. Appreciating the ways that personhood is distributed in time and space with respect to bodies, objects and materials is the goal' (ibid., 403). Although such an understanding allows for a precise differentiation of personhood beyond the usual patterns, it still assumes individual and dividual (as well as the other properties) as oppositional pairs, seemingly excluding that both can be considered as part of constituting personhood in a dynamic process.

As the investigation into the viewership of images of crucifixions shows, such a divide into dividual or individual is neither necessary nor actually factual. Although providing two different perspectives, personhood can also be understood as being characterised by both dividual and individual moments, if one takes on the contextual conception of dividuality by Klee, developed in the artist's pedagogic notes taken while teaching at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931 (Klee 1922; Kudielka 2002). Referring to objects, the artist defines the dividual as the opposite of the individual, whereby the individual can also become a dividual and the dividual an individual, depending on the perspective. By refering to a fish, Klee

states that the fish is a dividual in light of an aquarium, the latter which would be the individual. He then provides a list of individuals and their depending dividuals like a syntax series: 'trunk – wood fibres, wrinkles in the bark; tree – leaves, branches, twigs; forest – tree; forest region – particular forest' (Klee 1922, 266). These examples illustrate that Klee sees the in/dividual in a continuum, in which the definition of dividual and individual depends on the relation formed between them. Applying his ideas to personhood, dividual and individual moments both define personhood, depending on the relationship which these form. In the context of describing the relationship between art object and viewer, the viewer is an individual; but while experiencing the object, the viewer is dividual, becoming detached from the self and part of something else through spirituality, transcendence and affection.

Furthermore, taking on Deleuze's conception of the dividual in cinematographic images, outlined in his book *Cinema I. The Movement-Image*, constituting personhood is a process rather than an ontologogical essence, as it only wins formation when being enacted (Deleuze 1986). For Deleuze, the duration of the film consists of parts, whereas images, when seen in duration, become a film. These images are themselves thought of as immobile, though there is movement between them. This movement makes the images into a film. Later in his book, Deleuze spells out that these parts, the cinematographic images, have 'two facets, one of which is oriented towards sets and their parts, the other towards the whole and its changes; it is this that we must examine – the movement-image for itself, in all itself, in all its varieties and both its facets' (ibid., 61). The latter image is connected via movement with other images to form a whole, an indivisible continuity, a duration consisting 'in time'. In terms of viewer-personhood, I would suggest that personhood is both individual and dividual, mobile and immobile. In the present, in the now of the moment, personhood is dividual, while in view of its future (and past) in which moments are put together, personhood becomes a whole, an indivisible continuity, characterisations that can be applied to the individual, because this continuity is thought of as mobile, in flux, in a continuous process of becoming, never constituting essentiality. If this continuity is thought of as indivisible, one cannot conclude that the continuity consists of moments. As soon as one recognises such moments, one fixes them and thus changes fundamentally this continuity into something essentially different, namely into a dividual that is characterised by movement in space rather than in duration.

For performance art such a conception would mean that the still image of those works (as well as photographs of the body) documented as a film, would be dividual and, combined with other such 'immobile' stills by movement, form a 'whole' of the documented performance piece. According to Deleuze, however,

dividual is understood as stable and immobile in contrast to anthropological understandings that emphasise fluidity and mobility. The enactments of Horsley and Nitsch are dividual as they consist of stills which are part of the entire performance, while the entire performance as a whole constitutes personhood anew with each viewing.

For the personhood of viewers, such a conception would not only mean that perception can be considered as a set of moments, consisting of religious/aesthetic, embodied, as well as cognitive elements that dynamically form a whole, as described above, but also that the viewer's perception and relation to the world is constituted in this way.

Apart from the viewership and the medium, the dynamic process of dividualising and individualising can also be applied to the iconography of the crucifixion. To return to the image from the beginning, Beecroft's *Black Christ* enacts dividual personhood by being a Sudanese boy and, at the same time, the (re-)presentation of Jesus Christ in view of its Christian meaning (Fig. 1). The representation as the divine (as part of the Trinity) is underpinned by an aesthetically pleasing body that mystifies the depicted beyond the representation of a simple individual (Grant 2013). In other words, Beecroft's Sudanese boy is not only representing Jesus Christ, he *is* the Son of God and thus God itself through the process of crucifixion according to Christian belief. Criticism of the image and other representations of the body as God, which express outrage that a human body can personify Jesus Christ on the cross, prove that crucifixions go beyond a simple symbolic reception. Nowhere else comes this more to light than in performance art pieces of the crucifixion, where the symbolic character seemingly disappears behind the corporeal presence of the body-artist. Stripped of the iconography, however, the photograph becomes also just that of a teenage black boy who has lived his life before the image was taken, in other words, constituting an individual person in a historical setting.

Appendix

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Vanessa Beecroft, *Black Christ*, 2006, digital C-print, 76 × 59 cm © the artist. https://oneroom.eu/products/vanessa-beecroft-vbss-006-mp-2006

Fig. 2: Sebastian Horsley, *Crucifixion*, 2000, still of a performance © the artist. https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39534/1/extreme-art-marina-abramovic-carolee-schneeman-jenny-saville-glen-luchford

Fig. 3: Hermann Nitsch, *Crucifixion*, 2002, still of performance at the Fondazione Morra, Naples. https://kunstistkrieg.blogspot.com/2012/10/arnulf-rainer-hermann-nitsch-e.html

Fig. 4: Brian Catling, *Processional Cross*, 2013, sculpture (aluminium gilded in white gold), St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London © the artist and St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London. http://www.modusoperandi-art.com/projects/st_martin_in_the_fields_the_processional_cross

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