

The Problem with Pendulums: Divination and Alterhumanity

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Divination isn't exactly a rarity in alterhuman circles—it's not uncommon for people to either be a practitioner themselves or know a practitioner, especially for alterhumans who are spiritual and religious. From tarot, to fire scrying, to astragalomancy, to any other form of magically seeking knowledge, you can find a near limitless number of ways to divine the future and the unknown if you know where to look or if you're in the right places.

On Tumblr, there's a particularly unique culture around pendulum-focused alterhuman blogs. Pendulum divination involves utilizing a bob of some type (usually a stone, jewel, or symbol) attached by a chain or string to a fixed point, where readings are conducted based on the bob's behaviors and movement in comparison to the fixed point. Pendulums primarily are used in yes/no questions, but can also be held over mats and charts for more complex readings.

Pendulum "kinfirmation" blogs, as they're usually referred to, are blogs focused around conducting pendulum readings for alterhumans and individuals questioning alterhumanity in order to answer questions related to identity and spirituality. Questions can range from very broad to very specific, but almost always fall into the yes/no category common to pendulum-based divination. Understandably, many alterhumans have taken issue with these types of blogs and their practices, myself included.

The most obvious issue is the fallibility of these methods. Even assuming that someone full-heartedly believes in divination and its applications and going from there, there still arises several issues when asking a stranger online to divine intimate or personal details about oneself: the diviner's capabilities, differences in definitions and perspectives between the diviner and the subject, and then the nebulous nature of the "self" and identity. Depending on one's beliefs around divination, anonymity of the subject may also be an obstacle or issue in this as well.

While it's easy to assume that a diviner is capable by virtue of them feeling confident in offering their services to others, that confidence could easily translate to reasons that are a far-flung cry from any semblance of competence. Just because someone offers a service for free doesn't necessarily mean they're reliable and consistent with what they produce, which is a relevant problem when working within "kinfirmation" blogs: these blogs are almost always entirely dedicated to a 'softcore' divination, alterhuman aesthetic which functions as the foundation of the site, with the main person(s) actually helping to run the blog either disconnected from it via anonymous pseudonyms, or only connecting non-relevant blogs to

their name (that is to say, connections to blogs which contain no showcasing of any practice or knowledge around divination). It's often impossible to both know who is actually behind the divining and see some of their past, non-alterhuman related divination practices or beliefs to judge for yourself how much they align with your own and if you think they're reliable in their practice.

And not being able to see someone's perspectives are relevant not only to the literal pendulum work, but also to the interpretation of alterhuman labels that the individual is working off of. Due to the broadness of many alterhuman terms and due to the long, complicated histories some alterhuman terms have (especially the therian, otherkin, and fictionkin terms), people will potentially have very different understandings of what "makes" someone one alterhuman label or another.

This is, in part, because labels are meant to be useful specifically to the person using it. Two people could have near identical experiences and label them completely different things, viewing them through completely different lenses, and engaging in entirely different communities around them, just because that's what they've realized works best for them. Vice versa, two people could use the same label, have the same reasonings for how and why their alterhumanity functions or exists, while both having drastically different experiences.

But there's also just no telling what perspective a diviner on a "kinfirmation" blog has regarding various alterhuman identities. For example, the diviner may not take into account "lesser known" forms of identity, such as fictionflickers and polymorphs; they may have very strict beliefs around what types of alterhuman identities are legitimate and not, and what types are likely to occur or not; they may have perspectives that lean on more shifter-oriented ideas of nonhumanity; and any number of other hiccups and theoretical disconnects between the diviner and the subject. By the diviner's standards, someone may indeed be [X], but by the subject's standards, they may perhaps fit [Y] better or just not fit into [X] the way they imagined when asking. No matter how you look at it, it's a minefield of miscommunication and assumption.

There's also the issue that arrives more generally when seeking an overarching truth about something as complex and nebulous as identity and self. A single, individual person will change massively over the course of their life. That is to say, there is no singular, eternal "truth" that will apply to someone, even someone who does retain a label or identity throughout the course of their life: their relationship with terms, with related concepts, with themselves, will always be shifting and changing as they themselves grow and are exposed to new things.

And divination readings—depending on who you ask—also aren't set in stone. They can be influenced by personal bias and feelings, by future actions you take or things that change, and even by whether or not the asks you send to the diviner are anonymous. Individuals asking “kinfirmation” blogs to confirm or deny aspects of their identity are taking an imperfect and often finicky measuring system and trying to use it to solve an equation with ever-shifting variables.

At the end of the day, if someone asks a “kinfirmation” blog about the facts of their identity, then they're doing themselves a disservice. One's personal relationship to alterhumanity is something they should learn about first-hand. It isn't something to delegate to another person, much less a stranger on the Internet, and then shrug your shoulders off. If someone is questioning an identity, experience, or the usefulness of a label, a one-off ask on Tumblr isn't going to be half as useful as—as cheesy as this sounds—just going out there and examining or recording their own experiences to look back on later, or talking to people who seem to experience or feel similar. You can't achieve self-understanding without being your authentic self, in all the various ways that entails, and working to understand yourself *in the way that most makes sense to you*.

While divination within the scope of (spiritual-based) alterhumanity can be an incredibly useful tool, especially when recorded and tracked consistently over long periods of time, it's just no substitute for genuine introspection and reflection. Divination can certainly help point you in the right direction when grappling with questions surrounding identity, but it's not meant to be the end-all, be-all to self-understanding. There's also the arguable fact that not all forms of divination are equally useful for self-exploration: some people may find that the yes/no nature of pendulum readings appealing, but there's something to be said for the metaphor and nuance that can arguably be gleaned from tarot, oracle, bibliomancy, and stitchomancy among others. The right tool for the right job, as the saying goes. And, equally important, the right tool in trusted hands: it's always a bad idea to give strangers on the Internet so much sway over something as personal and important as one's relationship to humanity or their own species identity.

Truth be told, I feel it could be easily argued that “kinfirmation” blogs have done more harm than good. There is the more obvious consequences to these blogs that alterhumans have complained about in the past to acknowledge, such as these blogs peddling blatantly wrong definitions of terms and phrases, clogging up specific tags and making it functionally impossible to navigate within certain spaces (and related forms of breaches in netiquette), and being otherwise hotbeds for KFFers, but there's also the less obvious, more hidden harm that's

been done. Just by how these blogs function, they turn people away from identities and labels that those individuals may have found otherwise to fit them, they put forward the idea that complex feelings and the experiences interwoven into them can be boiled down to a simple yes or no question any random individual on the street could answer, and they ultimately substitute self-knowing for stranger-guessing. These all aren't only harmful to personal understandings of alterhumanity, they're equally as damaging to outside and larger understandings of alterhumanity, especially in regards to individuals who are questioning.

Some people might be inclined to argue that the disclaimers you can often find at the end of "kinfirmation" blog posts or within their blog descriptions, lines that tend to go something along the way of "but you know yourself best," mitigate the damaging assumptions I've mentioned, but it has to be noted that these don't functionally change anything: if the diviner does not believe in the accuracy of their readings, then they're knowingly offering misleading and confusing information to people; if the diviner does believe in the accuracy of their readings while acknowledging that there's a real potential for them to be wrong regardless, then they know they're still liable to contribute to the issues aforementioned; and if the asker is confident enough in their own intuition and self-examination abilities, then they wouldn't be seeking out random individuals on the Internet, people who they've never otherwise spoken or interacted with, to confirm or deny something so intrinsic and intimate.

I'm not against the idea of alterhuman-related divination blogs, but I mean that in a much broader conceptual way than the abomination that is "kinfirmation" blog culture. The connection between magical practices and nonhumanity is a fascinating one, something worthy to explore and encourage larger community discussions of for relevant persons: pendulum (or really, any type of) "kinfirmations", however, are not that, and have potentially 'poisoned the well' in some of the social media spaces where such discussions could realistically happen. There's likely no shifting these blogs away from the places they already inhabit and flood, most notably Tumblr, but maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to begin to spark divination and magic-related alterhumanity discussions and conversations in more productive, interesting forms on platforms such as Dreamwidth, Pillowfort, Discord, Amino, forums, and similar, or even in a separate and unique Tumblr tag to begin to navigate away from the parts of the website that are something of an unnavigable wreck. It could to mitigate the poor precedent set by these types of pendulum blogs, while also being an interesting and investing point to explore for alterhumans new and old.