

This text appears in the publication *Ends Meet*. My contribution was a text written in response to the work of photographer Dominic Hawgood (MA Photography, 2014).

A tissue catches viscous liquid that has been expelled – vomit, ooze, spit.

The ex in exorcism is the expulsion – ‘out of’. Exorcism is from exhorkizein; the ex follows horkizein, ‘cause to swear’ from horkos ‘oath’, to call up expulsion, purification and adjuration. Things are removed but also administered, whether it is anointing water, or words that command the demon that has taken possession of the body to leave. The elemental qualities of the rites of exorcism are embodied in these details, and the effects that are undergone and witnessed. What can run into as well as out of has importance. Liquid has this property – it leaks, it is absorbed, or consumed. The liquid that purifies and cleanses is water. In the exorcism, curses, addictions and physical suffering are chased out with anointing water. The ministry’s advertisements are saturated with water’s image: a notional essence of a blue, cooling liquid. The images might show a waterfall, frosty-clear waters or sunlit ripples. This water is for consumption. It is transmutable too, its value lies not in its substance, but in its capacity to transmit. Sprayed onto the skin, anointing water promises to arouse the cleansing that its own image has created.

This water’s liquidity urges other fluids out. Tissues absorb this discharge, and present it as the material evidence of the expulsion. It seems improbable that fragile tissue would be part of an exorcism in all its abrasive physicality. But this fragility has a weighty presence. Ushers stand at the sides of the auditorium with boxes of tissue. The man holding the tissues is watching; the concentration he maintains adds to the tissues’ presence as objects. An object is thrown against the senses: ob-‘against’, ject ‘throw’. The man moves when he sees reactions in the audience. Tissues identify who is vulnerable, vulnerability being indicated by a body that leaks through the eyes – confirmation of an emotional state ready for deliverance. Does awareness of these objects excite a desire to meet their expectation?

In the auditorium (a university lecture theatre) where the exorcism will take place, the mood is tightly controlled. When singing, this mood manages to be both foreboding and uplifting – the kind of full, spirited atmosphere that produces the need to move and dance along with everyone else. Hands are lifted up, stretched and exposed. But I am unsure what to do with my hands, only lifting them up, palms (half-) displayed, when encouraged to do so by the band member leading the hymns; and although I am swaying and singing, most of the time my hands are clasped in front of me, or resting, palms down, on my thighs. The ministers standing in the aisles are an unsettling presence: they seem like actors in an abstracted process that I don’t understand. This abstraction makes them withdrawn, inaccessible; I can’t imagine them outside of this emotional temperature. Enthusiasm in the auditorium is so constant it is flat, and confidence is unquestioned.

The thin, institutional blue carpets are matched by the blue and purple branded banners carrying the ministry’s logo. These banners provide the backdrop to a smiling band, wearing purple satin-look shirts and singing into microphones on stands. Heavily branded aesthetic elements work to unify everything

into a corporate show of strength that becomes a frantic banality. This surface is so unquantifiable it becomes depthless, whilst the physicality of the whole occurrence – dancing, singing, shouting – is perfused with this flatness. The word corporate, as used to denote a slick flatness, is far from connotations of the bodily from which the corporate derives – corps meaning body. In fact the scene in the auditorium seems to contain both these uses; it is removed from and yet so close to corporeality. How does the corporeal become corporate, and the corporate, corporeal?

Like the water and the tears, other materials surround the affliction as well as the deliverance, and transmit meaning. The ingestion of some substances is cited as evidence of possession – like eating clay or soil, or ice for its crunchiness, its hardened quality contrary to the purified liquidity of water.

The voices kept telling her to eat the soil and clay and later prompted her to eat ice cubes, crunching them daily as if they were biscuits. She would buy large freezers to accommodate the ice cubes and have them at her side, whether day or night.

I scraped them from the freezer. I had to buy more freezers to get them and buy loads from the supermarkets. When I would sit watching TV, I could go on for three or four hours eating it. I felt relaxed when I was eating it. I became desperate and angry till I could get it. I could not sleep until I finished it... I kept it at work and at home; I took it to bed. I could eat a lunchbox of clay a day. It was nice; I enjoyed it. I sometimes got soil from the garden; it tasted better than food. I would pick it, roast it in a pan and eat it... [Now] I do not crave the ice, clay and soil at all! Before I was dreaming of eating the ice and soil but I don't have those dreams anymore. My dreams are clear now.

The terrifyingly bodily becomes the clarity of electronic slickness. A tangle of wires is at the front of the auditorium, forming a mass of connections. During the service, structures behind the service semi-appear, like the network of ushers and the film crew filming what is broadcast live (the ministry has a global presence). What is it like to be an observer to this, to be completely removed? The recording is projected onto a screen at the front, as if to make you hyper-aware of an encompassing reality, and of your own part within it. Flashing up on the screen over the top of these images are the hymn lyrics: another totalising effect. Screens exact the sense of being watched, of being subject to the visual and to evidence. I was being filmed too. Everything is mediated in such a way that it is impossible to tell its opposite; it surpasses fakeness. All this is to prove that 'distance is no barrier' – things may be transmitted through the screen, as if ready-made, to be absorbed.

By the time you prayed and laid hands on the screen, it was like you were there with us and you joined our midst. As you laid your hands on the screen, you laid

your hands on our face. That was when confusion came between us; everybody scattered. Any time I lie down, I will be seeing you in my dream. You keep praying for me and laying hands on me. I want to sleep well. I cannot close my eyes without seeing you.

All attention is on the screens except for the occasional comment, or laughter, that momentarily breaks this order. In the lead-up to the deliverance, voices from the auditorium intensify. Words are exchanged – appeals to the holy – the ministers pace up and down, stamping and flinging their arms down, and shaking their heads that are lowered inwardly in a discordant conversation. Voices are multiple and concurrent with the electronic voices via the screen. As this recorded video gets louder and louder with shouts and commands from their prophet, his voice distorts, being unable to reach out of the flatness of the screen. The air twists with prayers and shouts, but sticks – plateaus – as it reaches the limits of its fervour.

After several minutes, attention is turned to the back of the auditorium, where a man is jumping so quickly he is shaking. Awareness shifts from inwards to outwards, towards the spectacle that is occurring, and back again. A woman runs to the front and casts herself down on the floor. She vomits and spits into tissues placed in front of her. Another runs forward. Stretched out on the floor, they are surrounded by the ministers and the cameramen. Voices drive out and expel, whilst assistants restrain the body: arms pulled back behind her, pinned under the armpit and pressure applied to the lower arms and wrists – out you unclean spirit, you have no place in that body, what have you done to this body? The interviewer narrates the events – watch the screens as the anointing water is poured all over her.

And she falls back. You can see the evil substances coming out of her. Deliverance is taking place all over the auditorium.

The highly constructed service seems to break down into chaotic ruptures of bodily disorder, whilst still retaining its deliberate, managed qualities. The heat of the auditorium is affirmed by the words Holy Ghost Fire as the anointing water is sprayed on the face. It brings flinches, screams and convulsions. The water that is clear cool purity burns the evil spirit and the affliction is lifted.

Dissipating over the skin, she is enraptured and removed as if transported elsewhere.