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Technologies of Faith Performance: Theatre/Performance and Pentecostalism in Africa

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Abstract

The notion of theatre has escaped from its conventional consistency into a state of amorphousness that seems to admit practically every form of physical interaction between people. This inconsistency is a consequence of the growing disaffection with conventional Western theatre's textuality and illusionism, and the influence of the postmodern critique of received orthodoxies. These conditions have enabled the emergence of performance as the practical and analytical category and the consequent accommodation of 'other theatres' and popular cultures within the discipline of theatre studies. This paper furthers this critical direction by examining the manner in which popular Pentecostalism in Africa deploys the technologies of performance in its evangelism. Adopting a *performance studies* perspective, the paper focuses on Chris Oyakhilome, the renowned Nigerian pastor, and credits his evangelical success to his dexterity as a performer; one who consciously exploits his body and every available media to influence an audience in pre-determined directions.

> "All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify"
> (Goffman, 1959: 72).

In recent times theatre has become such a shifting domain that its boundaries have proved increasingly difficult to delineate. In mainstream Western tradition, theatre is a dramatic performance involving spectators collected in a conventionally determined environment. Its convention requires that performers represent characters in a fictional narrative rather

than themselves in everyday encounters. Since the later half of the 20th century this illusionist theatre has become so vigorously troubled that many scholars think it inadvisable to attempt any enduring definition more committed than that it is a kind of symbolic behaviour involving physically present human beings distinguishable at certain moments into performer/s and audience. In concert with the postmodern framework which now contests previous interest in the construction of stable, essentialist, disciplinary fields, notable theatre scholars and practitioners attack conventional theatre's textuality and elitist disengagement with physical reality. They criticize theatre for becoming too literary and rational instead of relying on what Antonin Artaud refers to as "spatial language – the visual language of things, of movements, attitudes, gestures – the language of sounds, cries, of lights and onomatopoeia" (Artaud, 1978: 86; cited in Harth, 2004: 79).

The consequence has been a pushing out of the conventional limits of theatre to accommodate 'other theatres' that do not render theatre as an essentially textual (as in scripted) and intellectual enterprise. Largely influenced by these non-Western forms, the conventional boundaries between theatre and the quotidian, performer, performance and audience, have effectively collapsed. With this territorial breakdown and the consequent interdisciplinarity which became the vogue in Western thinking since the late 20th-century, performance emerged as either an alternative to, or new form of theatre, or an entirely unique expressive category accommodating theatre as well as other genres, such as music, sports, dance, and ritual. Influenced by the works of anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists and theatre scholars, especially those, like Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Erving Goffman, and Richard Schechner, whose research interests embraced traditional or marginal cultures outside the canonical West, performance has opened up theatre studies to embrace more embodied popular and marginal cultural practices. As Marvin Carlson (2001: 141) notes,

> Although theatre studies itself, through the 1970s and 1980s, gradually had been giving more attention to the hitherto largely neglected works of 'popular' and 'folk' theatre that were outside the accepted literary canon, performance studies carried this interest much further, looking beyond popular forms of theatre to all sorts of popular and folk entertainments and activities which fell entirely outside the normal domain of theatre studies: rituals, sporting events, parades, and every manner of public event and ceremony.

This condition makes it possible to investigate African Christian Pentecostal movement from the broader perspective of theatre and performance studies. That is, as a *performance*, an "activity consciously carried out and presented to others to have some effect on them" (141). I

examine the crucial ways in which religion is performed by Believers' Loveworld Inc., Nigeria; the means by which the behaviour of pastors and their crew of religious workers and assistants, as well as congregants, are 'framed'. In line with this thinking, I see the charismatic pastor as a performer whose every gesture, movement, vocalization, as well as physical appearance, are undeniably 'staged'; all studiously selected, elaborated and executed for effects other than those they elicit in their everyday communicative uses. Similarly, the members of the audience are bound by a contract that is not of the everyday; a contract whose terms engage them as stakeholders in a special kind of symbolic encounter wherein they accept responsibilities and invest certain pre-determined behaviours.

In this investigation I adopt a performance approach, rather than a textual or semiotic mode. This constrains the enquiry to bodily behaviours or actions themselves, to "what people do in the activity of their doing it" (Schechner, 2006: 1), the spatial contexts within which the actions are constructed, and the sensory resources which underscore these bodily actions. This implies an analysis of embodied strategies and 'media': the tangible structures constructed to bear the weight of evangelical messages, articulate the extra-daily experiences that constitute the religious encounter, and make the extra-ordinary manifest for congregants. This is evidently akin to Kramer's use of 'media' in terms of "faith artefacts", except that here the concern is not particularly with "those tangible symbolic *constructs* which direct and embody religious expectation and devotion" (2002: 22; emphasis added), but with those symbolic *behaviours*, including artefacts or properties, which embody religion sensuously.

Faith (as) Performance

Philosophers, theologians and scholars of religion have vigorously investigated the relationship between faith and belief. In the main, they cast this in a mould that echoes somewhat the Cartesian mind and body dialectic: belief is cognitive, faith is pragmatic. Belief in the ordinary sense implies an absence of doubt, that is, it is produced or destroyed through rational processes: where there is little or no doubt belief thrives. From a Christian perspective, however, belief does not subsist on the basis of empirical evidence. According to Wittgestein (1966: 56), "if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business". Thus Lopez Jr. (1998: 33) affirms that it "is an agnostic affirmation of something that cannot be subjected to ordinary rules of verification". Faith, on the other hand, is posited as an experience of, or 'personal encounter', with God (Neely-Chandler, 2003: 317). Belief is the domain of religious philosophy and metaphysics – of concepts, theology, and dogma – and faith is the site of sensuous behaviour, of manifest relationship between the faithful and spiritual presence. Belief is articulated through introspection, through

thinking, writing and/or reading, while faith is embodied: "Faith is represented as an active force exercised in this world" (Kramer, 2001: 183). It is sensuously produced or accessed, rather than cognitively disconnected from embodied behaviour.

Isolated, bodily-disengaged speculation has been entrenched in Western theology as the true means by which God is approached. (See, for instance, Hegel's three-volume *Lectures*, 1984, 1987 & 1985.) Physical activities are commonly 'read' as manifestations of an internally goaded rational process. This schema is also demonstrated in conventional theatre's actor-training programme, especially the influential Stanislavski 'System', which is based on the principle of 'emotional recall'. However, both experience and research contest the hegemony of this system. At least they suggest that this is not the only way to physically reproduce, experience or communicate an emotion. Many non-Western theatres, such as the Indian *Kathakali* dance theatre and Japanese *Noh*, work from the outside in that style of mechanical acting that is deprecated in the System. Paul Eckman's research validates this mechanical process. According to Richard Schechner (2006: 31), "What is truly surprising about Eckman's experiment is not that emotional recall works, but that … mechanical acting worked better than getting the actor to feel". When applied to the practice of religion, Eckman's research disputes the more popular Hegelian rhetoric by arguing that embodied expression has the potential of working better than cognitive process; that in religion, as in other human expressive engagements, the body is actually a better emotive medium and language than the mind. This submission is validated by the new wave of global Pentecostalism, the Faith Movement, characterised by manifest embodied encounters with the Holy Ghost evidenced by "not only tongues and interpretations, but also holy laughter, falling in the spirit, dancing before the Lord, and singing in tongues" (Synan, 2001: 359).

Pentecostalism in Africa.

Although the root of Pentecostalism, according to Synan (2001: 1), is traceable to the 'Holy Spirit' theology of John Wesley after his 'conversion' in 1738, its exact birth is the Holy Spirit baptism of Agnes Ozman "at a small Bible school in Topeka, Kansas", on January 1, 1901. On this day "Ozman received a startling manifestation of the gift of tongues and became, in effect, the first Pentecostal of the 20th century". This tradition of origin is contested by a notable number of scholars who posit that "not all Pentecostal outbursts around the world may be causally linked to North American initiatives" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005: 10). I use the term here in its rather inflated sense to designate the 'classical' influenced, the African initiated, and other "new Pentecostal churches" characterised by a doctrinal emphasis on Holy Ghost manifestation signalled by glossolalia

and healing (Anderson, 2005: 67). However, irrespective of its exact origin, Pentecostalism is a global movement. In most countries of Africa it has become arguably the most visible popular culture, insinuating itself into contention in practically every sphere of existence; from religion, through the arts and entertainment, into economics and politics.

In typifying Pentecostalism in Nigeria, Adegboyin and Ukah (2002: 78-85) identify "four strands": Classical, Indigenous, Charismatic, and Neo-Pentecostal. They observe that the last is easily the most ubiquitous and amorphous, differentiated from the Classical model by its doctrinal emphasis on prosperity, "emotional and enthusiastic" services and a "craze to publish their own glossy booklets, run their Bible Institutes and organize Minister's Conferences". These characteristics have come to include a liberal attitude to popular culture, and a mass-oriented method of proselytization. In short, this strand is marked by its greater theatricality, a pervasive sensuousness that privileges embodied expression and sensoriality. It thus utilises performative media – the body and every practicable artefact – to navigate the experience of the Holy Ghost.

One such prominent Neo-Pentecostal group in Nigeria is Believers' Loveworld Inc. (also known as Christ Embassy), under the administrative and spiritual leadership of Chris Oyakhilome. In every respect, the Embassy typifies the Neo-Pentecostal strand, especially in the profundity of its healing strategies, fervent appropriation of multi-media technology, and its octopus structure reflected not only in the overwhelming expanse of its spiritual outreach, but also its entrepreneurial concerns. It is reputed to command "a follower-ship that is in the millions", with an internet homepage that "attracts over 57 million visitors monthly", and a television network described as "the largest Christian television network in Africa, and with its recently launched satellite station reaching out to about a quarter of the world's population" (*National Standard*, Dec. 2004: 6, 23). Granting that these figures may be somewhat overstated, they, nonetheless, give an indication of the global aspirations as well as the social and cultural visibility of Chris Oyakhilome's Embassy. Although it has developed its own individual characteristics, obviously responding to its spatial and cultural location, it is evidently a prototype of the North American genus. This manifests not only in its doctrinal bias but also its performative and entrepreneurial engagements. These have evidently earned it enrolment in the not very acclamatory institution of ''Hollywood Ministries'' (Magbadelo, 2005: 44).

Technologies of Faith Performance in Christ Embassy

Faith performance as construed here is the *embodiment* of faith in symbolic visual and auditory vehicles, such as rhythmic and non-rhythmic body movements, actions, gestures, facial expressions, speech, vocal and

instrumental sounds, spatial and body designs (scenography, properties, makeup, costume), and other communicative media, such as film, print, video and sound technologies. The actions and their corollaries executed in the performance are viewed from a theatrical paradigm as consciously selected and symbolically elaborated to affect an audience in loosely pre-determined ways.

Generally, every performance involves an audience which, in the conventional sense, is a group of voyeuristic observers bounded not just spatially but behaviourally and conceptually. This form of sheltered spectatorship has been discredited by notable theatre practitioners, such as Bertolt Brecht and practically all avant-gardists, in favour of a more participative audience. In some cultural contexts the audience is so involved with the performance that any distinction between it and the performers is a matter of degree rather than species. For instance, Nnabuenyi Ugonna (1984:196) says of Igbo masquerade drama that both audience and performers form an inseparable continuum – from "those who provide primary spectacle and initiate action" to those who respond to the initiated actions and provide "a secondary spectacle" – and are not distinguished into performing and non-performing categories. This continuity is replicated in Pentecostalism where every member of the congregation is committed both physically and emotionally. Physically, each member plays a role, spanning various forms of vocal and bodily investments; emotionally, each experiences different stages of charged states signalled by such behaviours as shouting, weeping, falling, fainting and uncontrolled speech and bodily actions. In Christ Embassy, therefore, it is more appropriate to speak generally of performers since each individual contributes to the performance through various embodied and psychic conducts. The visual and conceptual expenditures of everyone involved make every service an intense transformative experience, leading to a palimpsest state, a condition analogous to what Schechner and Appel (1990: 4) refer to as "the physicalization of an incomplete transformation". Even at that most climactic moment in the performance – when the Holy Ghost manifests in the vocal and bodily acts of the performers – agency is not totally overwritten but compromised or negotiated. This negotiated state, commonly described as 'being in the spirit,' is evidenced by some kind of control discernible even in the apparent surrender of agency to the Spirit. It is obvious that each performer knows, even in the very eye of the Spirit, what to do at every stage, how far to go, and when to stop.

Although each service is unique in context, form and content, it is possible to tease out a loosely consistent structure; some consistent characteristics which occur in all the church's evangelistic services. A typical church program, especially Chris Oyakhilome's 'healing and anointing' services and 'crusades', is consummately theatrical. Often conceived in terms of 'spiritual warfare', these programs are spectacular, cumulative and suspenseful, beginning with some kind of an exposition,

developing through conflict and crisis, and terminating in resolution and dénouement. This is undeniably the structure of every successful theatre experience. The general pattern of the 'plot', or the Aristotelian "arrangement of the incidents", is not unlike Gustav Freytag's influential five-part pyramidal dramatic structure comprising exposition, rising action, climax or turning point, falling action, and dénouement or catastrophe (Prince, 1987). A typical anointing, deliverance, or miracle service is structured thus: a mood-setting beginning which involves dancing and singing to live music; the pastor's presentation and elaboration of the theme of the service utilising controlled vocal and bodily registers; the prophesying of positive messages derived from the theme with more elaborate vocal and bodily emphasis; the invocation and descent of the Holy Ghost or anointing on the congregation signalled by miracles and frenetic aural and bodily behaviour; a drop into victorious celebration in music, dance, song and more prophesy deploying more controlled but still elaborate actions; a final level of more articulate behaviour and a return to a more sombre state where the pastor bids the congregation goodbye with prayers, prophesies, and best wishes. Kramer (2002: 110) describes a similar structure in a Neo-Pentecostal programme as a "spiritual drama with three acts: an opening that establishes the emotional tone for the service; an extended ritual that addresses and exposes evil, in which the Word of God forces demons to manifest their true identities and intentions; and the final climactic sequence of expulsion by the collectivity". Utilising broad, elaborate, and aggressive gesture, speech, bodily attitude and movement, this 'drama' is conducted with profound theatricality. The following detailed examination of the space of performance, time and the use of the body in Christ Embassy illustrates this theatricality.

Performance space is commonly the material environment within which a performance is hosted; or, as McAuley puts it (2007: 4), "space as it is occupied and experienced by performers and spectators". In this case, however, we do not restrict it to the physical geography alone, but also to such virtual or conceptual 'environments' that function significantly in the performance. These non-spatial spaces are articulated through symbolic media such as speech, sound and visual artefact. Within the most stable and concrete space, that is, the fixed and delimitated geography of the church, everything is staged or designed to make an impression. First of all, this space is framed and highlighted against the habitual ordinariness of the everyday. In exactly the same manner as the conventional theatre building, several procedures – physical, conceptual, metaphysical, aesthetic – serve to 'mark' or frame the environment of the church from everyday topography. Physically, the church building is erected in relief on what is a routinely imagined flatness of the earth's surface. Physical boundaries hallow this space by practically cutting it and everything within it out of the space of everyday. Thus, to enter it one must physically

leave behind the space of the everyday and the consciousness that operates therein. Within it certain conventionalised attitudes and behaviours are expected, encouraged and often called for or cued. The individual's consciousness becomes charged, their behaviour towards everything and everyone within the space becomes formalised in a manner that is different from the everyday. This change in consciousness is made evident in embodied behaviour – carriage, greeting, facial expression, and so on. As Brook (1969) observes, entering the space of the theatre is coming "from a life outside the theatre that is essentially repetitive to a special arena in which each moment is lived more clearly and more tensely" (cited in Auslander, 1997: 17-18).

In Christ Embassy's worship services, the physical presence of 'a man of God', the lead performer, serves to set off the space even more intensely from everywhere else. While her/his aura or presence suffuses and elevates the entire environment, the space immediately surrounding her/his physical body is particularly saturated, thereby making it once-removed from the general church geography and twice-removed from the everyday. This holiest space is the stage which also hosts the altar, and is effectively more circumscribed than the conventional theatre stage: geographically, it is usually elevated, aesthetically, it is more decorated, spiritually, it hosts a more concentrated presence of the Holy Ghost, strategically, it constitutes the visual focus for everyone who is not on it, and manually, it is policed by security personnel in dark suits who forcefully discourage unwarranted invasion. A professional lighting design, comprising footlights, floods, robotics and spots add colour, mood and visual intensity to the stage. Combined with such decorative devices as textured backdrops, blooming flowers and fresh plants, the stage emerges in clear relief from the other stations of the church.

An interesting reproduction and dissemination of space is effected through processes of spatial mediation. Within, and often outside the physical geography of the church, proceedings are projected on a number of large-screen monitors; a strategy which intensifies the stage even more by virtually 'moving' it close to those not physically close enough. Beyond the immediate church environment, across national and continental borders, worship sessions are transmitted, often live, to the thousands of Christ Embassy churches via satellite. For instance, the "Good Friday Miracle Night" crusade held on Friday, 14 April, 2006, at the Loveworld Crusade Ground, Lagos, was broadcast live in two venues in South Africa and London, enabling over "seven thousand people in Johannesburg and more than 5,000 in London" to participate in the crusade (http://www.christembassy.org/GFMNreport/index.htm).

In addition to these, video and audio tapes disseminate these spaces across geographies. This active mediatisation shrinks physical space by virtually sucking viewers from their physical environments into the distant

spaces of the services. On the other hand, it could be seen as a system of dissemination which takes copies of the space to viewers rather than bring them into the original space of performance. Apart from the visual, certain interactive devices, such as verbal referencing and addressing of viewers from television screens – inviting them into the performance and often asking them to engage physically by repeating certain statements after the pastor, touching their television sets, shutting their eyes, and so on – further deconstruct the concept of space as a natural environment.

There is probably nothing as tedious and monotonous as natural time. And it seems that the business of living is preoccupied mainly with its administration; how to produce it, 'kill' it, tame it, or be tamed by it. African Pentecostals are adept at the production, killing, dissemination, control and occupation of time. Christ Embassy is especially distinguished in this business of 'timing time.' Time's monotony is broken through practices or strategies of timelessness. First of all, all church programmes occupy moments that are marked and set apart in clock or calendar time. Whether they are marked as hours or days, months or years, the moments are framed or abstracted from the everyday in the same fashion as space is. Time is cut from its everyday blandness or monotony and intensified by designation as 'worship time'. Thus, specific hours and days, sometimes months and even years, are set apart as special times for spiritual experience. Although this timing depends on contingency, the most stable in the Christ Embassy calendar are Sundays and Wednesdays. Important dates in the Christian calendar, such as Christmas, New Year, and Easter, are especially marked. Natural time is also suspended through conventions that exclude or deny it: no clocks are visible on the walls of the church, and the use of mobile phones is generally discouraged. Natural time is translated into virtual time and commodified in such mediating forms as television programmes and video recordings. Additionally, a typical programme is so packed with suspenseful and impacting actions that worshippers and spectators hardly notice the passage of time. Every piece of time is literally occupied with intense activity which seems to overwrite it, rendering it invisible in the course of the services.

Catherine Bell (1998: 205) observes that more current concepts of performance "emphasize an event in which the very activity of the agent or artist is the most critical dimension and not the completion of the action". This contrasts with the dominant illusionistic 'acting' style which objectified the performing body by focusing on the character. Schechner (2006: 146-147) conceives acting as consisting of "focused, clearly marked, and tightly framed behaviours specifically designed for showing", and Frances Harding (1999) observes that in Africa, for instance, there is "a preference for multilayered performances whereby any one performer may, within a single performance, be at one point 'acting' and at another point 'presenting the self'" (cited in Schechner, 2006: 148). Although Harding seems to imply a difference between 'acting' and 'presenting the

self', Schechner's definition seems to consider both styles of performance as different styles of acting. This is the perspective adopted here.

Without question, the locus of every performance is the human body in motion, whether subjective or mimetic, acting or not-acting. In Christ Embassy, as in other Pentecostal churches, it is the central medium of faith performance. Here acting typifies the multilayered performance style – consisting of bodily behaviours supported by several media/elements, such as music and design – deployed for the activation of faith in God. Combining both the agentive and mimetic kinds, both pastor and congregation 'act out' or perform their faith consummately.

Having observed that the distinction between the central performer and the congregation is a matter of gradation rather than of kind, in the sense that everyone actively contributes to the performance, I focus attention on the performance style of Chris Oyakhilome. As Kramer (2002: 340) observes, "one mark of an influential preacher is the ability to combine scriptural content and performance style with the anointing". In this 'mark' Oyakhilome is undeniably a maestro. His stage 'presence' (Barba 1985) or 'charisma'(Weber, 1947: 358-359) makes him, to borrow Reuben Abati's (2001: 11) description, "a spell binder". Barba describes actors' 'presence' thus:

> Faced with certain actors, a spectator is attracted by an elementary energy which seduces without mediation, even before he has deciphered the individual actions or questioned himself about their meaning and understood it …. We often call this power of the actor "presence". But it is not something which *is*, which is *there* in front of us…. It is a body-in-life…. The tensions which secretly govern our normal way of being physically present, come to the surface in the actor, become visible, unexpectedly (1985: 13-14).

Oyakhilome's style of dress, voice and speech, bodily technique, combined with the anointing, lead his congregation through a gamut of emotions: from mild excitation to outright unconsciousness. Physically, he is described as "[h]andsome and debonair" (*National Standard* Dec. 2004: 23). This is not unaided by such theatrical devices as makeup and costume. His hair, for instance, is habitually curled and jelled into a 'wet-look'; and his 'power' dressing, in manifestly expensive designer suits, shirts, ties and shoes, is undeniably chosen to impress.

Spruced with an obvious North American accent, Oyakhilome's sonorous voice, aided by a state of the art sound technology, is profoundly affective. Whether live or transmitted on television, recorded on video or audio tapes, his voice carries a tonality that ranges from the subtlest, deepest and most intimate whisper to a grating, guttural timbre; and an inflection that is at ease with both low and high pitches, slow and fast frequencies. Oyakhilome's diction is clear, resonant and intelligible,

sometimes caressing, at other times striking or knocking his audience literally senseless. Mobilising the most assertive imageries, he entrances his audience by at once calling into reality the horrors of hell and the tranquillity of heaven. His style here is usually to explicate on a particular passage of the Bible and then deploy performative idioms and constations to cast his utterances into physical actions, and prophesy their fulfilment in the lives of his congregation.

Oyakhilome utilises a hybrid style in his performances, using speech and physical actions in a combination of realistic, codified, improvisatory and non-illusionistic performance technique; seamlessly welding such varied expressive forms as music, song, drama, dance and elaborate gestures and facial expressions into an affective arsenal. He re-enacts some of the characters and incidents in his sermons, utilises certain ritualised gestures and rhetorical devices that are exclusive to members of his congregation or an audience familiar with the Neo-Pentecostal visual and verbal idioms, improvises narratives to illustrate his messages, and easily delves into the inexhaustible archive of anecdotal experience for illustrative texts. He often transits smoothly from speech into improvised scat-style singing and punctuates his sermons with music from a well furnished choir and orchestra. He performs his words and sentences with sensitivity to tonality, a rhythmic and melodic flexibility that reminds one of J. L. Styan's statement that the dramatic "text is a tune to be sung" (1969: 86). He makes avid use of such rhetorical and literary devices as repetition, modulation, rhetorical questions, witticism, humour, metre, simile and metaphor. His words are nuanced and often emotively coloured. He often intensifies the effect of his messages by the insertion of conspicuous silences or pauses. The affectivity of this technique is noted by J. Fernald's point that:

> any line which is intended to convey a particular effect and which it may be of dramatic importance to emphasize, should be followed by a Dramatic Pause, in order that the particular effect may have time to sink into the consciousness of the audience (cited in Styan, 1969: 89).

In other cases, he breaks the formality of his performance by making personal references, interpolation of exclamatory sounds, and requesting certain vocal and embodied actions from his congregation. In this manner, he counters the formal elitism of a sermon by encouraging interactivity, seeming to remind his audience that it is after all listening to a physically present pastor in a physically real space and time. This occurs most strategically at those moments when his audience gets rather carried away. Such strategies as the incongruous smile, movement or laughter, long pauses, and so on, serve to bring the audience back to the temporal and spatial reality of the moment and of his presence in a manner reminiscent of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ('alienation effect'); a strategy of

'estrangement' which disengages the audience from the incident portrayed on the stage thereby enabling it to adopt a more critical, rather than impassioned, attitude (2001: 99).

Chris Oyakhilome seems to have taken as his lodestar the injunction of the great actor-trainer, Konstanin Stanislavski (1949: 118) to the stage actor: "When you are in verbal intercourse on the stage, speak not so much to the ear as to the eye". Thus, he makes as much use, if not more, of his voice as his body, combining a range of gestures and movements that runs from sensitive facial expressions and arm movements to wild and spasmodic actions, high leaps and jumps, and dancing. These gestures and movements underscore the moment and the meaning, being most elaborate at the climactic and gentle at the sober moments, thus initiating a marriage of word and action.

His ingenious interactive strategies constitute his most effective performative battery. His sermons are generously spiced with strategies of interaction between himself in the pulpit and the congregation in the auditorium. He uses certain codified antiphonal-responsorial (call-and-response) sentences and phrases as participatory cues which produce instant reactions from his audience. He often moves physically from the pulpit into the auditorium, and sometimes he leads a congregant to the pulpit to either illustrate his message, demand of her/him some answers to certain questions, narrate a personal encounter (or 'testimony') with the Holy Spirit, or display her/his healing or infirmity to all.

Apart from these physical procedures, other more psychological and embodied devices of engagement and participation are deployed, such as requesting certain physical or vocal behaviours from his congregation. For instance, at various moments in his 2005 New Year service tagged "2005: The Year of the Spirit" he asked the congregation to "Tell somebody 'from my belly rivers, rivers, rivers, rivers, rivers of living water'"; "Now, say it with me"; "Can you shout Amen somebody"; "Do a dance for the Lord." And this is not restricted to his actual audiences. As already noted, in his live and recorded broadcasts on television, video and audio cassettes, he addresses his viewers/listeners directly, sometimes collectively but often individually.

To illustrate his performance I give the following description of a scene from "2005: The Year of the Spirit." Having prepared his congregation for the anointing by performing the passage from Psalm 23, with such dramatically executed prophesies as: "In 2005 we are going to get stronger and stronger! Stronger and stronger! Stronger and stronger! Stronger and stronger! Somebody say Halleluya-a!", he then proceeded to build up an almost unbearable suspense by continuously prophesying and asking: "Are you ready for the anointing?" To these, the congregation screamed excitedly, perspiring, jumping, screaming, some dancing, and many weeping. "Are you sure you are ready?" he asked yet again. This time the congregation got to a frenzied stage, variously screaming, jumping and

weeping heedlessly. The orchestra, predominantly of saxophone and piano, played improvised phrases to emphasize the mood. "I said, are you ready for the anointi-ing?" he screamed. The congregation reached out desperately, arms stretched towards him to receive. But he was not ready yet. Sweating and almost as physically agitated as his congregation, he spoke to the camera: "Listen! Listen! You are watching now. In Port Harcourt, in Abuja, from Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, all over this great country. And you are watching all around the world. At this moment the anointing of God's spirit is about to hit. I said the anointing of God's spirit is about to HIT! To launch you into 2005 in a big way. Are you ready?" Moving agitatedly, he exclaimed: "Hey hey hey! Heey! Heey!" Then pointing to a section of the auditorium, he asked: "Are you ready?" The congregation screamed its readiness, reaching out physically and expectantly towards him. With emphatic gestures he continued: "Listen to me. Listen. Listen! If you can catch this anointing tonight… Listen to me. Listen to me. As I release the anointing, you catch it. Hey! Hey!" The saxophonist and pianist played quick riffs to heighten the mood. "Brother, sister, take all of it. When you catch it... Ha! Ha! Ha!" Then he observed a brief pause and then continued. "Shooo! This anointing is to beautify your life. It'll make your life colourful! It'll make your life glorious! Oh prosperous! Are you ready-y?" Then he pointed to a section of the congregation: "Are you ready over here?" They cheered, jumped excitedly, and screamed in expression of their readiness. "Oh thank you Jesus. Hey!" Then more emphatically: "Are you ready?" At this moment that section of the congregation could hardly control itself anymore. Then staring into his right palm, he said: "I feel the anointing right now." Still staring into his palm he leaned backwards and flung his arm violently in that direction of the auditorium. "Take it!" he screamed. This literal launching of the anointing affected the recipients in assorted fashions: some fell down instantly, others spun around awhile before falling; some were lifted bodily and flung backwards, collapsing on one another, breaking chairs; and some shook spasmodically on the floor while many visibly passed out. Then he voiced a brief glossolalia and moved hastily to another section. "That's the anointing of the Holy Ghost! Ooh, ooh!" he pronounced. Then pointing at another section, he asked: "Are you ready? Maa maa maa maa! Are you ready? I said are you ready?" This section screamed even louder than the previous one. Then he leaned backwards again and swung the open palm in that direction, shouting: "Take it in Jesus name!" The people reacted in the same manner as the previous ones. "Power of the Holy Ghost," he screamed triumphantly and did another round of glossolalia. Thus, he dispensed the Holy Ghost with similar consequences in all corners of the auditorium. Then he addressed one of the numerous cameras: "Those of you watching, are you ready for the anointing? Are you ready for the anointing?" he asked repeatedly. Then he flung his arm in the face of the camera in the same manner: "Take it in Jesus name!"

After the confusion of falling, jumping, screaming, praying, weeping, rolling and so on, he encouraged them to "Speak in other tongues! Speak in other tongues!" Then a racket of speaking and shouting ensued, accompanied by various forms of discordant bodily movements. The entire auditorium was subsumed in a bedlam of aural and visual confusion. "Many are being healed right now…," he said. Walking dramatically, he proclaimed: "You are walking into 2005 like a king." Then he observed an emphatic pause. "Alleluia to the son of God," he announced. Then another pause. "Phew! Uh, Glory! Come on brother! Hey! Alleluia. Have you received something? I said have you received something? Have you received something?" he enquired repeatedly even as the audience screamed their 'yeses'. "You wanna dance about it?" he asked. "Are you hearing me? Give God praise. Do a dance for the Lord. Come o-on-n!" Then the congregation went into all manners of dancing to their individual rhythms. From this spirited moment the service tapered down in cadence, from a musical celebration of the Holy Spirit to the final prayers, goodbyes and best wishes from Chris Oyakhilome.

Conclusion

The Pentecostal movement which has speedily transformed into a global phenomenon conceives of faith as a product of active affirmation and investment made physically manifest on the bodily behaviour of worshippers. Thus, its followers have adopted a system of worship and proselytisation that is consummately theatrical. They appropriate all signifying cultural media, such as music, dance, song, visual and rhetorical arts, film, television and radio, in the construction of an expressive idiom which turns the pastor into a performance artist and congregants into a performing audience. As Kramer (2002: 105) observes, the successful pastor is not unlike the television personality "who keeps an audience entertained and guarantees that they will return". Chris Oyakhilome is one such successful pastor whose theatrical prowess has turned his Christ Embassy into one of the most influential Neo-Pentecostal congregations in Africa. His crusades and miracle/healing programmes are reputed to attract worshippers in their millions, and his satellite network bestrides the entire globe, transmitting both recorded and 'live' programs to practically every part of the world.

An examination of his performance technique demonstrates his integrity, not only as an anointed (and anointing) 'man of God', but significantly as an immensely talented performance practitioner; one who consciously mobilises every rhetorical, literary, and theatrical device – such as emphasis, metaphor, repetition, intonation, cadence, rhythm, makeup, costume, voice, movement, gesture, mime, music, dance, and song, lighting, stage, video and sound technologies – to influence his audience in largely pre-determined ways.

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