

Energetic Forces and Flow States

Kelly Large

Flow States

As pandemic lockdowns lift, I repeatedly visit the vestiges of the cell of a mediaeval anchoress, which once adjoined St James church in Shere. The stone lintel and two small openings in the church wall are all that remains of the tiny room in which Christine Carpenter, the Anchoress of Shere, is thought to have been entombed for most of her adult life.

The Anchorite tradition involved an individual, usually a woman, voluntarily forgoing village life to be enclosed in a chamber to pursue solitary, religious devotion. Walled in, the cell protected the anchoress from the sins of the world, shielding her from the mortal dangers of plague and pestilence as well as the social perils of moral temptation. One could also say that it released her from the daily grind of domestic, agrarian and reproductive labour, itself a form of incarceration. In Chris Newby's film, *Anchoress* (1993), which was based on Christine Carpenter's story, we see the newly entombed anchoress engrossed in mindful tasks. She works on delicate embroideries and makes shadow play with the shimmering light that penetrates her enclosure. Time stops, the here and now expands and she transcends her corporeal confinement into an emancipatory state of flow and ecstatic reverie.

Close-up shots of Catherine carefully stitching bring to mind the hands that apply gentle pressure over and over to finely score the gleaming aluminium sheets that make up *once solid, now dissolved* (2022). Every mark made inevitably following from the previous one, like the mindful, repetitive tasks used in the religious ritual of the anchoress, the hyper-focus of intricate art-making distorts a sense of time. Utterly immersed in the present moment, the maker can enter a mental flow state. Known to alter brain patterns, a state of flow is capable of generating a sense of serenity and control over one's immediate environment, providing sanctuary in times of uncertainty.

Charismatic Energies

The word 'charisma' is adapted from the Greek *charizesthai*, meaning a favour bestowed from God. In the ancient world, charismatic individuals were thought to

have been touched by divine forces, manifesting as extraordinary gifts, such as the power to heal, perform miracles, prophesise or commune with the spirit world. Nowadays, secular interpretations translate these supernatural powers into a compelling aura that inspires devotion from others – people, places and even objects can be said to possess charismatic allure.

Surrounded by glimmering forms I feel an electrifying presence, the objects that cause it create their own magnetic field, a vortex of elemental forces that pull me in. Light rays refract across surfaces, energetic currents jumping from one foil surface to another, animating them into life. Electrical and magnetic power transformed from an alchemical curiosity into an essential utility around about the same time that aluminium foil was invented. As a social phenomenon, charisma started to gain popularity in that period too. Electricity and magnetism's association with both scientific and metaphysical realms continue to offer a rich source of evocative vocabulary through which to describe the ineffable qualities of charisma – 'electrifying', 'magnetic' and 'radiant' are often used to describe its effect. These vivid impressions make the everyday pulse with otherworldly, supernatural presence, just like the aluminium foil forms shimmering into life. This constellation of fragments that flash and gleam with light, entangle the rational world of electrical energy and industrial modernity with the ancient, inexplicable world of charismatic presence.

Drawing Power

Light and colour dance across a multitude of scored surfaces, their brilliance expanding outwards to touch me, dissolving the edges between us, between animate and inanimate things, between the material and immaterial. The physical limits of the space seemingly disappear. In describing *once solid, now dissolved* I find myself reaching for words associated with charisma – compelling, mesmerising, bewitching, magical. Are these shiny, foil shapes momentarily showing themselves in order to perform for me?

Myth has it that Marilyn Monroe was able to switch her star quality on and off at will, depending on whether she wanted the camera or a crowd to notice her. Charismatic entities possess a finely tuned power, a special gift to generate a magnetic connection that is worldly and human and extraordinarily magical at once. Charisma may have detached itself from its religious origins but still retains mystical qualities of some sort. Writing in the early 1900s, sociologist Max Weber saw the social

yearning for charismatic phenomena as a desire to re-enchant modern life with an ineffable magic that expanded experience beyond the economic and bureaucratic apparatuses that had come to define it.

The Tremble

A shiver ripples across the silver forms as if archaeological fragments are momentarily animated by an unseen kinetic force. I'm reminded of the YouTube videos I've been watching of charismatic worship: in contemporary charisma-based faiths, members of the congregation shake and shudder in a physical manifestation of the spiritual force flowing through their body. These simultaneous tremors also bring to mind the moment a crowd transforms from a mass of individuals into one swaying and undulating unified entity.

I do a little dance to animate the pieces and, yes, they tremble into life. Moving my body to see the work glint and shiver I feel possessed, as if the congregation of radiant forms compels me to do so. As a relational experience, charisma helps structure people's connection to authority, but secular charisma is bestowed by people rather than a divine being. Charismatic leaders only hold power for as long as their public believes in them though. Rocking back and forth on my heels, caught up in a mass of quivering presence, I wonder who has the power here – is it the work or is it me? Do these objects perform for me or I for them?

Enclosures and Openings

Made during our own plague times, these half-formed shapes are reminiscent of protective coverings – armour, blankets, shawls and amulets, alongside the toughened surfaces of shells and rock. Protective forms like these have always been willed into being, and as physical and spiritual defences were also common in mediaeval times and the things an anchoress might gather around her. Resistant to light, radio waves, bacteria and oxygen, the aluminium foil used to shape these pieces is a modern-day barrier. Wafer thin, these sheets are infinitely recyclable, their protective qualities everlasting.

Openings in each surface offer constantly changing perspectives, each revealing new textures, glinting in close-up. Colours emerge then fade, previously hidden shapes appear then dissolve into one another. Like the squint hole cut into the darkness of the anchoress's cell, we are granted not just a vision of the luminous altar, but the means to spiritually escape an enclosure, every vantage point offering

enticing glimpses of an elsewhere, a more-than human magical world, a place of refuge that slips in and out of focus.