Spirit media: charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana

de Witte, M.

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Introduction

‘It’s a new day! And it’s time for transformation. Destiny Summit 2002. It’s time to discover your destiny and change your paradigm from the old to the new, as you receive inspiration for transformation at the Destiny Summit 2002 by the International Central Gospel Church.’ On Sunday evening November 2002, the weekly Living Word broadcast on TV3 starts with an advert for a church ‘product’: a seven-day long religious conference ‘full of life transforming ministry,’ to begin the next day. An excited female voice urges the TV viewers at home to attend the sessions in order to change from ‘the old,’ visualised by an old-fashioned type writer, to ‘the new,’ represented by a computer. The next shot shows a crowd of worshipers, hands lifted up. The slogan ‘inspiration for transformation’ lards the image, in graphics and in voice. The backing trumpet music builds up as ‘the place to be’ comes on: a frontal shot of the mass audience filling the Christ Temple auditorium. Then the spectacle’s protagonists, four ‘seasoned international ministers of the gospel’ are presented: as the voice-over mentions their titles, names, churches and countries, their pictures appear with their names and national flags. Just as the advert seems to end with a spinning logo against a moving graphic background, a last shout of ‘transformation!’ and fading trumpets, a show music beat takes over and a flashing text ‘Coming Up TONIGHT’ appears. The female voice calls us to ‘get ready to receive the life transforming ministry of pastor Randy Morrison’ and we see a video clip of the man preaching: energetically walking up and down, his expressive face making the volume of his voice visible. Both arms gesticulate in the air, his motions enforced by the music. A similar clip presents the ‘summit host, Dr. Mensa Otabil, Coming Up TOMORROW MORNING @ 9:00am.’

The advert beautifully illustrates not only the marketing techniques the ICGC employs, but also the vision behind its plurifold media ministry: to use modern media technologies to radically transform Ghanaian people with the message of Christ and not to remain stuck in an archaic idea of religion as separate from ‘the world’; to move along with technological developments and use the computer when the typewriter has become outdated. It also shows the extent to which charismatic televisual culture revolves around images of the bodies of pastor-personalities and of their mass followings, around the convergence of visual technology and the human body.

This chapter deals with the ICGC’s media department AltarMedia and its Living Word broadcast. It investigates the relationship between the ICGC ‘media ministry’ and the more performative modes of mediation discussed in the previous chap-
ter. It builds upon the dynamics between charisma and format running through the previous chapters and shows how the format of televisualisation of religious practice creates charisma, informs ways of perception, and produces new kinds of religious subjectivity. It treats the styling of Otabil and of his audience through *Living Word* and analyses the creation and mediation of charisma through a specific religious media format, with attention to styles of dress, body language, setting, graphics, and visual and audio styles and effects. Describing the whole process of making, editing, broadcasting and watching or listening to *Living Word*, the chapter shows that, although Otabil focuses more on the message than on the miracle, his programme attempts to mediate charisma and give its audience a sense of spirit power. It argues that the televisualisation of religious performance fuses with commercial television culture and so constitutes new forms of religiosity.

Charismatic preachers have been successful in transferring the power of the Holy Spirit not only through live events such as church services, conferences, miracle crusades, and healing and prayer meetings, but also through the airwaves to radio and TV audiences (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005c). Testimonies abound of people being touched by the Holy Spirit while watching a religious TV broadcast, being healed through a radio prayer, or having received another miracle through the broadcast media. While television and radio are commonly understood as media of seeing and hearing, the mediation of the Holy Spirit in religious performance depends, as argued in the previous chapter, on bodily and spatially organised modes of interaction between the ‘man of God’ and the religious subject, immersed in a crowd of fellow believers. How then, can we understand its transmission through electronic media technologies, which lack the physicality of ritual performance, transcend the spatial boundaries of the church building, and are usually consumed individually or in small groups? Conceiving of religion as a practice of mediation, this chapter examines the relationship between performative technologies of mediating the Holy Spirit, that presuppose a shared space and involve all senses including physical touch, and broadcast technologies of ‘media ministries,’ that address the eye and the ear. As set out in the introduction, I wish to expand the focus on image and sound to include the question of touch. I suggest that tactility is less absent from mass mediation than might be assumed. This chapter, then, deals with the relationship between the senses of vision, sound and touch in the technological mediation of spiritual power and the formation of religious subjects.

Recent work from cinema studies on the bodily sensuality of film experience focuses on the relation between audiovisuality and tactility. Laura Marks’ theory of ‘haptic visuality’ and ‘tactile memory’ (1999) and Vivian Sobchack’s work on ‘carnal thoughts’ (2004), even if neither of them deal with religion, can be of interest to understanding the relationship between the tactility of religious performance and the audiovisuality of religious broadcasts. Examining the multisensory quality of the image, both authors argue that looking at an image triggers embodied memories of touch, taste and smell.1 ‘[W]e do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium’ (Sobchack 2004:61). An image’s appeal to the viewer’s intellect, that makes meaning of it, is thus informed by
and informs the images’ appeal to the senses, that touch, taste, and smell it (see also Verrips 2002). Such an approach of the relation between vision and touch is helpful to understanding charismatic mass media spirituality in that it provides us with a clue to the link between religious experience in church and behind the TV screen. It helps us to overcome the opposition of representation and embodiment, or mediation and immediacy, and to see both as two sides of the same coin.

While Marks’ and Sobchack’s work is useful for their concern with cross-sensuous perception, or ‘synaesthesia,’ the question that emerges is how their phenomenological approach to media experience can be used ethnographically. Sobchack’s recognition of the acculturation of the sensorium provides an opening here. The understanding that the subject’s sensorium is pre-structured by certain acquired, cultural dispositions, is the basis of the anthropology of the senses (e.g. Classen 1993; Howes 1991, 2004; Stoller 1989b, 1997; Etnofoor 18(1)). The focus on how the senses are differently ordered and signified in various cultures, however, keeps them somehow separate from each other (Ingold 2000). Moreover, while vision, sound, smell, and taste have received considerable attention, touch has remained underemphasized (but see Classen 2005; Verrips 2002, 2006). This chapter draws upon the combined insights of the (re)turn to bodily perception in cinema studies and of the anthropology of the senses. The link between media and the senses has recently inspired a number of anthropologists of religion and media to ask how the nexus of media technologies and the sensorium shapes religiously informed subjectivities and senses of belonging (e.g. Alvez De Abreu 2005; Hirschkind 2001b; Meyer 2006b; Morgan 2005; Pinney 2004; Spyer 2006). Taking Otabil’s Living Word as a case study, this chapter aims at understanding the relationship between the embodied process of becoming a born-again Christian, as described in the previous chapter, and the cross-sensual experience of viewing or listening to a religious media broadcast. It argues that the reception of the touch of the Holy Spirit, that facilitates the transformation of the religious self, is predicated upon particular sound and image practices and modes of listening and viewing that involve the whole body.

**AltarMedia’s Living Word**

The ICGC has a separate department fully devoted to carrying out its media ministry, AltarMedia. It is part of the overarching body of Altar International, which also includes a publishing company and a bookshop. Its aim is to market the products of
the church, with a focus on Otabil's products, that is, the weekly TV and radio programme *Living Word* and the *Living Word* video and audio tapes and CD's. A side task of AltarMedia, public relations, was described in chapter 2. When Otabil goes out to give speeches or to preach, AltarMedia sources the information and photographs to the people involved. The Altar staff thus control anything that leaves the boundaries of the church and becomes accessible for a wider public. As one of them put it, ‘we are like a betweener between Otabil and the audience.’ With five staff members with an educational and professional background in media as well as a religious commitment to the church, Altar International is purely commercial and supposed to – but in practice does not yet – operate (financially) independently of the church.

In the AltarMedia studio
The ICGC is one of the few churches that have their own editing studio and it became my favourite hangout during my fieldwork in the Christ Temple. Otabil’s ‘research permission’ included access to the AltarMedia studio and I spent much of my time there with the editors Clifford, Duncan, and Kofi, and occasionally also with the head of AltarMedia, Bright. At first, Bright’s office functioned as editing studio, video library, and storage room at the same time and the rather small space was usually packed with staff members busy at various media production tasks, computers, printers, and editing and recording equipment, and boxes with tapes, labels, and other materials. Still, I was always welcome to join and given a seat in one or the other free corner. I witnessed the daily work that went into the making of *Living Word* and other media productions and the numerous people – pastors, free lance workers, other ICGC staff, or business relations – popping in for a question, a request, a contract, or a chat. I listened to and joined in the exchange of ideas and experiences, jokes and opinions, and in between asked my never-ending questions. In 2003 AltarMedia moved to

*Fig. 4.2 Bright at work behind his desk.*
a new, spacious studio at the other side of the church, with a separate office for Bright (fig. 4.2). The ICGC invests a lot in professional equipment and to ‘satisfy customer expectation’ and ‘provide excellence,’ the new studio was expanded with new, powerful computers and an editing deck for both Betacam and digital video. A fire wire connecting it to the computer and an internal hardware that can read Betacam images too make it possible to edit all images digitally with Adobe Premiere software. Finished productions are stored on digital video cassette and compact disc. The new studio, which is even more advanced than the editing studio of TV3, greatly pleased the staff, as it made their work more professional and reduced disturbance. I was still welcome to disturb them though.

Normally I would find Clifford and/or Kofi behind the editing computers. Clifford works with AltarMedia from the beginning. Trained at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), he used to work with the video company that did the filming and editing for the ICGC. He was already an ICGC member then. When AltarMedia was established, he came to work here. Clifford believes God called him to do this work.

You have to determine your personal calling. Personally I, as a media man, believe that God has called me to use the media to spread the gospel. I could have stood in the pulpit, like Otabil. That has even been prophesied to me. But I feel my calling is the media.4

In the studio Clifford works mostly at image editing, but he also works as a camera man or operates the camera control unit. Kofi worked with AltarMedia since six months when I first met him in March 2002. He is in his twenties and graduated from ‘Tech’ (Kumasi University of Science and Technology) in graphics. Together with Clifford he does image editing and graphics for Living Word and for Power in his

Fig. 4.3 Duncan busy at tape duplication in the new AltarMedia studio.
Fig. 4.4 Living Word audio cassette case, front and inside.

Fig. 4.5 Living Word video cassette case.  Fig. 4.6 Living Word audio cassette carton.
Presence, the TV programme of pastor Korankye Ankrah of the Royal House Chapel International, who makes use of AltarMedia’s studio and expertise. Kofi also made the ICGC 18th anniversary video, which he proudly showed me, and several church adverts. Kofi has a great interest in the latest technological gadgets in media and communications and in between his work he likes to browse through foreign sales catalogues. He also loves ‘cool music’ (American jazz and gospel) and he has hundreds of digital music files in his computer, which he likes to play while working. The sound does not disturb his editing work, on the contrary; it gives him the divine inspiration he needs for working on Otabil’s messages. At the same moment, Duncan would also be behind his computer, busy at sound editing, or duplicating, labelling, and organising the distribution of video and audiotapes (fig. 4.3). Work load permitting, he enjoyed playing patience on his computer. In 2005 Matthew joined the team to carry out organisational tasks.

From audio tapes to DVD
The name AltarMedia comes from the intention that, as Duncan put it, ‘everything that comes from the altar, everything that is preached, is to be commercialised,’ in other words, to be made available to the public in a commodity format. This started as a tape ministry right from the birth of the church. Sunday services were recorded and sold to the public on audio and videotapes and there used to be a video library. With the rise of FM stations, AltarMedia expanded and since 1995, Otabil has been on radio in Accra and later also in other towns. With the commercialisation of television from 1997, AltarMedia applied for airtime with Ghana Television and started telecasting Living Word every Monday morning, but soon switched to TV3 on Sunday evening. Although the production and sales of audio tapes (figs. 4.4, 4.6) is still important, video tapes (fig. 4.5) have in 2005 been replaced by VCD’s and audio CD’s are also available (fig. 4.7). Duncan told me that ‘DVD is catching on in Ghana and Altar decided to stimulate that development.’ A pile of six video decks was used to duplicate tapes, but now stands idle in the studio. With the rapid technological advancement, equipment soon becomes outdated, Duncan told me as a matter of fact. The new professional colour printer that was bought in 2003 to be able to not just design, but also print the video sleeves ‘at home,’ making it affordable to give each message its own characteristic sleeve (fig. 4.5), is now used to print a new type of full-colour cartons for audio cassettes (fig. 4.6).

A clear vision on the relation between religion and technology informs ICGC’s media ministry. Kofi explained:

For some churches […] technology does not go together with the divine inspiration in the pastor’s work. In traditional religion too knowledge was not widely shared. The person kept it secret and surrounded by mysticism and when he died the knowledge was lost. But churches have to use all new technologies available. If they don’t do that, they will be behind and die. The Devil is using all technologies, so we also have to use the same weapons to fight him. […] Churches have to go beyond the confines of their buildings. In contemporary
society journalists have more influence on society than pastors preaching in their churches, because television and especially radio are everywhere. So if we don’t want to loose out, we have to use the media to spread the gospel and not say technology is of the world. That whole separation between sacred and secular should be broken.5

Media technology should however not be used randomly. Clifford has clear ideas about how to use the media effectively by employing a media format that reinforces a pastor’s personal ‘ministry gift’ from God.6 While editing Korankye Ankrah’s Power in his Presence he told Kofi and me:

As a minister using the media, you have to determine what media format is suitable for your specific calling or ministry. You should not use a certain format because somebody else is using it successfully. Otabil is first of all a teacher, not a prophet or whatever, so we use a format that reinforces and clarifies his teachings. Others may be in the ministry of prophecy or healing. The focus of Korankye Ankrah is the manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost. To bring that over needs a totally different format. Many pastors today use the media just to showcase their church, but you have to use the media according to your personal calling. Whether your ministry is healing, or prophecy or teaching, the media format you use should suit your purpose. That is all marketing is about. Determine your target group, determine what you have, and find the best ways to get what you have to your target group.7

The programme format for Power in his Presence, then, not only includes the message, but also the church choir, worship, deliverance, and people shaking, falling down, and rolling on the floor in reception of the Holy Ghost. This is a format very different from Otabil’s Living Word.
The making of Living Word

Over the years the Living Word programme format has developed in line with Otabil’s divine calling as a teacher. In the early beginnings the programme included the choir, some praise and worship, and the sermon. The viewers were lifted up and spiritually prepared to receive the Word. Later it included shots of Otabil standing at the church entrance to welcome people. The current format focuses on the teaching only. ‘Praise and worship is also important,’ says Clifford, ‘but we want to use expensive airtime to inform and transform people, as that is the main purpose of the media ministry’ and indeed, of the church as a whole. The review of the previous week’s and the preview of the next week’s message were dropped, however, when a sponsor came in and part of the thirty minutes time slot had to be used for a commercial. Living Word, then, is basically a broadcast of half a church sermon preceded and followed by Otabil addressing the viewer personally from his office (fig. 4.11). As each Sunday sermon is cut into two parts of less than thirty minutes, Otabil, speaking with a media broadcast in mind, briefly revisits the major points after thirty minutes. Each sermon thus provides material for two weeks broadcast, enough to select only those messages found to be suitable for the general public for broadcasting. This format, Otabil told me, ‘has become a successful formula,’ but he is not very happy with it anymore. ‘It seems to have reached somewhere that it has become too static, there is no improvement anymore, it is always the same.’ The success of the Living Word formula thus threatens this very success. The latest idea to improve the programme format is to include short clips of ‘people on the street’ commenting on how the topic for that week relates to their personal lives.

Much inspiration for making Living Word comes from American televangelists like Benny Hinn, Billy Graham, Morris Cerrulo, and Kenneth Hagin, who reach Ghana through Trinity Broadcast Network, available on cable TV. As Clifford said:
We watch those American TV preachers and try to use some of the things they do there. But we should think about our audience here and not lose the Ghanaian identity. It is more things like how the programme is done, how it is compiled technically, that we try to copy. People like Benny Hinn and Billy Graham also use the media to suit their specific ministry. When you look at Benny Hinn on TV, you see him not preaching to a congregation, but ministering to individuals.9

For as much as the content of the messages is specifically Ghanaian, much of the format used to broadcast them derives from American televangelism and mass churches.

For filming, people and cameras are hired from outside. Mostly they are church members, such as Jonathan and Philip, who work at the TV station TV3 and do this privately as a side-job, what they call ‘moonlighting.’ They use three cameras to record from different angles, while Clifford coordinates the recording from behind the control board and monitor in the middle of the church auditorium. The master camera is fixed on a platform next to him and records only Otabil’s sermon and movements. Clifford instructs the camera man by patting his leg. A sub-master camera is fixed on the balcony and records Otabil on stage in front of his audience and overviews of the audience from above. A moving camera (fig. 4.10) is used for ‘cutaways’ of the congregation, close-ups of people in the church reacting to Otabil’s preaching (fig. 4.11). The film crew, with the help of the security department, is also acting as a ‘gatekeeper’ to prevent others from recording. I was, for example, allowed to film anything except Otabil’s preaching. The reason is that he sometimes says things that are not meant for public consumption outside the church and they can’t control where the images and statements will end up. AltarMedia thus guards the

Fig. 4.10 AltarMedia crew member at work during the Destiny Summit 2002.
4. Living Word

border between inside and outside the church and wants to have full control over what passes this border to make sure that nothing could possibly damage Otabil’s or the church’s image. The media are used to create Otabil’s public image and this process is carefully controlled by AltarMedia. Editing of the outgoing message already starts during the service by preventing anybody to record what might be edited out for TV. Of course, the tapes are for sale, so there are also business interests involved.

As all Altar workers are also church members, the film crew are also part of what they are filming. This became very clear during the anointing service described in the previous chapter, when the film crew participated in the rituals of communion, offering, and anointing at the same time as filming them (for record keeping, not for broadcasting). While filming people holding their donation envelope in the air for collective prayer, the camera man held his own envelope in his mouth. When people laid their hands with olive oil on their heads, the camera man filmed this with one hand and placed the other on his head. The wire carrier followed him, also with his hand on his head. When the bread and wine were passed round for communion, one of the crew who was not busy at that moment took some cups and rounds of bread for her colleagues and put it on the camera platform for them to take later. But of course there is a limit to this participation; a camera man will not spontaneously fall on the floor in reception of the Holy Spirit.

Once every month Otabil’s office is turned into a film set to record the ‘intros’ and ‘outros’ for four broadcasts at a time. In the otherwise carefully guarded sacred office space with its posh furniture, ‘golden’ light switches and sockets, and newest computer equipment, Clifford and his colleagues move plants to make a nice background, rearrange furniture, set up camera and lights, and fix colour filters. They empty the salon table and put a monitor, control board and sound machine on it. Otabil talks to the camera without notes, sitting behind a round table with his hands resting on a large bible, which he never opens. With his fatherly voice he welcomes viewers to the programme, introduces the topic and briefly recapitulates last week’s teaching. Halfway the introduction, the camera zooms in on his face. For the ‘outros,’ Otabil starts with ‘well, my friend…’ and stresses the importance of the message for one’s personal life. Sometimes he asks the viewers to bow down their heads and pray with him. While praying he leaves just enough time for them to repeat his words. He thanks the viewers for watching, urges them to write or email to him and concludes with his well-known ‘signature’ phrase ‘my name is pastor Otabil, shalom, peace, and life to you.’ In between the recordings, Otabil changes his dress to match it with what he wore on the day he preached the message.

All post-production is done in the AltarMedia studio: design, editing, duplication, labelling, packaging, promotion, and distribution. Above I have described the studio activities of the AltarMedia staff and the technologies they use. Before looking at the editing process in detail, let me first turn to broadcasting strategies. As programme production means moving on the waves of technological development, broadcasting means moving along with the rapid developments in Ghana’s media scene.
Fig. 4.11 Series of video stills captured from Living Word video tape.
Broadcasting the message

To broadcast Living Word AltarMedia has (had) agreements with various TV and radio stations. In early 2001 Living Word was aired on the national station GTV on Monday mornings at 5.30, thus reaching the whole of Ghana. This lasted for only four months; the station charged too much. Moreover, there were other problems with GTV, Otabil said.11

GTV is not serious, they don’t handle your programme with care. It was supposed to start at 5.30, but sometimes the person in charge just forgot to play it, so I had to phone them and only then did they put it on. But then at 6, when their own programming is supposed to start, they just take it off even though it is not yet finished. Sometimes it didn’t even come on at all. It is because their mind only starts working from 6, as that is when their own programming starts. Anything that comes on before that time is not taken seriously. Yet I pay for the 30 minutes! So I said you are not doing me a service, so I stopped. TV3 is much more professional. Even though they can also make mistakes, they always try to make up for it. The other thing that put me off was the time. At 5.30 in the morning nobody has time to watch TV. People are rushing to go to work. It is a waste of money. At that time radio is better, because it can be on while you are in the kitchen doing something else. Other churches have also tried it at GTV, but most of them have stopped.

Since mid 2001, then, Living Word has featured on TV3 every Sunday evening at six o’clock, prime-time. Normally TV3 covers most of Southern Ghana, but, as viewers’ letters testify, during the harmattan season it may reach as far as Nigeria. Airtime costs $ 600 per thirty minutes. This used to be paid for by sponsors of the church’s media ministry. The main programme sponsor was for several years Kingdom Transport Services, a successful transport company owned by an ICGC member, who attributes his business success to his membership of the church and Otabil’s teachings. A KTS advert followed every Living Word broadcast. In 2005 the company ran into financial problems and had to cut down on advertising costs. That means that the church now has to pay for the programme, which is no problem, Otabil told me, but he is looking for new sponsors. In Kumasi the programme is on Fontomfrom TV twice a week, lagging behind TV3 a fortnight. Outside Ghana, Living Word is broadcast on TV in Kenya. Since November 2000, Nairobi and environs receive Living Word weekly through a Christian broadcast station called Family TV. AltarMedia is currently discussing a new package with African Broadcast Network, which will take Living Word to thirteen African countries at once.

The radio version of Living Word (formerly called ‘Believer’s Voice of Hope’) comes on JoyFM in Accra every Sunday morning at seven. The station owner is a member of ICGC, but has a business contract with the church, that pays for airtime like any other business partner. The radio station uses the slogan ‘Joy 99.7 FM, taking you closer to heaven’ to announce and close the broadcast. Messages preached and recorded in the past are broadcast daily on Radio Gold, every afternoon at two. The managing director of Radio Gold, Mr. Baffou-Bonnie, is a great fan of Otabil and does
not require any payment. He has partnerships with entrepreneurs who sponsor the programme, among others, in 2001, Lady’s Paradise, a lingerie store in Accra.

I don’t attend ICGC, but after listening to Dr. Mensa Otabil, his tapes, I felt that he has a lot of insightful messages to change the attitude, the belief system of people in this country. As a Ghanaian who was born in this country, in a village, very poor, I never dreamt of even going to school. Having worked my way up till this time, God having given me the opportunity to go and study abroad and come back, and having instituted a comparison between my people and what I saw outside, I have realized that we are living in the 1750s, the sort of life we are leading. It is very very sad. I think we need some people in this society, who will give the people some shock system to wake up and change our attitude towards things. No amount of positive change preaching will transform this country if the attitude of the people does not change. So we need powerful speakers who will send out these messages and I find that in Dr. Mensa Otabil. What is unique about pastor Mensa Otabil is that he always intertwines his religious message with social problems, political problems, traditional problems, that are confronting the African and that matter the Ghanaian’s own society. That a lot of pastors do not want to talk about. Personally I think that he should be the president of this country. There is a proverb which says ‘when a fish rots, it rots from the head.’ If you have a good leader, who is not leading you to slaughter, but is leading you to life, the whole society will progress. And that is how I see pastor Mensa Otabil. I admire him and I study his works very intently. So what I did is that I went to him and I told him that, look, I think you have a very powerful message for this country and money should not be a hindrance, so I am going to put your messages on my station for free, five days in a week. And he said ‘wow, do you think we can do it?’ and I said ‘we can do it, with your support.’ I think that it has paid off, because I know that every day at 2 pm, most people listen to Living Word on Radio Gold. And it is transforming lives in geometrical numbers. Every day different messages. He has preached over one thousand messages, we play the older ones too. Every day another one. And it is good, because what he preached five years ago is still relevant. And it was only limited to the people of his congregation, because then there were no radio stations, so a lot of people..., if you did not go to his church, if you had not the advantage of buying his tapes, then you wouldn’t know what he is preaching about. And they were all powerful messages and very relevant today.'13

When AltarMedia started with Gold, they also used the earliest messages, until Otabil said that they should not go back that far, because at that time he didn’t preach with radio in mind and a lot of editing was necessary to make it fit for broadcasting. From the time when he started to disseminate his sermons to mass audiences, he does the editing in his mind and has changed his modes of preaching. As mentioned in chapter 2, he told me that he does not preach to the born-again crowd in front of him, but to an imaginary non-Christian visitor representing the broad audience he aims to reach. This also reveals Otabil’s constant media consciousness.
Since 2004 Living Word has another daily broadcast on a new radio station in Accra, Happy FM, every morning at 11. This means that Otabil’s voice can now be heard twice daily all over Accra and the power of this repetitive aural presence cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the fact that many owners of publicly audible radios simultaneously tune into the popular Living Word broadcast adds an amazing echo-like effect to the listening experience in urban space, where one often hears Otabil’s voice from different directions and over different distances at once. Outside Accra AltarMedia has weekly programming on Sundays in the Brong-Ahafo region, in Kumasi on Luv FM, in the Western Region on Sky Power FM, and in the Volta Region on Volta Premier station, but because the CD has to be sent to the various stations, they lag behind Accra a week. New communication technologies make it easier: as JoyFM and Luv FM are on the Internet together (as they are part of the same company), they can now beam the programme right from the website onto Luv FM by connecting the mixer in the studio to the station’s website.

Such technological innovations inform AltarMedia’s choice of radio stations, ‘because as things get better, you have to move along with it,’ as Kofi said. Another consideration is of course the target audience:

We do not want to put our messages on Christian radio stations, because then you will not reach the non-Christian who will never tune into such a station. We want to reach an audience as wide as possible, so we prefer the secular stations. But Otabil should also not come on Peace FM. His target audience are not the Peace FM listeners. Peace FM is the Twi station and Otabil aims at the educated, English speaking group. They listen to Joy.14

As soon as a message is aired, people want to have the tape or CD. AltarMedia thus makes sure that these are available very shortly after or even before the broadcast.

Fig. 4.12 AltarMedia stand at the Christ Temple premises.
Audiotapes are distributed through the Altar Bookshop, the Christian Music Shop, the Radio Gold office, A-life supermarkets Kumasi, filling stations, and some private distributors, among others Kofi Coomson, the editor-publisher of the Chronicle. Videotapes and now audio and video CD’s are only on sale in the Altar Bookshop (fig. 4.8) or at the special Living Word stand in front of the church on Sundays or during conferences (figs. 4.12, 4.13, 4.14). Marketing strategies include various promotional campaigns, such as the Sweet Sixteen promotion, offering sixteen tapes of your choice at the price of fourteen (fig. 4.15), or the Golden Surprise Packs, offering packs of thematically grouped tapes (‘finances,’ ‘leadership,’ ‘prosperity,’ ‘faith,’ ‘new life,’ and ‘heritage’) at a small discount. There are also gift packs of tapes in baskets decorated with kente print paper, ribbons, and cellophane (figs. 4.16, 4.17). Luxury cases with series of four, five or six audiotapes and beautifully designed colour sleeves, meant for export, were AltarMedia’s latest pride in 2002 (fig. 4.4). Bright:

That is one of the interesting things about this job. We are sitting here in Africa and using our creativity to produce something for the international market. We make creative products while there is not even a local market for it. These new tape packages are mainly for outside, but everything is done here, the designing, the editing, the graphics, the lay-out, the packaging, everything.15

In 2005, however, this new type of packaging was already left behind. It had turned out to be too expensive to import the cases from the US, print the sleeves, and export them again. Altar thus switched to full-colour printed cartons (fig. 4.6), that are also attractive and totally home-made. Not only are they cheaper, Bright said, they also fit better with Otambil’s philosophy of African independence and productivity.

AltarMedia also produces TV and radio adverts for Living Word tapes. During the soccer World Cup in June 2002, for example, an advert for the ‘Turning failure into
success’ series was shown on Sundays after *Living Word*. The advert compared life to a soccer match; you can win or lose. Images of a player falling down during a match had the subscript ‘failure’; a team winning the cup in front of a cheering audience was ‘success.’ An enthusiastic voice announced ‘now you can win and turn your failure into success with Mensa Otabil’s messages on audio and video tapes; priceless inspiration.’ The series was very popular already, but this advert gave sales figures an extra boost.

Since 2005 AltarMedia has an online sales outlet, AltarMedia.com, where you can e-shop for messages (tapes, CD's, books) by reading abstracts, looking at covers and paying with credit card (figs. 4.18, 4.19). More than just spreading the gospel, AltarMedia thus has a strong business aspect. But according to Bright, bringing church and business together is not yet obvious for everybody.

The church still does not run as a business. Ideally it should, but it still doesn't. The attitude of the people in the church is not like that. Even the word itself: church – non-profit; business – profit. It is very difficult to make them meet. We try here, but we are not there yet. People’s attitude is that ‘o, this is church, we just have fun and worship God.’ But God himself wants profit, he is a profit minded God, as Doc [Mensa Otabil] has said. He has laid down management principles in the Bible. Business management started from the Bible. But somehow that seems to be lost in the church today. People think we are here to fellowship only, so they come to the office and chat the day away.16

Yet, the whole production process of *Living Word* shows that AltarMedia successfully operates on the intersection of religion and marketing. For AltarMedia the market is not a profane place to keep away from as a church, but to enter with vision and expertise in order to ‘influence society through Christ.’ The logic of marketing shapes the format that AltarMedia employs to sell the gospel and transform as many people as possible.

**Editing Otabil and his audience**

Much of the style and format used to broadcast religious messages, like camera use, editing, and the use of globally circulating computer graphics, derives from a global charismatic media culture. What is most characteristic of the charismatic representation of religion is the visualisation of the communication or flow of spiritual power between the preacher or worship leader and the congregation. The spectacular theatre of charismatic worship is further dramatized on TV by editing the parts both pastor and audience play (cf. Kramer 2005). A closer look at the editing process reveals interesting details about how *Living Word* not only addresses, but also creates the audience at the same time as creating a particular image of Otabil.

First of all, the message is edited, that is, certain passages are cut out. Statements with political implications for instance, because ‘the newspapers will misrepresent it and the politicians will not understand.’ A critical, political statement about HIPC, for example, was left out, and a cut was put after the passage ‘if you
want to turn failure into success, follow what God has put in your heart,’ leaving out ‘not what the government officials are saying.’ Kofi explained:

This is in-house; it is preaching for people to get motivated, not teaching. This [TV programme] is not a platform for critique on the government. Doc does that elsewhere, in newspapers or radio discussion programmes, but this is meant for teaching the people.

Sarcastic statements are also cut out, for example ‘if you want to follow that agenda [of inefficiency], follow it!’ Things said specifically for the congregation, like information about a certain church programme, are not relevant for a larger audience. Lastly, long pauses, as when Otabil wipes his face or when people are looking for a passage in the bible and he waits for them, are minimised. ‘We have only half an hour and else it becomes too boring.’ When the message is ready, Kofi inserts ‘power quotes,’ powerful statements made by Otabil that reflect the core argument of the message. Put in graphics under the image on screen, they are primarily meant to help the TV audience to follow the lines of thought and take notes. They should thus stay on long enough for people to copy them. An example from the message ‘Transformation’: ‘When you conform to your world, you will only become what your world wants you to become.’ Such ‘power quotes,’ as argued in chapter 2, also contribute to Otabil’s charisma as a national and international celebrity.

While Kofi and Clifford edit the message, Duncan edits the sound. Basically that is adjusting Otabil’s voice and adding laughter where appropriate and the Living Word signature tune, a sound clip from the American gospel trumpeter Phil Driscoll. Sound editing is difficult with Otabil, Duncan explained, because of the high contrast in the volume of his voice, as Otabil dramatises his performance. The low parts should be raised and the high parts tempered for audibility’s sake, but the dramatic
effect should remain. Occasionally he adds special sound effects. In the message ‘The portrait of success,’ for example, Otabil speaks about kinds of persons one has to be careful with: the ungodly, sinners, and scoffers. We hear him speaking about ‘friends who are always mocking your values’ and as soon as he finishes the sentence ‘you have to warn them and let them know where the limits are and if they don’t … [silence], you take legal action against them for harassing you,’ we hear a powerful sound effect and see a shot of a chief in the audience nodding smilingly. The effect emphasises the power of legal action, enforcing the implicit warning against immoral people. In view of Otabil’s critique on the institution of chieftaincy, it is interesting to note that Altar uses a shot of a chief to visualise legal power. Indirectly, of course, such sound effects and the image of a powerful person agreeing reinforce the authority of Otabil’s statements.

Visual editing creates Otabil’s authority and charisma even more so. Close-ups, almost intimate sometimes, of the man that not many people can come close to in reality are followed by wide-angle shots showing him elevated on the stage, watching over his large congregation. The ‘general overseer’ indeed. Shots that highlight his impressive dress are included, as when he spreads his arms in making a statement. Shots from below that make him look huge are preferred to shots from above that make him look small, as I heard Clifford teach Kofi. This display of flamboyance and elegance on stage, combined with close-ups of his face and afterwards a personal word to the viewer (fig. 4.11), whom he always calls ‘my friend,’ suggest that Otabil is a man of the people who, despite his mega church and his successful rise to the top in many spheres of life, does not feel superior and relates to the common man in a personal and egalitarian way, with a warm heart, a listening ear, and a word of encouragement for everybody. The facts that in practice he rules his church in a hierarchical and authoritarian manner, that protocol makes it very difficult to get access to ‘the big man,’ and that hardly any of the letters or emails written reach him personally, does not affect the charisma of his televised personality. The focus on the image of the pastor, on his body, his expressive face and gestures, and his dress can be found in charismatic TV programs and video tapes world-wide and has much to do with the importance in charismatic churches of the personality of the leader (and usually founder) of the church. An emphasis on emotional or powerful expression as an indicator of spiritual power is globally shared. With African pastors it is often also the fatness of their bodies and sometimes, as in the case of Otabil, their precious African dress, that are visible evidence of success, of spiritual blessing and as such of the power of the Holy Spirit in a pastor’s life.

Just as Otabil’s public personality is edited, so is his audience. ‘Cut-aways’ of the massive church audience are intermixed with shots of Otabil preaching (fig. 4.11). Again, the image of the mass of worshippers is characteristic of charismatic imagery worldwide. From the US to Brazil to Africa to the Far East we find images (electronic or printed) of church halls filled with masses (cf. Birman 2006). On TV and video tapes we see these masses moving and being moved almost as one body, dancing and clapping, simultaneously responding to the preacher or worshipping God with particular gestures (raising hands, arms, lifting up face and hands while closing eyes) and utterances (amen, halleluiah, Jesus!). The Living Word editors too
spend much time editing the audience, cutting out any deviant or undesirable behavior and ensuring that no empty chairs are in view, so as to produce a perfect image of a mass.

Yet, as Kofi emphasized when he referred to American televangelists' ministering to individuals, not only the image of the mass is important, but also the image of the individual in the mass. Hence we see close-ups of people in the audience. From the raw recordings of the moving camera, different shots of audience reactions are selected, categorised and saved in digital folders named ‘opening Bible,’ ‘reading Bible,’ ‘nod’ (meaning agreement or confirmation), ‘lifting of hand’ (this also comes under this category, as it carries the same meaning), ‘clap,’ ‘smile, laughter,’ ‘attention,’ ‘writing,’ ‘say after me’ (where people repeat words after Otabil, specific for every message), ‘shout.’ What we then see on TV are beautifully dressed people taking notes, listening attentively, applauding, laughing, responding to Otabil’s preaching (fig. 4.11). We see them admiring Otabil, learning something from him, and having fun with him. We see close-ups of their faces as the Word of God by mouth of the pastor brings them into a state of exaltation or near trance. Hearing Otabil’s deep voice in the background, we can almost see the Holy Spirit flowing into them. This alternating focus on the image of the individual believer and that of the mass is closely related to the individual spiritual experience evoked by being in a crowd of believers that characterizes the spectacular mode of charismatic worship world-wide.
What we don’t see on screen, what is purposely left out, is just as clarifying as the images we see. Kofi:

Certain shots of people in the audience do not fit the format. We have a certain format and some people do not conform. For example people who are sleeping, not paying attention, chewing gum, looking straight into the camera, or people who do not look neat, should not appear. Or shots where people are walking in the background. It gives a wrong impression when people are walking about when church is going on. Or shots with empty chairs in view. That doesn’t help the ministry.

Thus, when one person looks into the camera, chews gum or happens to sit in front of an unoccupied seat, the shot is spoilt. The editors also look at dress or hairstyle, because a person carries a message by his or her look. A shot of a lady wearing a very low-cut dress showing part of the breasts, was left out, because ‘we don’t want to expose her and create a wrong impression.’ According to Kofi, shots of the audience are meant to bring across the communication between Otabil and the audience. So the shots show non-verbal communication. Facial expression, mood, gestures. We look at what people are communicating. It should add something to the message of the main speaker. Somebody chewing gum does not add to the message, while somebody nodding or clapping does. The shot should fit into the message.

Making the shots fit the message needs a bit of ‘cheating.’ When there are no good, fitting shots of that particular service, shots of another service can be used. But then the editors have to take care, for example, that they ‘don’t put a shot of people opening the New Testament when Doc refers to the book of Numbers. If you have to cheat, you have to be smart.’ Similarly, a shot of a person writing should not be so close-up that it is readable on screen, because it might not be what Otabil actually said at that moment. Sometimes Kofi makes the audience react differently from how they actually reacted if that seems better. When he was editing a message where Otabil preached against eating fat, he put a cut-away of a laughing audience after the serious and warning statement ‘take some kelewele, kaklo or tatali,’ wrap it in a tissue and squeeze... the amount of oil, you’ll be amazed what you have been drinking,’ which seemed a bit odd to me. Did the audience really laugh when he said this? ‘No, but I am editing. It is serious, but funny. The humour is that you have been drinking oil.’

Through the Living Word format, then, not only a specific public image of Otabil is carefully constructed, but also a specific image of his public, the immediately visible embodiment of the ‘achievement’ and ‘success’ he talks about, and a specific way in which people are supposed to react to his message. Clifford: ‘people at home like to identify with the people they see on TV. If they see the people there nodding in agreement, they also want to agree with the statement.’ Moreover, the manner in which the people on the TV screen are seen receiving Otabil’s preaching is vital for his public image and charisma. When he speaks, the crowd of thousands is orderly and
full of attention and devotion, laughing when it is appropriate to laugh and nodding when it is appropriate to nod. The church audience is shown to admire Otabil and the TV audience is expected to do the same. Clifford, Kofi, and Duncan’s daily practice of editing Otabil and his audience, then, links up in an interesting way with Weber’s notion of charisma as located in the relationship between leader and followers. Visualising and idealising this relationship on television not only adds to the message of the main speaker, but constitutes his charisma.

AltarMedia has thus developed a specific television format not only to circulate Otabil’s teachings and transform people, but more specifically to create religious subjects. Programmes such as Living Word visualise the bodily regimes necessary to appropriately receive the Word of God and with it the Holy Spirit. In order to be spiritually blessed and internalise the Holy Spirit through a message by a ‘man of God,’ one cannot just listen to it anyhow. Living Word shows how the whole body is involved in a particular way of listening. Bodies that do not listen appropriately and thus do not receive the Spirit, but hear mere words, are not shown. The Living Word format strongly suggests a way of perceiving Otabil and receiving his message. Through a process of identification with the televised bodies of the church audience, the TV audience at home is expected to similarly subject to ‘the general overseer’ and to the Word in order to experience the power of the Holy Spirit that he transfers onto them. As the physical bodies of the ‘powerful man of God’ and his followers function as a medium in religious practice, so do the edited and televised images of their bodies function as a medium for the Holy Spirit to ‘touch’ the viewer through the television screen. So whereas Protestantism radically breaks with the Catholic visual culture that features prominently images of the body of Christ, of Mary and of various saints, its charismatic-Pentecostal version has developed a visual culture around pastors and worshippers themselves, around the bodies of living human beings. Not only are they the tangible evidence of the workings of the Spirit through people and communities, they become ‘living icons’ mediating the power of the Holy Spirit to the spectators at home.  

Fig. 4.16 Promotional flyer for Living Word tapes.
4. Living Word

Watching *Living Word*

Audience research

According to audience research by Research International, a private research company in Accra, and by Ghana’s *TV & Radio Guide* (Nr. 97, January 2003), *Living Word* is among the most popular TV programmes in Ghana. With half of the TV3 audience watching, AltarMedia itself estimates that it has an audience of two million in Ghana alone. The ICGC’s media audience is much broader and more diverse than the church membership. As Otabil’s message is very relevant to everybody, it is composed not only of charismatic Christians, but of people of different churches and religions, including many Muslims. Otabil’s use of the English language and his appeal to the intellect and scholarly way of preaching, however, limit his ‘target audience’ to the educated middle class. Although in terms of age too the media audience is much broader than the church membership, Otabil’s message is especially attractive for young people. In these ‘hipik-times,’ with its high rate of unemployment also among the educated and a general feeling of lack of improvement, young, aspiring people crave for a charismatic role model who tells them that they are somebody, that they have talents to develop, that they can be successful and become rich. Moreover, his teachings can easily be related to personal problems and experiences people have. I have heard many reactions like ‘he talks about the real problems we face in Ghana’ or ‘when I heard him preaching I felt he was talking about me.’ Making biblical lessons personal and practical is exactly what Otabil tries to do. He clearly steps into many, especially young people’s longing for a personal experience of Christianity, even if ‘anonymously’ through a TV screen.

In 2002 a group of theology students at the Central University College carried out a study on the reception of *Living Word* among various layers of the Accra population. From this research, my own informal talks with people about watching *Living Word* and occasionally watching with them, I have gained some insight into viewing practices. Many people told me that Sunday six p.m. is a special time for them and they consciously sit down to watch the programme attentively. *Living Word* is not a programme to listen to with a half ear while doing other things like eating, drinking, cooking, or chatting. Many people make sure there are no disturbances during broadcast time, some even lock their door. Some people pray before watching that the Lord may allow the Word of God to transform them and bless them. People watch – some rather speak of listening even though it is TV – actively. Many take notes, which they may use later on during bible studies or personal devotion. They say ‘amen,’ ‘hallelujah,’ and ‘yes’ when it is appropriate, and join Otabil in prayer at the end when he invites the viewers to do so. Receiving the message often does not end with the broadcast. People buy or order tapes, listen to them repeatedly, and give them away or exchange them. Some decide to join the ICGC or to convert to (charismatic) Christianity after hearing Otabil. A common follow-up action is to respond to Otabil’s call to write to him, just as in the early years of the charismatic movement in Ghana it was very popular to correspond with Oral Roberts, who was then on Ghana television.
Living Word correspondence

In the *Living Word* correspondence department, pastor Charlotte and her group of carefully selected and screened church members file and answer the great many letters (about 400 a month) and e-mails the church receives. Most of the letters come from non-members, who write after having heard Otabil preaching on radio or TV, including viewers in Kenya. Some people write just to ask for audiotapes, Otabil’s books, bibles, or information about the church. But many write with a specific problem they think Otabil will have a solution for, or to tell him what his teachings have done in their lives. Some also give testimonies of being baptised by the Holy Spirit or converted to Christianity after listening to him. Letters are filed into thirty categories – including appreciation, salvation, adultery, masturbation, homosexuality – for which standard reply letters have been written, but are modified to suit each particular case. They always start with ‘greetings in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ,’ also when the addressee is a Muslim. Letter or e-mail writers are not pushed to come to the ICGC, but advised to worship at any bible-believing church.

The letter files are kept in pastor Charlotte’s office. Letters dealing with very personal problems are handled with great care and were not accessible to me. From the less personal letters that I was allowed to read and photocopy (with the author names folded away) I selected a few examples. Many people write to thank Otabil for his preaching, often in very general terms.

Dear Dr. Otabil. I greet you and your entire church in the name of the Lord, I also thank God for bringing you Otabil into this world, may God bless you and your ministry. […] It was but the grace of god that I met the voice of the great man of God Otabil […] Your message has given me three hundred and sixty degree change of mind, character, attitude and made me even more useful in my local church. Through your teachings I have high and deeper understanding of the word of god.

Other letters of appreciation thank Otabil for a specific message, such as the following letter from Nigeria, where TV3 appears to reach once in a while.

Dear pastor Mensah, thanks for giving to the lord and doing his will, may the almighty God whose and whom you are, continue to bless his work in your hand. I was just tuning the TV when I came across TV3, while I was wondering which station is this, you came on air and began to release the undiluted word of the most high. I sat down and had a good meal of the teaching that evening. What do I say but to thank you for giving to the lord, to do his work. Your audience is not in Ghana alone, but it includes Nigeria, right now I tell my friends about your programme. The series that has just been concluded – opening new pages for your life – is the one I am referring to. I am wonderfully blessed by the exposition of the word of life through your ministry. […] I was encouraged, motivated, reassured and chastised by the message, sir, thanks for giving to the lord. Since I have not gotten it all, the ideal prescription is to get the tapes and listen over and over again and again and again. Sir, how many
are the tapes in the series –VIDEO, and what is the cost and freight? I promise to work by the teachings and my testimonies shall soon reach you.

Apart from appreciation, people’s reaction to a message also depends on the topic. When Otabil talks about more intellectual or national topics, people write to join in the discussion and may comment on Otabil’s contribution to national issues.

[…] I have been following your messages on JoyFM on Sunday mornings. Some indeed may be irked by the frank and courageous way in which you address our national experience. But, to me, the messages spell out a godly and non-partisan approach to true national reconciliation. My prayer is that the message will accomplish the purpose for which it is sent and that, as the Lord grants, you will also address the issues relating to understanding in the inter-tribal, inter-faith, and economic spheres of national life.

The following letter dates from the time that Living Word was on Ghana Television and thus reached the (predominantly Islamic) North of the country.

Dear pastor, I thank Almighty Allah for giving you the wisdom and resources to spread your message to the whole nation through Ghana television. However, I was deeply disappointed at people’s ignorance about your message, better still the message of Allah because of the time, that is 5.30 a.m. [when Muslims pray] I pray that Allah will change the minds of GTV staff to shift the time probably from 9am to 12 noon on Sundays so that the import of your message to my people in the North is felt. Perhaps we need the message better. Pastor, I would urge you to continue with your work and I am confident that Allah is using you as an instrument to change our negative perceptions to the realisation of the immense spiritual reality of Africa. God does not hate Africans, our present predicament of wars, poverty, corruption, ignorance etc. are a source of worry but I have hope in the WORD of God. Why did Joseph suffer in the hands of his brothers? Why was he made a slave and a prisoner in the house of Pharaoh? Why was Jesus brought to Africa to escape death? Why Africa and not any continent? Why did Moslems escape from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia in Africa and not any other continent? I hope you would use the scriptures and the pulpit to teach us and that we are not cursed by Allah like Satan.

When Otabil talks about personal development, people write about their own lives and how the message has helped them.

Dear Pastor. I feel good any time I heard you preaching on both the radio and the television, in fact, your messages has really changed my life, and I wish I will imminate [sic] you if God wishes me to be.

[…] I listened to your message yesterday on ‘opening pages of your life’ part VI on TV3. I was greatly blessed by the message especially as it applied to a par-
ticular need in my life right now. After listening to you, my eyes were indeed opened to see that God could still bring blessings from the same source of my pains. It's a wonderful knowledge!

When Otabil preaches about speaking in tongues or on how to receive the Holy Spirit, people send testimonies of their own spiritual experience, as the Presbyterian woman who was baptised by the Holy Spirit while watching the programme. She was busy sweeping the living room when *Living Word* came on and caught her attention. As she heard pastor Otabil preaching on speaking in tongues, she put down her broom, sat down and listened to the whole message. After the sermon Otabil said ‘let’s pray’ and suddenly she found herself praying in tongues without stopping. For the first time in her life she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Her children started crying, it was such a beautiful experience, and she was so excited. So she wrote to the church to thank pastor Otabil, saying that she would from now on allow God to use him to bless her.

Letters also express a strong belief in Otabil’s power of prayer and solving problems and in his, as one writer put it, ‘spiritual occupation of the nation.’

[…] I am a Catholic anyway, but I love your teachings. Dear pastor Otabil what I want you to do for me is first to pray with me so that any obstacle that is blocking my marriage life would be broken in Jesus name so that my path would be clear and secondly please pray with me so that the man God himself has chosen for me would come my way so that we would live together praising and giving thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What the letters make clear is that apart from the rational, practical message that Otabil preaches on air, there is also a spiritual side to receiving this message. People speak of the blessings of God being released in their lives, of being totally transformed, of receiving spiritual strength, encouragement, and restoration of hope, and some of receiving the Holy Spirit. As speaks from their testimonies, such experiences are fundamental to their sense of self as a born-again Christian. Otabil’s words, carried to a broad audience by radio and television, can transfer the power of the Holy Spirit into the lives of his listeners and viewers and thereby inform religious subjectivity. In order to understand the relation between spiritual mediation in church and through technological media, I will now discuss charismatic notions and doctrines of sensory perception.

**Doctrines of sensory perception**

In the previous chapter I have already referred to Poloma’s (2003) argument that charismatic doctrine is suspicious of perception through the bodily senses. It favours ‘spiritual knowledge’ instead, knowledge directly given by God. In a similar vein, Gifford (2004:71) argues that Ghana’s charismatic Christianity puts great stress on not believing what you see, hear or feel around you. The faith gospel preaches that, for example, when you look at your living conditions, you may see that you are poor. But
God tells you that you are rich. Are you going to believe what your senses tell you or are you going to believe what God (through the bible) tells you? The answer is obvious. Yet, despite this disbelief in human perception, charismatics also recognise that, in the words of prophet Dan, ‘God communicates to us through the five senses.’ And not only are the human senses the vehicle for divine communication, but also for spiritual power, both good and evil. In much of charismatic practice, then, the senses are both mobilised to connect to the power of the Holy Spirit and disciplined to disconnect from the power of the Devil. In this section I look at how in Ghanaian charismatic perception and practice the Holy Spirit uses the eye, the ear, and the touch (smell and taste are less prominent) to intervene in the life of the believer, but how the senses can also be ‘demonic doorways’ to the human body.

The eye
Charismatic Pentecostalism has an ambiguous relationship with looking and the image. On the one hand it strongly rejects, in Protestant, iconoclastic tradition, the Catholic use of saintly images as sites of worship and means of divine communication and emphasises the Word instead. Yet, at the same time, we cannot deny that it is a religion in which the visual plays a key role. Various authors have related the lively visual culture of Pentecostalism to the centrality of vision and the power of revelation (Gordon and Hancock 2005; Meyer 2006a, 2006c; Morgan 1998; see also special issue of Material Religion 1(3), 2005). Prophecy and healing, as in ICGC’s Solution Centre described in the last chapter, depend on the prophet’s ability to see into the spiritual realm and to communicate his visions to those who cannot see. Christ Temple prophet Pastor Dan: ‘The vision is the eye. As somebody sees a picture physically, we see pictures in the realm of the spirit. I close my eyes and see a vision.’ This function of a prophet as an intermediary eye has its roots in local religious traditions and has become central to Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Meyer (2006a) analyses video technology as an extension of such Pentecostal looking practices, as part and parcel of a ‘new regime of visibility, in which visuality is a proof of true existence.’ This conclusion is thus quite the opposite of the above observation of mistrust of what the eye sees. Furthermore, Meyer argues, visuality can even become true existence, as there
SPIRIT MEDIA

Fig. 4.18 AltarMedia website (2005).

Fig. 4.19 AltarMedia website (2006).
is no clear-cut boundary between the representation and its referent, in her case fake shrines on a film set that risk being inhabited by demonic spirits. Representation or fiction can become real and thus acquire a power of its own, that can affect the person seeing it.

Gordon and Hancock (2005) make a similar argument when they state that in Pentecostalism’s praxis of looking, the image is iconic rather than symbolic. Pentecostal images do not simply represent a physical reality, in their case the vast masses of worshippers at Reinhardt Bonnke’s crusades, but embody the spiritual reality behind it. As the believer’s sight penetrates the image surface to experience the Holy Spirit, the image can trigger gifts of healing and tongues. Of course, only the ‘real,’ biblically informed Christian has the privilege of this kind of vision. Visual experience, then, is an important medium of divine intervention in the life of the Christian viewer.

But in this iconic power of the image also lies the danger of images. As images do not merely represent, but make present Holy Spirit power, they do the same with evil power. Images of evil or sin thus not only show, but embody demonic power, thus enabling Satan to get hold of a person through the image, through his/her vision. Hence the suspicion in charismatic circles against imagery, and especially the imagery of the mass media, that is often considered sinful. During an ICGC discipleship class (17 March 2002), a discussion was held about the Devil using our eyes, especially through media and advertisement, as entrances to the body. Teacher Peter Dzandza:

Three main ways the Devil uses: eyes, flesh, pride of life (1 John) and all that marketing people aim at is our eyes. The devil has a Ph.D. in packaging and marketing. Take sin and make it look good. Everything that is evil is presented as good. Gambling, cigarettes, alcohol, sex, they are all advertised as signs of good life. Advertisement boards are not in obscure places, but a nice picture on a big board, with nice colours, so you will see it. They show a nice young lady, slim, wearing a short shirt, neatly dressed, smiling, and a young man, slim, slightly taller, standing by her and a nice posh car and they are telling you to smoke. When you smoke you will get a nice lady and a nice car and be beautiful. They aim at you, the younger generation, aiming at your eyes to create a desire in you, a lust, a negative desire.

By merely seeing such images, a person can already be caught by the Devil. Demonic power can enter a person’s body through the eye and affect the person’s life. The only way to prevent this is to clearly frame the images in the Pentecostal worldview of good and evil. This is done in video films (Meyer 2006a), but not in most advertising and foreign films and TV programmes and that is why these are considered so dangerous. The public has to mobilise that frame and thus charismatic-Pentecostal churches make sure they teach their members to do so. It is important thus to examine Pentecostal imagery and looking practices and not to take the Pentecostal rejection of the image and centrality of the Word for granted. Yet, a too exclusive emphasis on vision taken for granted as distanced gaze risks
overlooking the equally important role of sound and hearing in charismatic Pentecostalism.

The ear

The opening phrases of a booklet published by The End Time Evangelistic Church in Accra, *Be careful about what you hear*, summarise very well the general understandings of hearing that are taught in charismatic-Pentecostal circles: ‘There is power in the spoken word. It can either be for good or for evil’ (Nketia n.d.:1). It is this idea of power in the spoken word that informs common prayers, such as this one by a radio preacher on Akasanoma Radio (September 2004): ‘Lord, as your people are hearing the sound of my voice, let your mighty spirit touch them.’ There is a strong emphasis on the spiritual effect of the sound of divinely inspired speaking. Saying you are poor indeed makes you poor (hence also the fierce resistance in charismatic circles against Kufour’s acceptance of the HIPC programme), while saying you are rich makes you rich. This principle is well summarised by the faith gospel slogan ‘name it! claim it!! take it!!!’ (Heward-Mills 1999), based on the biblical understanding that the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs18:21). The power of prophecy, of preaching and of praying aloud rests on this principle. The divinely inspired sound of gospel music also embodies the power of the Holy Spirit and is thus able to affect and protect one’s life. Hence the belief that playing gospel music in a car keeps evil spirits away and prevents car accidents.

But as the ear thus serves as an entrance for the Holy Spirit to touch a person, the Devil can equally make use of this ‘doorway.’ Hearing something spiritually affects you and thus you have to be very careful about what you hear and ‘guard you ears.’ According to Nketia ‘what you see is not as serious as what you hear’ (n.d.:9).

Whether you like it or not you will hear something: over the Radio or Television, from friends, and other sources. …With the recent springing up of FM Radio Stations all over Ghana, it is clear that what a nation hears is very important. If a nation hears good and encouraging news, this affects the people for good. Frightful news on the other hand transmits fear into people, causing panic and even leading to the loss of innocent lives (Genital Scare [sic], Mataheko Murders in Ghana)’ (ibid.:2-3).

As what people hear on the radio news can transfer ‘the spirit of fear’ into them, listening to ‘wordly music,’ especially sexually loaded song texts, can transfer the spirit of sin. The only way to ‘be careful about what one hears’ and prevent such demonic spirits from entering through the ear, is to check everything one hears with the bible to know
whether it comes from God or from the Devil. As with looking at images, one can listen to evil words or sounds, but only when they are Pentecostally framed as such.

A similar argument as made above for images and looking can thus also be made for sound and hearing (see also Hirschkind 2001b). The spoken Word of God, divinely inspired music or sinful songs do not just represent meanings, but embody spiritual power that can affect the hearer. The Holy Spirit and the Devil fight about the ear in order to enter a person’s body and life.

The touch

In the previous chapter I described how during the ICGC Solution Centre spiritual power is primarily mediated by the pastor’s touch. The Holy Spirit also communicates through the sense of touch. Pastor Dan told me that ‘at times, whilst you are praying for somebody, you sense that something is paining your this thing, then you know that this person is going through a pain on that part of the body. We feel it.’ Prophetic revelation thus depends not only on seeing and hearing, but also on feeling (and even on smelling; pastor Dan said he can smell demons and ‘witchcraft spirits’). But ‘feeling the Holy Spirit’ is not restricted to prophets. The experience of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, which forms the foundation of being a born-again Christian, is commonly expressed in terms of tactility. The popular miracle preacher Dag Heward-Mills, for instance, preaches on one of his miracle videos (Miracle days are here) (fig. 4.20): ‘I see the healing of the Lord moving into your body right now. Some of you may feel it like a warm passing through. Or something you feel, but you don’t know what it is.’ Testimonies captured on the tape include that of a woman who miraculously became pregnant after having both tubes removed. She said ‘I felt the power of God inside my stomach and knew that I was healed.’ Others described their experience to the audience as ‘I felt some heaviness in my legs and all of a sudden the pain vanished,’ ‘I felt some heat in my knees and believed that I was healed,’ ‘I didn’t feel any warmth or heaviness, but at a certain point I just felt like checking and the pain had disappeared,’ ‘I felt something coming out,’ or ‘I felt something very cold on my shoulder and as I checked I felt the lump in my breast shrinking.’ The touch of the Holy Spirit, then, is experienced as an extreme temperature, as weight, or as ‘just feeling something.’ Moreover, this indefinable physical experience (‘some,’ ‘something,’ ‘don’t know what it is’) precedes the understanding that this is the Holy Spirit touching.

Let me repeat that for Otabil physical touch as employed in miracle healing is problematic. Still, as I described in the previous chapter, both physical touch, as in the Solution Centre, and the discourse of tactility and bodiliness feature prominently in his church. I argue that common charismatic expressions like ‘being touched by the spirit’ or ‘feeling the power of the Holy Ghost’ should not be understood only metaphorically, but quite literally, as indeed a bodily experience (cf. Sobchack 2004), also when mediated through the airwaves, by religious radio and television broadcasts. The point is that the touch by the Spirit, which constitutes a born-again Christian’s being, may be mediated by physical touch, that is, through laying on of hands, but not necessarily. It may also be mediated by sounds and images, either of a
live performance, as described in the previous chapter, or of technological media. Similarly, demonic power may be mediated not only by touching evil matter or physically indulging in immoral behaviour such as pre- or extramarital sex, drinking, or smoking, but also by seeing images (billboards, television) or hearing sounds (music) of such matter and behaviour. Hence the emphasis is not only on not touching but also on not seeing and not hearing in order to remain out of touch with evil powers. Only when we acknowledge the interrelatedness of the senses and the possibility of touch through the eye and the ear, can we understand why images and sounds may cause so much concern among charismatics, as in the above examples (see also Verrips 2006). And only then can we also understand charismatics’ use of audiovisual media.

The tactile dimension of religious subjectivity in charismatic Pentecostalism is not limited to its African strain. In the African context, however, the emphasis on being touched by the Spirit resonates with the central role of the sense of touch in traditional religiosity. This point will be discussed in detail in chapter 6 in the context of the Afrikania Mission and its ambiguous relationship to tactile spirituality. Here I wish to point to the phenomenon of spirit possession and the application of ritual objects and substances to the body in religious practice to underline that traditional religious subjects connect to the spiritual primarily through the sense of touch. In traditional religion too touch can be mobilized through the other senses. To give just a few examples: the use of people’s photographs in magical practices of healing and harming (Behrend 2003); the beating of particular drumming rhythms to invoke the tactile presence of particular deities in possession ritual; the idea of witchcraft or ‘juju’ as physical touch over distance (in local parlance often referred to as ‘African electronics’).

Charismatic-Pentecostal sensory practices, then, in which images and sounds can transfer the touch of Holy Spirit power to viewers and listeners and affect their being, show a continuity with traditional African ideas about seeing, hearing, touch, spiritual power, and personhood. I argue that we have to take into account the specific sensory practices of African traditional religiosity in order to understand what Asamoah-Gyadu has called the ‘sacramental use of television’ by African charismatics (2005c:23).

Receiving the Word, being touched by the Spirit

While prospective converts are often urged to ‘visit this church on a Sunday to really feel the Holy Spirit at work,’ it is also possible to have this experience over a large distance, through electronic media. The text on the cover of the religious video tape Miracle Days Are Here (fig. 4.20) proclaims:

Join Bishop Dag Heward-Mills in the powerful miracle service captured on this video and experience the miraculous touch of God which is able to heal, deliver and restore! As you receive the Word of God about the Anointing and the miraculous, may faith be stirred up within you to receive your own miracle!

The tape cover thus promises an experience of ‘miraculous touch’ through an audiovisual medium. Indeed, testimonies abound of people having received the touch of the
Holy Spirit through a media broadcast or video tape.

Some preachers solve the problem of mass media’s lack of tactility by calling their listeners, viewers, or readers to create a ‘point of contact’ by laying their hand on the radio set, the TV screen, or the book page. Asamoah-Gyadu writes, for example, that Bishop Agyin Asare of Word Miracle Church International, often opens his palms and asks viewers to place their own open palms into his on the TV screen as he prays for them, in the belief that ‘there is transference of “healing anointing”’ to the sick through the screen’ (2005c:20). Or, viewers may be asked to place a bottle of oil on the television set in the belief that the oil will be infused with anointing as the pastor on the screen prays (ibid.:23). Media preachers thus make use of the materiality of the medium, much like the materiality of the body is used to create ‘contact points’ during anointing services. The television set or the radio, Asamoah-Gyadu argues, thus ‘acquires a talismanic status as a medium for effective anointing’ (ibid.). Yet, also without physically touching the medium, people can receive the touch of the Holy Spirit, as happened to the sweeping woman. Divine touch can thus work through the eye and the ear.

Let’s return to Clifford, the Living Word editor, and his statement that ‘people at
home like to identify with the people they see on TV. What he seems to hint at is the same bodily process of posture, tension, and intention that Sobchack describes as ‘mimetic sympathy.’

Focussed on the screen, my “postural schema” or intentional comportment takes its shape in mimetic sympathy with (or shrinking recoil from) what I see and hear. If I am engaged by what I see, my intentionality streams toward the world onscreen, marking itself not merely in my conscious attention, but always also in my bodily tension: the sometimes flagrant, sometimes subtle, but always dynamic investment, inclination, and arrangement of my material being (Sobchack 2004:76).

Note that it was only after the sweeping woman put down her broom and sat down to listen to the whole message that she was touched by the Holy Spirit and started speaking in tongues. Watching a religious TV broadcast with an intentional body, ‘sitting in readiness’ and ‘in mimetic sympathy’ with the attentive audience onscreen, then, may be a prerequisite for the reception of the spiritual power contained in the Word. We don’t know what would have happened had she continued sweeping while listening to the message, but charismatic doctrine also suggests a bodily way of listening necessary to ‘catch’ the spiritual power embedded in the religious message.

In charismatic circles a distinction is commonly made between listening to ‘the Word of God’ as an educational exercise and as a spiritual event, between ‘learning’ and ‘catching’ in the words of Dag Heward-Mills. He writes about ‘the art of soaking in tapes’ in his book Catch the Anointing, which has a revealing cover photograph of a hand literally catching an audio tape (fig. 4.21).

“Soaking” in tapes simply means to listen to the words over and over again until it becomes a part of you and until the anointing passes on to you! When a tape is fully “soaked”, both the Word content and the spirit content are imbibed in your spirit. The anointing is not something you learn, it is something you catch. Do not assume that the “soaking” in of the tape is just an educational exercise. It is a spiritual event. Two important things happen when you soak in a tape. First, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word (Romans 10:17). Secondly, the anointing of the Spirit through the words, comes into you. The Spirit enters a person as he receives the Word of God. That is why many people experience a radical transformation by just listening to a powerful message from the Word of God (2000:12).

He thus advises his readers to listen to tapes in such a way that you no longer just hear the meaning of the words, but embody their spiritual quality and the anointing ‘comes into you.’ One may listen to the message only with one’s ears and brains and understand it alright, but it is only when one also absorbs it in one’s material being like porous matter absorbs liquid that one can ‘catch the anointing.’ The taped or broadcast message, the sound of the spoken words, thus becomes the vehicle for the Spirit to enter the person. Heward-Mills reminds us that our presupposed opposition
of intellectual versus spiritual, teaching versus spiritual experience, does not hold: people experience the power of the Holy Spirit by listening to teachings, provided they listen in a particular way. This charismatic listening practice is strikingly similar to Islamic practices of cassette-sermon audition in Egypt described by Charles Hirschkind (2001b). The particular ‘affective-volitional responsiveness’ necessary for ‘understanding’ sermon speech, described by practitioners as ‘hearing with the heart,’ ‘is not strictly something cognitive, but involves the body in its entirety’ (ibid.: 624) and is distinguished from the kind of hearing that engages only the mind. Although Otabil’s emphasis is more on learning and education, he shares Heward-Mills’ conviction that real understanding should and can only be accompanied by the embodiment of God’s Spirit.

This emphasis on soaking spirit content with one’s full being reminds of Marks’ notion of embodied, tactile knowledge, gained through mimesis and physical contact and triggered by ‘haptic vision.’ Without using the concept of mimesis, Heward-Mills alludes to this pre-conscious process when he writes that one of the signs that you are catching the anointing is when ‘you unconsciously begin to use certain phrases and points in these messages. Unknown to you, you begin to walk and think like the person you are listening to’ (ibid.:33). He compares this process to a young girl learning how to cook by watching her mother and doing it over and over again (ibid.:35). Moreover, he tells us to ‘avoid the mistake of leaving out the video dimension. [It] helps you to catch things that you cannot catch on an audio tape: posture, attire, gestures’ (ibid.:34). ‘Soaking in tapes,’ then, is a bodily practice of mimesis supplementing the cerebral practice of understanding the meaning of the words.

Viewing and listening with one’s body, then, triggers the embodied sensory memory of a live church event and the spiritual experience it evokes. In church, the body and voice of the man of God and the bodies of the audience joined together in a collective performance of communication facilitate a link between the individual worshippers and the spiritual realm and evoke the presence of God’s spirit in the physical...
space of the church hall. In front of the TV, through the sensual relation with what the
religious viewer sees on and hears from the screen, s/he becomes part of the event,
participates in a way with the onscreen audience in religious worship, and, more
importantly, interacts in a close association with the anointed man of God. Otabil's
introductory and closing words to the viewer at home clearly serve this purpose of
intimacy. Not only does he address the viewer (as if) personally, always calling
him/her ‘my friend,’ the intimate close-up of the face of the man that not many people
can come close to in reality also render him present in their living room, rather than
represented on the screen. As Heward-Mills writes:

> For many people, the close association with men of God is not possible except
through the medium of books and tapes. … “Soaking” in books written by
anointed men is an invaluable way of associating with them. … What a great
privilege it is to interact with a great person for three hours in the privacy of
your home! As you read this book you are fellowshipping with me and I am
fellowshipping with you (Heward-Mills 2000:8).

While watching an anointed man on TV, you are fellowshipping with him, closely inter-
acting, and thus able to partake in the spiritual power he gives off. Looking at his image
calls up the religious subject's tactile memory of sitting in a church hall, surrounded by
his amplified voice, of feeling a pastor's firm hand on one's head, of being immersed in
a crowd speaking in tongues, of being moved by the beat of the music. The boundary
between onscreen and offscreen, between object and subject thus blurs and the Holy
Spirit ceases to be an onscreen representation, represented by the interaction between
pastor and congregation, but becomes present and able to touch the viewer.

**Conclusion: television and the religious subject**

Building upon the tension between charisma and format set up in the previous chap-
ters, this chapter has shown how the televisualisation of a religious ritual, the teaching
sermon, creates a pastor's charisma and addresses as well as constitutes new religious
subjects. AltarMedia makes use of television and video not only to spread a message
and an image of Otabil and his followers, but also to mediate charisma and spiritual
power to the audiences at home. Through careful framing and editing of pre-recorded
church services, the televised religious spectacle invites the TV spectator to partake of
the power of the Holy Spirit present in the Word of God.

In the previous chapter I have shown that the Christ Temple celebrates services
according to a specific format, that entails not only a more or less fixed sequence of
practices and performances, but also a similarly fixed, but more implicit pattern of
bodily behaviour and vocal utterances required of the congregation. In order to share
in the blessings that God, through the pastor, bestows upon the social and spiritual
community of believers, a person has to participate in the communication between the
man of God and the congregation according to this format. The dynamic between the
body and voice of the pastor on stage, the mass body of the audience, and the individ-
ual body of each worshipper, often evokes the emotional experience interpreted as a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. These bodies, joined in a communal religious event, are the medium that carries spiritual power.

This ‘formatting’ of the church audience through performance practices is carried further in the AltarMedia editing studio. The Living Word programme format that the editors use to circulate and market Otabil’s teachings, visualises the dynamics between the pastor, the mass and the individual believer in church. By mixing shots of Otabil preaching with shots of the crowd filling the auditorium and close-ups of individual persons in the audience, Living Word implicitly provides the bodily format one has to submit to in order to not only understand the Word of God, but ‘catch’ the spiritual power inherent in it. Bodies that do not conform to this regime of listening to the Word, and thus hear but words without feeling the Spirit, are edited out. The bodies, reactions, and emotions that are shown provide the format for what viewers at home are expected to experience in receiving Otabil’s message and the Word of God. Through identification with the church audience, the viewer is invited to participate in the service and, just like the people on screen, to subject to pastor Otabil and to partake in the Holy Spirit power that his message transfers onto them. By giving them a feeling of belonging to that larger community of believers, Living Word thus not just addresses and creates an audience outside the church, but constitutes religious subjects.

The Living Word format, a common format for religious programmes, bears a striking resemblance to the format of a TV show with a host and a studio audience yet directed at a mass TV audience. A charismatic church service similarly features a host pastor and a local church congregation, but is, through the media ministry, also directed at all those not-yet-born-agains, Otabil’s imaginary first-time visitor. In both cases too, the host is often a national celebrity and the people present at the live event function as ‘the people like you and me,’ who are nevertheless interacting with this famous personality, giving the TV audience a feeling of ‘I could also be there.’ The format of the TV show with studio audience, be it a talk show, a quiz or whatever entertainment show, always includes both wide-angle shots of the whole or a large part of the studio audience and close-ups of individual persons. This works to draw the viewer into the show, to be part of the studio audience, to experience the live event. Sometimes the studio audience is only present audibly, by their applause and laughter, sometimes even faked. Still, this sound works to increase a feeling of participation in the TV audience. This is very different from programme formats without a visible or audible studio audience.

I argue, then, that the success of the televisual culture of charismatic Pentecostalism in Ghana can be traced to the similarity between specific formats, styles, and modes of address of the medium of television and those of mediating the Spirit in charismatic religious practice. Charismatic churches communicate spiritual power through mass gatherings, spectacle, and theatrical performance. Their dominant mode of address (in preaching and in leading worship and prayer) is a mode of addressing the masses, or more precisely, the individual as part of a mass of worshippers. The Holy Spirit seems to be easily attracted by crowds, be they in large church halls or in open spaces. This fits the televisual logic of creating public spectacle and visual attraction to enchant the masses and addressing the individual TV viewer at
home as being part of a mass audience. Indeed, Pentecostalism’s strong emphasis on evangelization, on winning as many souls as possible, has given its main ways of transmitting religious knowledge and spiritual power an outward direction that is very similar to television’s commercial logic of reaching an audience as wide as possible, targeting and entertaining a maximum of potential customers for the advertisers or program sponsors. Moreover, as Asamoah-Gyadu has argued, charismatic-Pentecostal discursive practice has developed to suit media demands and produces a ‘crisp, clear, and direct message, which speaks to the concerns of broad masses of Ghanaians in terms that are fascinating and enchanting’ (2005c:10). Charismatic slogans, ‘power quotes,’ and serialized thematic messages are well-suited to commercial mass media. Lastly, Pentecostal dramatization, by stressing emotion, and serialization of religious performance shows affinity to popular formats of TV programming. The medium of television thus offers formats and modes of address that are familiar to those of charismatic events and practices.

While television is commonly understood as an audiovisual medium, one that engages the eye and the ear, in this chapter I have argued that watching a religious broadcast involves the whole body and appeals to all senses. I thus argue that the tactile language most charismatics use to describe their spiritual experience, in church and behind the TV screen, is not necessarily or solely metaphoric (cf. Sobchack 2004:79). Acknowledging that vision and hearing are informed by and inform the other senses, claims of being ‘touched’ by the Spirit while watching or listening to a powerful ‘man of God’ delivering the Word can be taken quite literal. Agreeing with Sobchack and with Verrips (2002) that all audiovisual media engage the other senses, I argue that the particular format of the religious broadcast reinforces this process. Watching ‘common people’ one can identify with experiencing a religious service on screen can trigger the embodied, multisensory memory of a similar experience in church, making it possible to physically experience a touch. This experience may not be very different from the touch experienced in church, which is also mediated partly by electronic technologies such as closed-circuit television, Power Point projection, and all-round sound amplification, and partly by bodily technologies. The Christian consciousness then frames this tactile experience in the learned Holy Spirit discourse. The fact that people send testimonies of being touched by the Spirit in front of the TV screen means that this touch is very important for their being, their Christian personhood. Being touched makes a vital change in their life. Body and language thus work together in shaping the Christian self, as so beautifully captured by the title Living Word: language, the Word, is not merely representation, it lives, and does so in and through the body.

It would follow from the above that people who have no sensory memory of charismatic religious practice that can be triggered by the TV images, could never experience a touch of the Spirit. Let me repeat that both the performative, expressive way of worship and the emphasis on the Holy Spirit are no longer restricted to charismatic churches. Through their media ministries and through the numerous, publicly accessible crusades and conferences, the charismatic style of practising religion has greatly influenced worship and preaching styles in other churches, that are loosing more and more members to the charismatics. Many of Ghana’s Christians thus have
some lived experience of what they see on TV. Still, we cannot assume that this is the case for all viewers of charismatic programmes. Otabil in particular has many Muslim viewers, many of whom have probably never attended a charismatic or charismatic-like event. While for insider charismatics, seeing and hearing a service on TV may trigger, unconsciously, on the mimetic, embodied level, the ‘tactile’ memory of being touched by the Holy Spirit, for outsiders such as Muslims watching a televised service engages them on the more conscious, rational level and they may not be ‘touched by the Spirit.’ Indeed, it is noteworthy that Muslims who write to the church in response to watching *Living Word*, always comment on the content of the message and what it teaches them and the nation as a whole, while reports of spiritual experiences mostly come from Christian viewers. More research would be needed, however, to see whether such a correlation indeed exists.

As argued in the previous chapter, the ‘inner’ transformation of the religious self happens through bodily practices of self-styling. The power of the Holy Spirit needed for this transformation can only be received through modes of listening and viewing that involve the whole body and all senses. It is here that the experience and embodiment of live church events and the bodily reception of religious broadcasts inform each other in the constitution of religious subjectivity. The question, however, is whether without the outside discipline church members must submit to, the media format indeed changes religious experience. In other words, whether the media format is as powerful as the bodily formats inscribed on church members. Listeners and viewers of *Living Word*, who participate in sharing the church’s message and sometimes engage in follow-up practices, may in a way be regarded as part of the ICGC community. Yet, the church is in no way able to control the persons that make up this fluid and unbounded community. As the reception of the ICGC message does not go together with close supervision and physical interaction, the ‘inner transformation’ that the message is aimed at cannot be monitored as is attempted with the registered members. Charismatic church leaders fear, then, that as a result of increasing mass-mediatisation and popularisation, for many people being born-again becomes, in their analysis, a matter of ‘outward style’ rather than ‘inner transformation.’ Otabil also struggles with this dilemma, as becomes clear from a prayer meeting he led in the Christ Temple:

Today we pray for the propagation of the gospel. In the times of the apostles, they went by horse or by foot and held crusades to spread the gospel. Now, planes and cars are available to travel long distances. But it is no longer necessary to travel to spread the gospel. We can now use media, especially TV, radio, and satellite for propagating the gospel. It is more effective than the crusades of earlier Pentecostalism, because it is not mass, but enters into people’s homes, where they take time to listen and make their choices. Today we pray that God will make the word as spread through TV and radio not only attract people, but turn them to Christ, make them born-again. Born-again is a change in life (16 July 2001).

Pastors like Otabil criticise identification with and appropriation of the charismatic format of worship and being a Christian without an inner experience of Christ. At the
same time they unintentionally stimulate what they reject as 'bumper sticker Christianity' by the ways they showcase their churches in the mass mediated religious marketplace. Such criticisms, however, should be understood as a particular religious concern with authenticity that privileges ‘deep’ over ‘superficial,’ ‘content’ over ‘form,’ ‘spirit’ over ‘body,’ ‘spontaneity’ over ‘ritual,’ ‘immediacy’ over ‘mediation,’ and ultimately ‘Holy Spirit’ agency over ‘human’ agency. In this and the previous chapters I have attempted to escape such dichotomies by arguing that the experiences that are authenticated as deep, inner, spontaneous, immediate and generated by the Holy Spirit are necessarily mediated by forms: ritual performance, bodily and rhetorical styles, membership forms, and media formats. While opening up new possibilities to create and mediate the kind of charisma such churches thrive on, the television format has also expanded the challenges posed by the problem of mediation.

Notes

1 While Marks uses the concept of ‘haptic visuality’ to analyse the in my view problematic category of ‘intercultural cinema’ and its particular kind of imagery, Sobchack argues that all films and all images engage the sense-making capacities of our bodies.
2 Marks speaks of a dialectic of optical and haptic visuality; Sobchack of a reciprocity of the figural and the literal aspects of the image. Both thus view representation as inseparable from embodiment (Marks 1999:142).
3 Only three other churches have their own studio: the Word Miracle Church International, the Church of Pentecost, and the Christ Apostolic Church.
4 Conversation 18 April 2002.
5 Conversation 2 April 2002.
6 Charismatics generally distinguish between five ministry or leadership gifts: that of pastor, teacher, apostle, prophet, and evangelist.
7 Conversation 18 April 2002.
8 Interview 16 March 2005.
9 Conversation 18 April 2002.
10 From 2005 duplication, labelling and packaging of CD’s was contracted out.
11 Interview 16 March 2005.
12 ‘Vote for positive change’ was J.A. Kufour’s election slogan in 2000.
13 Interview Mr. Baffou-Bonnie, 10 August 2001.
14 Conversation 26 September 2002.
15 Conversation 19 September 2002.
16 Conversation 3 December 2002.
17 See a special issue of Material Religion (1(3), 2005) on the visual culture of Pentecostalism.
18 For many charismatics, the Ghanaian government’s acceptance of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative was a straightforward acceptance of poverty and thus totally opposed to their message of achievement and prosperity as God’s aim for everybody. Otabil furthermore strongly criticises the government for going round the world begging for money instead of leading the country out of poverty with a vision of self-development and true independence.
19 Conversation 4 June 2002.
20 These are different fried snacks made of ripe plantain and usually absorbing a lot of oil.
21 While Coleman (2000:150) uses the term 'living icons' to denote the body image of charismatic pastors who preach and embody prosperity, I argue here that the prosperous bodies of their audiences invest them with religious authority as well.
22 Since president Kufour embarked on the ‘Highly Indebted Poor Countries’ initiative, HIPC, also spelled hipik, has become a popular term for poor, poverty, difficult times, or suffering. The notion has generated spin-off terms such as hipim and hipiw, highly indebted poor man and woman, and the junction near the Tetteh Quarshie roundabout which leads to President Kufuor’s house is popularly named Hipik Junction.
23 Unfortunately, apart from the survey done by Rev. Asamoah among Pentecostal (non-ICGC) students no results were available. I gained additional data from talking with the students about their research findings.