

# Cell: an introduction to a response

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Thank you to Kate for inviting me here today to think in concert with you about some of the concretions and concavities, abysses, abbesses, abscesses of fabulation. (Already the words I need for this job are setting conglomerate, all just encased, and it's going to be hard to pick them out without bits of the others coming with them.

Let's take it slow and get the grit out of our teeth.) I am a reader and a poet and a researcher but Kate's performance was all reading and poem and research and so this too may become an accretion of all three modes.

My job, as I see it, is to burrow back into Kate's work and instate a series of small *squints*: splayed, oblique holes through a common wall shared by a church and its adjoining cell.

These squints are often set at seated eye-level, orientated south-east or north-east so they cut a diagonal line-of-sight to the altar from the small cell occupied by the anchorite, a woman, overwhelmingly a woman, her body bricked into the side of the building.

The squint would be one of three windows through which the body of the woman is made continuous with the building.

One window for food to be taken into the cell and waste to be passed out of the cell.

One for light, that welcome, open eye of light, that round warm patch of light on skin.

One for looking in, observing the altar, seeing the elevation of the flesh and the blood.

None are big enough for the entire body to pass through. The door is bricked-shut.

When we discussed this performance, prior to today, Kate carefully talked me through the common walls of her practice and those of the megachurch, the lines-of-sight set up between the space of narrative, of performance, of the screen by pastors with a knack for live broadcast, 'broadpastors' or 'televangelists' who set up large screens to relay the service even to those at the back of the sixteen-thousand-and-eight-hundred-strong congregation. Even to those outside, at home and squinting through the bright hole in their living room wall.

The screens stand over the stage, multiplying and multiplying the image, or what Kate calls in her performance that 'vast spectacle of one-ness' which multiplies and multiplies the spectator, which has us shimmering into eager flecks in the rock.

If the anchorite squinted into the stadium of the megachurch, she would see the live relay suspended over the stage in the place she might expect to see the rood screen in the European late-medieval church. The rood screen, an illuminated lattice loft which might be substantial enough to house a choir, a conglomerate of song strung above the congregation, stands between her and the body and the flesh and the blood. Yet most rood stairs are narrow, built for just one ascension at a time. Up they go, one by one into one-ness. In the wall, the anchorite, squinting singly and unsung. Hers is a fixed rig.

Kate, you said 'I will flesh this thought out: being entranced, or enchanted by a thing is to become particularly fixed within that orientation.' and I thought *entrance entrance entrance* is an entrance on the back foot and so too as flesh becomes *flesh* becomes just something to do, just something really

should be done about this. If flesh is an action, a space of the performance, we can flesh this thought in as well as out.

I'll remind you of what Kate said of the *tunicate*, a small submarine body which fleshes itself into a shimmering rock, a stone so bloody squeezable it is classified by marine biologists as a *squirt*.

Oh to flesh ourselves in like this!

Let me return us to the definition of the cavity, the hollow in the rock, the living cell: the cave.

What follows is both the squint and the squirt of it:



Categorically, a cavity is a cave the moment it might admit a human body and when I learned that this was the measure of it, I knew I knew poems by the relief my full body makes for itself in finding the poem.

If all you can do is press a knuckle to the depression in the ground or watch as the water — like a gif of water tripping into loops of distance — trips, you're looking into a hole or a hollow or a swallet or a pocket (or prose, even). You need to be able to pull the full wet ten degrees around you like a sleeping bag, at least and right up to your neck, for a cave to be a cave. Once you're snug, you can begin the ecstatic business, echoing your *hello-lo-lo*-belownesses all night long if you must.

But if, say, the cave admits nothing to no body, not even you, and lies on its belly, extremely soiled in discretion and doesn't know your name, even to throw it back at you, it is not a cave at all which is to say it is not yet a cave but a kind of double negativity. Your quartzic hiccup, swallowed immediately. My countdown from 0. A sewn-shut pocket implied by a fault, not at all yours.

Pockets are ordinarily, however we feel about this, for owners only. You can't just stuff your hand in in the furred privacy of the cubicle. Get your trousers home first and carefully unpick the thread stitched across the (now *your*) openings and you'll be free to shyly bury your most distal tendernesses in public or turn them inside-out at the checkout, curtsying the fabric apart to prove you and your hot pound twenty are of no threat to anybody but yourself, when you are buying other pockets to hide your hands in.

I see you at the counter most days, trying to pour yourself a Klein bottle.

A pocket jangling like a deep field is the tuneful permission for even people who wear dresses to carry up to four kinds of belonging — keys, cash, phone, your hand (finally caving in) — which is just a depression or a hole or a hollow, remember, unless I can fit my whole body inside this pocket which I am also wearing as I fall through the dress into the pocket, through the pocket into the dress so that I am head to toe very solemnly by the air of this sudden movement with you addressed fully as if for the first time. (Geologists might talk of a closed loop like this as a vug which comes from the Cornish vooga for cave but denotes the bubble blown, calcite bright, holding earth apart just enough just before my body finds it and addresses it as vug (or *with-a-g* — so, v · u · g · g — vugg more damply (or *with-a-h* — so, v · u · g · h — so that it transcribes the bright uvular *hhhhhaa* of air so oldly sealed it is a new air cracking out as you open the open you shouldn't know about yet and yet and which, as soon as you need a word for it, has been cancelled. (

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