

Toni H. Donald	Sexes, Society and Safety: Political Inequality in a Chinese Rural Women's Union
Ira Kaniyil	The Age of Death? Ancestress about Aging in Japan
David H. A. Orr	Regulating Mobility in the Peruvian Andes: Rural Safety, Social Hierarchy and Governance in Cusco's Rural Provinces
Michèle Marks	Revolving Technology? Personalized Interrogation? Harassment in England?
Emily Pierini	Becoming a Spirit Medium: Initiatory Learning and the Self in the Vale do Amanhecer
Aurelia Lema	Placing Displacement: Place-making in a World of Movement
Kristen Leifeld	Building on Ireland's 'Spirit' Regulation: Spirits, Curses and Ethical National Identities
Mark Graham	Anthropologists Are Talking About Queer Anthropology

Becoming a Spirit Medium: Initiatory Learning and the Self in the Vale do Amanhecer

Emily Pierini

To cite this article: Emily Pierini (2016) Becoming a Spirit Medium: Initiatory Learning and the Self in the Vale do Amanhecer, *Ethnos*, 81:2, 290-314, DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2014.929598](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2014.929598)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2014.929598>



Published online: 02 Jul 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 367



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

Becoming a Spirit Medium: Initiatory Learning and the Self in the Vale do Amanhecer

Emily Pierini

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, UK

ABSTRACT *Drawing on ethnographic data from the Brazilian mediumistic religion known as Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of the Dawn), this article addresses the learning process at the core of mediumistic development. The process of learning is here approached as a multi-layered experience, which is embodied, intuitive, performative, conceptual and inter-subjective. I will illustrate how the relationship between mediums and spirits is established in trance states through what Thomas Csordas calls a 'multi-sensory imagery'. The discussion examines the concurrence of emotions, feelings, somatosensory experience and doctrinal discourses in developing mediumistic skills, which simultaneously engenders the attributes of extendability and multi-dimensionality that ground the notion of the self, informing the conceptualisation of trance.*

KEYWORDS *Spirit mediumship, possession, Brazil, self, body, learning*

Being a spirit medium in many cultures around the world is understood as mediating the knowledge from the spirit world, and the body is the primary site of this mediation, inasmuch as of the process of learning the practice of spirit mediumship. In this article, I discuss the ethnographic case of the Brazilian mediumistic religion¹ known as Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of the Dawn),² considering the learning process at the core of mediumistic development as a process which also entails the articulation of a sense of self. In doing so, I draw upon two main threads: on the one hand, on studies that approach the bodily dimension of spirit mediumship and possession (Stoller 1989; 1994; Desjarlais 1992; Strathern 1996; Greenfield 2008) and on the other

hand, on those that approach the process of learning religion (Berliner & Sarró 2009; Halloy & Naumescu 2012).

The earlier studies on spirit mediumship and possession were largely characterised by explanatory paradigms, which often led to pathologising reductions, since they were informed by Western notions of a bounded self and driven by the mind/body dichotomy. Arguing against these reductions Goldman proposed to shift the analytical focus onto the notions of personhood involved in the possession phenomenon so as to understand possession as a 'technique' of 'symbolic construction' of the person, which may also address disease when this is 'lived through as an experience of division of the person' (1984: 192). The question of how notions of possession and the self are produced and transmitted is increasingly intriguing anthropologist working in the field of spirit mediumship and possession. This question is also closely related to the current expansion of interest in the process of learning religion (Berliner & Sarró 2009; Halloy & Naumescu 2012). The field of religious transmission is largely addressed by cognitive anthropology (Whitehouse 2000; 2004; Boyer 2001; Whitehouse & Laidlaw 2004). Studies on possession driven by this approach are concerned with the exploration of the underlying cognitive structures that may account for the cross-cultural recurrence of concepts of possession (Cohen 2007; 2008). Moving further this approach, Halloy and Naumescu suggested that when considering transmission, along with the cognitive architecture, one should also take into account 'patterns of feeling and perceiving' as well as 'recurrent sets of affects and percepts' (2012: 168). They have identified a gap in the literature concerning a consideration of 'the way contextual factors shape cognitive, perceptual and emotional processes leading to possession expertise', that is how 'the inter-relationality of environmental conditions and mental processes' is articulated (2012: 166).

This article may be situated precisely along this thread of studies, and it addresses this gap by engaging in a discussion on how notions of the self are engendered by the process of learning, stressing the inter-relational aspect of this process in which perceptual experience and discourse emerge as intertwined. Accordingly, I use Ingold's understanding of the anthropology of the senses as attention to 'the creative interweaving of experience in discourse', and 'the ways in which the resulting discursive construction in turn affects people's perceptions of the world around them' (2000: 285). The Vale of the Amanhecer provides us with the opportunity to investigate ethnographically in depth these intertwinements given the conscious and semi-conscious modalities of mediumship developed in the temple, which allow mediums to

describe different feelings and processes at work in their experiences of trance. Provided that mediumistic development, particularly at the beginning of the process, draws extensively upon bodily experience, throughout my discussion, I will look at embodiment as a way of knowing, thus, at embodied knowledge. More specifically, I will explore the cognitive, sensory and emotional processes involved in mediumistic development and how these inform notions of the self. In doing so, I aim to move beyond those cognitive approaches that consider conceptual categories, the mind and beliefs, without exploring how they interweave with the lived, bodily and perceptual experience. As Strathern notes, the focus on 'embodiment represents a return to the sensuous quality of lived experience' (1996: 198). He considers 'the reentry of the body into the scene of social theorising' precisely 'as a result of a reaction against the mentalistic patterns of enquiry and explanation that have previously dominated' (1996: 198).

Becoming a spirit medium in the Vale do Amanhecer besides being a process of development of mediumistic skills is concomitantly a process of transformation of one's sense of self. Therefore, I will argue that the primacy given to bodily experience in trance, crucially in the first stages of learning to become a medium, engenders and informs notions of the self, providing it with attributes of extendability and multi-dimensionality, which also inform conceptualisations of trance. Particularly, I will illustrate how the articulation of the self through these attributes draws upon different layers of experience in the process of learning the mediumistic practice.

The Vale do Amanhecer

The Spiritualist Christian Order Vale do Amanhecer emerged in 1959 through Neiva Chaves Zelaya (1925–1985), a former truck driver who after spontaneously manifesting mediumistic phenomena became known in Brazil as the clairvoyant 'Tia Neiva' (Aunt Neiva), attracting visitors and patients seeking her advice and spiritual healing. Since its foundation the Order has opened more than 600 temples, not just in Brazil but also in North and South America, in Europe, and in Japan. The Vale do Amanhecer of Brasília is the main temple, known as Templo Mãe (Mother Temple). It is located in the Federal District, 50 km northeast from the Capital Brasília and 6 km south from the town of Planaltina-DF. The Vale has grown from a small farm into a town of around 10,000 inhabitants.³ Most activities in the town are based around the religious activities of the temple. According to the leaders of the Order, 70% of the inhabitants are mediums or have some kind of tie to the Order. The temple is open daily with a great variety of healing rituals taking place from 10:00 am until

late at night, with an emergency service available for patients arriving overnight. Rituals attract approximately 4000 mediums and patients each week.⁴ Mediumistic practices and healing in the Vale are centred on the temple and on an open-air sacred complex around an artificial lake which includes a pyramid. Patients arrive seeking spiritual advice concerning a wide range of emotional and material matters as well as for health issues. Many patients who came to seek healing subsequently returned to the temple in order to become mediums themselves. Members of the Order in the Templo Mãe in Brasília belong primarily to the Brazilian working and middle classes. They understand their spiritual practice as a charitable work, since patients are assisted free of charge and offerings are not accepted. Indeed, mediums live upon the income from their jobs outside their religion, and the temple is self-funded through the voluntary offerings of members of the Order.

In their spiritual practice, mediums in a semi-conscious trance state embody a wide range of spiritual beings, including *pretos velhos* (spirits of African old slaves), *caboclos* (spirits of Amerindians), *médicos de cura* (spirits of doctors), gypsies, princesses and spirits of the waters, among others. These are referred to as spirit 'mentors' for they are held to bring from the higher spirit worlds guidance, protection, and healing to human beings. The spiritual treatment is referred to as 'disobsessive healing' (*cura desobsessiva*), involving the release of causal spiritual agents understood as afflicting (obsessing) the patient. Differently from spirit mentors, these spirit categories – namely, suffering (*sofredores*), obsessing (*obsessores*) spirits, or creditors from past lives (*cobreadores*) – are described as discarnate beings trapped in-between the physical and spiritual worlds after death, feeding themselves through humans' energy, causing a wide range of disturbances in their material life or physical health. It is noteworthy to mention that in Brazil healing is a consistent feature in the ritual practices of many different religious groups, and that these practices often address particular categories of spirits as being causal agents of sicknesses and afflictions.

In the Vale do Amanhecer mediums call themselves the 'Jaguares' (Jaguars), for according to Tia Neiva's revelations through her clairvoyance, they have been related to each other as a particular group of spirits – known in the spirit worlds as 'the spiritual tribe of the Jaguares' – who shared reincarnations in different historical periods, among the Hittites, the Ionians, the Dorians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Mayans, the Incas, in Colonial Brazil, and among several peoples who used the symbol of the jaguar. They identify the purpose of their current incarnation as being the redemption of their karmic debts from their past lives through the spiritual healing of others,

which would contribute to the spiritual evolution of human beings. The feline imagery is widespread in pre-Columbian Mesoamerican and South American societies (Saunders 1998), and the *onça* (jaguar) crucially stands out in the myths of many Amazonian indigenous peoples, mainly in Tupí-Guaraní cultures in Brazil (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975; Gow 2001; Fausto 2007). Albeit differently interpreted according to the local contexts, it is worth noting two main attributes of the jaguar recurrent in these myths that become salient in the mediums' understanding of their designation as 'Jaguar'. On the one hand, the attributes of strength and prestige associated to warriors and hunters characterises also the history of the Jaguares along their past lives: depicted as warriors, kings or emperors, who would presently fight by means of the practice of the Gospel's principles. On the other hand, another set of attributes of the jaguar related to shamanic powers seems to characterise a new phase of the history of the 'spiritual tribe': the present life in the Vale as mediums between the physical and the spirit worlds. As part of his exploration of the jaguar imagery across the Americas, archaeologist Saunders (1998: 32) focuses upon the association between jaguar and shamans, whereby the former, companion spirit and protector of the latter, is the 'embodiment of physical and spiritual power'. Thus, the shaman undergoes a transformation in order to become a jaguar, to minister cures against illnesses caused by spirits. Likewise, in the Vale through the process of mediumistic development to become a 'Master Jaguar', mediums undergo a process of inner transformation.

Elements and symbols recalling the past lives of the Jaguares appear in the ritual spaces and uniforms, defining the religious hybridity of the Vale do Amanhecer. Indeed, the discourse of the Vale has a global character, as it evokes the elements and principles of different religions, such as Christianity, Spiritism (Kardecism⁵), Amerindian and Afro-Brazilian religions, Eastern Religions, Theosophy, cosmologies from ancient civilisations, and Millenarianism.

Two complementary types of mediumship are developed in the Vale, that of *aparã* and that of *doutrinador*, who always work in pairs in healing rituals. The *aparã* embodies spirits in a semiconscious state of trance, which is described by mediums as being similar to dream sleep, although the body moves as if it is in wakefulness state, partially maintaining proprioceptive sensations. These spirits may be mentors bringing communications and healing, or suffering spirits. The *doutrinador*, in a conscious trance, does not embody spirits, but directs the rituals and indoctrinates the suffering spirits embodied by the *aparã*, helping them to move further in the spirit world. In comparison with other Brazilian mediumistic religions, because of the emphasis the Vale puts upon spirit release

(addressed as ‘disobsession’), the practice of *aparã* and *doutrinador* may be positioned more closely to the Brazilian Spiritist practice (i.e. Espiritismo Kardecista), rather than to Afro-Brazilian trance states.

The Process of Mediumistic Development

Mediumship is understood in the Vale as a ‘universal feature of all human beings’, and its practice as being culturally shaped in the mediumistic development according to the purposes for which it is used. This feature concerns what is described by mediums as the universal bodily production of a particular kind of energy, namely ‘ectoplasm’.⁶ When this energy is produced in excess, the person may be more receptive to the world beyond matter. Therefore, some patients may be invited by spirits to develop their mediumship if this is uncontrolled or produced in excess. The process of mediumistic development is indeed a complex path through which a medium learns how to control his or her mediumship, and to direct the energy produced in excess to the healing of others. It consists of three main stages of preparation, each leading to an initiatory step, namely the rituals of: *Iniciação Dharman-Oxinto* (Initiation on the Path to God), *Elevação de Espadas* (Elevation of Swords) and *Centúria* (‘Century’ in the sense of the Roman legion). The development begins with a Test of Mediumship in order to determine if the person is a *doutrinador* or an *aparã* (i.e. a conscious or semi-conscious medium), during which the appointed mediums instructors summon spirit mentors to manifest. If the person enters trance and manifests the spirit, or shows what are identified as signs of a spirit projection (including shivering and shakiness in hands and legs), her mediumship is identified as *aparã*. Otherwise, in the absence of spirit manifestation, the person is a *doutrinador*. The person is then referred to the training that is appropriate to his or her type of mediumship, consisting of approximately 21 Sunday classes.

For the specific purpose of mediumistic practice in the Vale is disobsessive healing (i.e. the removal of discarnate spirits obsessing humans), and obsessing spirits need to be controlled by mediums; the process of mediumistic development draws largely upon bodily experience. Therefore, in the following sections, I will focus on the body in the first stages of mediumistic development and the role of ‘multi-sensory imagery’ (Csordas 1990: 13) in cultivating the relationship between spirit mentors and mediums. In doing so, I aim to illustrate how in the Vale’s mediumistic development, ritual practice and bodily experience precede and ground conceptual knowledge, which is passed on to mediums only in the last stage of development.

The body in the first stages of mediumistic development

Mediums' bodies are said to undergo changes during the development, and the effects of these changes are felt to differing degrees by each medium. Mediums *apará*s, more than the *doutrinadores*, often reported disturbances around the solar plexus (digestive system), back pains, headaches or fevers. These areas are said to be the most affected by the development as being directly involved in the mediumistic phenomenon. These pains and aches are considered to be independent from the disturbances related to the illness that may sometimes lead to mediumistic development. They differ from the symptoms of obsession, which in turn may involve depression, suffering, uncontrolled cries and other emotional responses. Developed mediums hold vivid memories of these body pains, particularly related to the initiations, for mediumistic development is understood as preparing the medium to receive the forces of the initiations and these forces are held to alter the body of the initiate. Episodes of vomit or dysentery are frequently reported by aspirants on the day of initiation and considered as a body cleansing. Stomach cramps and headaches are interpreted as the action of the forces upon the *chakras*, which are the points through which spiritual forces may access the porous body. Claudio, a *doutrinador* in his 30s, associated his pains to his initiation as it follows:

We all have our own reactions depending on the amount of energy that we receive. The week before my initiation, I felt abdominal pains and fever, which was unusual for me. When I reported it to my instructor he said I was 'in the ritual', because it is a process. This happens to all mediums because they will never be the same again, we are in constant development ... the body, the mind, and the spirit, are all involved in this process.

Mediums' reports and memories of the first stages of development often involved recalling experiences of pain, which reinforce the idea of reshaping of the body. The development is therefore 'felt' as acting simultaneously upon the different dimensions of the medium, producing a transformation, a sense of becoming.

During the development most instructions are passed while the *apará* is in trance. Spirit mentors are held to be prepared to then instruct their mediums. Hence, instructors teach the spirit mentors how to express themselves through the gestural and verbal codes of the Vale, according to the culturally recognisable manifestation the spirits choose to assume. A *preto velho* manifested through an *apará* in a ritual, once explained me that although most

pretos velhos had incarnations as African slaves in Brazil, other spirits on the same stage of evolution may join the phalanx of *pretos velhos* to assist patients in rituals. In order to manifest on the physical plane, he said they need to mould a kind of spiritual body appearance, which protects them and at the same time should also be culturally recognisable within the religion in which the spirit manifests, drawing on those human representations that include attributes and functions similar to those of the spirit group. These spirits first manifesting through their mediums need to undergo a process of learning their appropriate manifestation, ritual codes and gestures. Instructors may then ask the *preto velho* to cleanse the *aparâ's* body and snap the fingers in order to disintegrate negative charges, or the *caboclo* to slap the medium's chest to increase the production of energy through the medium's body, and the *médico de cura* to stretch the arms in front of the body to transmit healing energy. They may also ask the *preto velho* or the *caboclo* to release their voice to greet other forces and spirits of light through the *saudações* (greetings), for this is another way through which spirits cleanse patients' negative energies in the Vale. It is pertinent to note that my visits to external temples in Northeast Brazil and in the State of São Paulo have highlighted local ways of manifesting spirits. Even though there is a great conformity in the manifestation of *pretos velhos* and *caboclos*, there are also accents and details of their expression which are recurrent in mediums belonging to the same temple.

Some *aparâs* may initially manifest what is referred to as a 'crossed incorporation' (*incorporação cruzada*), when they are said to receive the projection of different mentors, without being able to discerning them, thus mixing their gestures (for instance, manifesting a *preto velho* slapping the chest as a *caboclo*). Hence, instructors teach them to concentrate on one mentor at a time, familiarising themselves with that specific energy while providing the spirit with corresponding instructions. In later development sessions, the *aparâ* learns to switch from the incorporation of one spirit to another without completely disincorporating. Switching from one spirit manifestation to another is comparable to switching from one language to another in speech. However, this case involves not only the verbal dimension but also the corporeal one, with different perceptions of energies, different emotions, feelings, gestures and postures, which together allow the identification and communication of the spirit's identity. Along with the practice and establishment of a relationship between medium and mentor, the initial conformity of the gestures undergoes a kind of personalisation. Once the medium begins to visualise the spirit and gain confidence in releasing its expression, the mentor may highlight specific traits of its expression

or particular features of its way of working with energies. Elisa, who has been working for two years with a *preto velho* called Pai Francisco de Oriente (Father Francis of the Orient), noted that he cleanses the energies of patients by making the shape of the pyramid with her hands and invoking his energy, which according to this spirit catalyses the healing forces of the spiritual oracles. Some gypsy spirits may manifest by holding a fan, so the hand of the medium opens waving the fan, and other gypsies clap their hands to dissipate the energy.

While the manifestation of the mentors and spirits of light features a wide range of personality expressions, the *sofredores*, *obsessores* and *cobrades* are generally contained in their verbal and gestural expression. *Aparás* are instructed to close their fists to secure the spirit's energy controlling them, while the *doutrinador* informs them that they are deceased and they should follow their journey in the spiritual planes, and then elevates them to the spirit world. *Doutrinadores* are also taught how to recognise the manifestation of a mentor through its gestures. However, much of the first stage of development is devoted to learning the ritual gestures appropriate to their functions, such as how to administer a magnetic pass (*passé magnético*), how to prepare the medium to receive a spirit mentor (a process called 'ionização'), how to project a *sofredor* spirit into the *apará's* body for indoctrination (*puxada*), how to indoctrinate a spirit (*doutrina*), how to cleanse the aura of the spirit (*limpeza*), how to elevate the *sofredor* to the spirit world (*elevação*), and how to disincorporate an *apará*. Each of these abilities requires a set of formalised and ritualised gestures and postures accompanied by prefixed sacred enunciations called 'keys' (*chaves*) that the *doutrinador* must be able to perform correctly before being allowed to assist patients.

The skill of discerning and controlling spirits

Cases of involuntary incorporation may happen during the first stage of development, while the *apará* is still not completely in control of the phenomenon and he or she remains vulnerable to different kind of energies. In contrast to the body pains attributed to the initiations, involuntary incorporation may begin with a sort of body pain but is accompanied by unexpected negative emotions and feelings, tiredness, headache, nausea or loosing sensitivity of the limbs. Studies on Shamanism have addressed these symptoms as part of the shamanic apprenticeship (Hutton 2001: 71) and have highlighted the question of control. Lewis (1971) has emphasised the mastery of spirits as

being at the core of the healing process. Spirits that would be otherwise dangerous, instead of being exorcised, are domesticated and become spirit helpers. The Vale's cosmology, however, does not entail that an obsessing spirit might be domesticated to become a medium's spirit helper. Indeed, in the Vale there is a definite distinction between the category of spirit mentors and those suffering or obsessing spirits, which belong to a different dimension of evolution. Obsessing spirits are controlled only for the purpose of being indoctrinated and released from the physical plane. Whereas spirit mentors are said to already belong to the higher spirit worlds and to rarely incorporate without the medium's permission, they are associated with positive emotions and feelings.

Veteran mediums stressed that the semi-conscious state of incorporation was developed over the years precisely to allow control. Some recalled episodes from early times in the Vale, when mediums who were incorporated with *sofredores*, ran away from the ritual, out of the temple and into the woods with *doutrinadores* running after them, yelling out the sacred formulas to release the spirits. Nowadays, allowing a force to take over a mediums body, especially after the initiation, is regarded as a lack of preparation on the medium's part, a form of unbalance, or vanity. Vanity is a frequent consideration that members of the Order make when they are in front of a medium, incorporating suffering spirits banging on the table, yelling or laughing at each manifestation. Some instructors pointed out that some mediums may seek visibility by manifesting suffering and obsessing spirits as acting fiercely, wrongly interpreting this as a proof of their ability in supporting similar forces in their bodies. Others suggested that the medium in this case might be playing out some kind of 'demonic imagery', belonging to other religious traditions. The basic assumption is that nothing happens during incorporation against the *aparâ's* will, especially after the initiation when the *aparâ* has already learned what is considered to be appropriate or not in the spirits' manifestation, and to contain inappropriate behaviour. This assumption implies a specific difference with the practice in many Afro-Brazilian religions whereby the behaviour of the spirits or *orixás* remains partly unpredictable as it is considered to depend upon the spiritual agent rather than upon the medium.⁷

Although members of the Order consider mediumship to be a natural and universal phenomenon, control and discernment are skills to be learned. Discernment for an *aparâ* works on different levels: firstly, discernment between his or her thoughts and those of the spirit; secondly, between his or her spirit mentors; and thirdly, between the mentors and the interference of a *sofredor*. From several discussions with *aparâs*, in different stages of their development,

it appeared that the process of discernment is informed by the joint action of three factors: emotions and feelings, the content of messages and the access to information about patients while in trance states. The presence of a spirit of light, for instance of a *preto velho*, is perceived to be clearly discernable from the presence of a human being, given the feeling that it provokes, firstly and most strongly in the *aparã*, then in the *doutrinador* and often in the patient. This feeling is often described as ‘a love that embraces you that does not belong to this world’, a non-ordinary feeling which is said to pervade the whole body. A way to discern spirits of light from suffering spirits is if the *aparã* perceives a drastic change in this feeling, resulting in an interruption in the flow of words or a sensation in the body similar to a sudden power outage in electricity. This is interpreted as interference caused by a suffering or obsessing spirit, to which the *aparã* responds by closing his or her fists and preventing as much as possible the verbal and gestural expression of the spirit. Since the *aparã* is not completely conscious during incorporation, the responsibility of determining the authenticity of or interference in a spirit manifestation relies on the *doutrinador*, particularly on his or her ability of discernment. This ability is held to increase when the *doutrinador* is in an ‘optimal state of conscious trance’, focused upon the ritual, experiencing what is described as an ‘expansion of consciousness’ that ‘extends’ into his or her spirit mentors and those manifesting through the *aparã*. The conformity of the styles of manifestation helps this process of discernment. In other words, the concurrence of a culturally recognisable configuration of elements, such as gestures, tone of voice and postures in the performance of spirit manifestation, suggests to the *doutrinador* the kind of manifesting spirit. However, much of this process is said to rely upon ‘intuition’; thus, the *doutrinador* may be able to identify interferences even within those manifestations legitimised by the Vale. Some spirits, such as the *obsessores*, are believed to mimic the gestures of the spirits of light in order to play tricks upon the patient or interfere in messages. Generally, the authenticity of a manifestation of a spirit of light is evaluated by the emotional response it provokes within those in its presence, including the *doutrinador*, the *aparã*, and the patient. Halloy and Naumescu address possession as a ‘cultural expertise’ for it

requires an expertise both from the observers, who perceive it in relation to shared social values and aesthetic and normative criteria offered by that particular culture, and from the possessed person who has to make sense of her own experience. (2012: 166)

The above-mentioned modalities of discernment based upon emotions and feelings, bodily manifestation and content of messages are partially passed on by instructors in the development, but mostly they are skills acquired by the *aparás* and the *doutrinadores* during their experience in the practice and familiarisation with the spirit mentors. The process of discernment is culturally informed and locally defined; involving both legitimised gestural and verbal patterns of spirit manifestation and the interpretation of emotions, feelings and intuition. Similarly to what Tania Luhrmann suggested in her study on how Evangelical Christians learned to discern the presence of God in their everyday lives: ‘discernment’ – she argues – ‘is clearly a social process, in that there are socially taught rules through which God is identified’ (Luhrmann 2009: 90).

Between spirit and medium: trance states and extended senses

Trance states have been the locus of interest particularly of earlier studies on spirit mediumship and possession. A variety of classifications of spiritual phenomena were driven by criteria such as the presence or absence of trance states, along with the level of control retained by mediums (Bourguignon 1967; 1979; Firth 1967; Lewis 1971). However, trance is merely one aspect of spirit possession, as argued by Michael Lambek in his study of possession in Mayotte society (Comore Islands). He describes possession as a relationship between humans and spiritual beings which encompasses the everyday life of the person (what he defines ‘latent possession’) and which becomes ‘manifest’ in rituals of spirit possession, that is, when the deity manifests itself actively possessing the host’s body (Lambek 1981). Likewise, Janice Boddy calls for a reconsideration of spirit possession as not confined to the ‘extraordinary’ and dramatic manifestation of spirits in rituals, for it is rather embedded in the experience of ‘ordinary’, everyday lives of the subjects (Boddy 1988). In the Vale the relationship between mediums and their spirit mentors is cultivated in their everyday lives. However, it is initially through trance that new mediums ‘learn’ their spirits, and it is only through experience that this relationship is gradually extended into the everyday life beyond trance states. For the purpose of this article’s focus upon the learning process, I will therefore illustrate how this relationship is initially built in trance states drawing upon the experiences reported by the mediums participants in my research.

In mediumistic development, instructors stress that the medium is considered to be analogous to a radio device (*aparelho*) which needs to be tuned to gain access to different channels and this tuning is achieved through a

preparation which is technically known as *mediunização* (mediumisation): that is, the process where one becomes an intermediary between planes, enabling the contact with spirits. In some rituals, the *mediunização* is guided by the medium directing the ritual with narrations focused on visualisations of scenes. These visualisations include landscapes, natural elements, forests and waterfalls, and tune in the energy of spirits such as the *caboclos*, the people of the waters, and mermaids, which are then called to manifest in the *aparás* through specific sacred formulas. In most rituals, however, mediums are individually responsible for their own *mediunização*. Both *aparás* and *doutrinadores* learn to focus on their spirit mentors, but they are also encouraged to find their own way of entering into a connection with the spirit world, and thus there are various ways in which mediumisation is experienced. Some mediums may use prayers focusing on words, some feel the mentor approaching, others meet their mentor in a specific place they visualise and converse with the spirit, or they immerse themselves into silence. In practising the process, it gradually becomes faster so that an experienced *apará* may be able to enter in trance in a matter of seconds, when necessary. The descriptions provided by a *doutrinador* and an *apará* may be useful to illuminate these states:

Doutrinador: Since the moment you begin the preparation, you are in the state to engage in a ritual. What you feel then is a kind of euphoria, a different kind of vibration around and inside your body. You almost see, you almost touch, it is quite subtle but perceptible. A feeling that I could describe as a joy generated by the entire body.

Apará: We [*aparás*] prepare ourselves through mediumisation in the *Castelo do Silêncio*.⁸ When we leave the *Castelo* to go to sit in the *Tronos*⁹ for the ritual, we are almost manifested with the spirit. The energies surround us, we are perfectly tuned with the incorporation, I don't hear much of the noises around me, I can see you, but I feel I am far away from you. As I sit in the *Trono*, I close my eyes, and the *doutrinador* invites the mentor, and then the manifestation is completed. When the spirit arrives, I feel my self moving onto the side to give my spirit mentor access. When the manifestation is complete, I am just an observer and not many things that are said remain in my mind afterwards.

The conscious trance of the *doutrinador* is described as expanded consciousness, which implies increased attention and sharpened intuition. Thermoperception is also reported by *doutrinadores* to be increased, such as the hands feeling or transmitting heat, and this sensation sometimes pervades the whole body. Therefore, mediumistic trance is a complex and changeable phenomenon

that cannot be reduced to one simple description, but evoked through some of its various traits. In the case of the medium *aparú*, not only is the level of consciousness varied between mediums, but also within the same *aparú* from one spirit incorporation to another, and even within the same incorporation. One *aparú* described her trance state as a feeling that the mentor was 'dancing between the consciousness and the unconsciousness'. Another *aparú* described it as a state of drowsiness although being conscious of what was happening, and thus able to follow the reasoning of the spirit: 'when the spirit entity leaves the body the feeling is like waking up and trying to remember a dream'. Semi-conscious trance states are described by *aparús* as being similar to dream sleep even though the body moves as if it is in wakefulness state. In mediums' narratives experiences of partial displacement appeared to be more recurrent than experiences of 'astral travel'. I highlight 'partial' because the feeling is described as being on one level somewhere else and on another still present in the body, suggesting a partial presence of proprioceptive sensations. The veteran instructor Master Caldeira pointed out to me that according to the Vale's discourse around mediumship, the spirit of the *aparú* is projected about one and a half metres out of the body while the mentor projects his or her aura into the medium's body. For mediums in the first stage of development, who were still not familiar with the discourse around the phenomenology of mediumship, this discourse about partial displacement was perceived as confirming the reality of their phenomena. Master Caldeira also explained that the spirit projects communication energetically in the form of thoughts in the *aparú*'s mind, then the articulation through language relies on the *aparú*'s brain processes, even though the tone of voice and accents are attributed to the spiritual agent. Medium instructors reported that this telepathic-like communication might sometimes take the form of visual or auditory images, which are then articulated in words and sentences.

What precedes verbalisation may imply the activation of the 'extended senses' that may be described as those senses that are not directly dependent upon the organs to which they are ordinarily attributed. They are conceived as inner, however, they are also seen to extend beyond a physical organ, the physical body, or a physical source. Thus, *aparús* may, in some cases, see an image as a snapshot or a succession of interconnected images with their eyes closed. They may hear, feel, touch, perceive the temperature of, or even smell what they claim to be an immaterial source, or a material one that is not physically present. A wide range of feelings accompanies these images. The ethnographic literature illuminates several similar phenomena in different

cultures, particularly regarding studies on shamanism, and long-term fieldwork tends to lead anthropologists to distinguish these images from pathological hallucinations. In making such a distinction, Tania Luhrmann in her study on Evangelical Christianity, preferred the term 'sensory override' to refer to moments where 'people experience a sensation in the absence of a source to be sensed', emphasising a lack of distress accompanying these experiences (Luhrmann 2011: 73–74). This definition complements with what I am describing. Additionally, she relates these experiences to absorption, which she understands 'as the mental capacity common to trance, hypnosis, dissociation, and much other spiritual experience', which may be learned and produces greater 'internal sensory experiences with sharper mental-imagery and more sensory overrides' (Luhrmann *et al.* 2010: 74).

Before Luhrmann, Noll (1985: 444–447) approached mental imagery in Shamanism as an ability achieved through altered states of consciousness and which can be cultivated as a skill in shamanic training. He specifically refers to visual mental imagery, mentioning metaphors of inner vision, such as 'the development of an inner or a spiritual eye' in different 'shamanic cultures' (446), and arguing that visual imagery enhancement is a cultural phenomenon. He points out that his focus on visual modality was informed by the fact that it was the most reported in the ethnographic literature on different societies. Likewise, Luhrmann has pointed out that the predominance of one sense in unusual sensory experiences is cultural, such as vision for Catholics and Hindus, and hearing for Protestants (2011: 77). Indeed, besides these ethnographic examples, we should consider that the use of absorption, and its relationship to the development of extended senses, is not restricted to Shamanic practices but it has also been advocated in sacred texts of World religions as the pre-condition to opening oneself up to the sacred, consisting in practices of meditation, prayer and devotion. In the case of Vale, visual mental imagery may be encouraged during the process of mediumisation that leads to trance. However, these sensory images, which emerge during trance states and that are strongly present in mediums' narratives about their experiences, are not particularly cultivated nor addressed by instructors in mediumistic development. Rather they understand them as a bodily means through which the spirit mentor communicates, emphasising the spontaneity of their emergence to the awareness of the medium. Visual and auditory images may be predominant in some mediums, but not in others. Other sensory modalities may interact or stand out. In this sense, I draw upon Csordas who, in order to avoid the focus on visual imagery as a dominant sensory modality, in his study of glossolalia,

proposes the term 'multi-sensory imagery' (1990: 13) describing the imagery process as resulting from the 'integration' of different senses (42).

Representations of medium's individual spirit mentors may also be considered to be multi-sensory images, since they are constructed by a mixture of physical feeling of their attributes, such as facial expression, whether contracted or relaxed, touch (such as one medium who could feel her hands increasing in dimension and becoming rough when incorporating her *preto velho*), and body feelings which reveal the robustness or fragility of the body, suggesting a younger or older appearance. These details combine to form a representation of the mentor. They may appear as embodied images, as one may form an image of oneself from an awareness of the body. They may also appear as external to the body, as an image of the spirit approaching or standing beside the body.

While spirit categories are necessary to discern between different types of spirit specialisations and for the medium to connect to their specific energy, individual experiences of incorporation sometimes stand out as being different from the referential image of those categories. There is a general consent among mediums that not all *pretos velhos* (old blacks) are old with African traits. Julio felt his *preto velho* to be in his 30s, while Camila said that she was able to see her *preta velha's* face traits that suggested she was a white woman in her late 80s. Ana affirmed that the image she formed of her *preta velha* while incorporated was half way between her own appearance of white woman in her 40s and that of an African woman. Although she recognised the implications of her physical sensations in this representation, she felt as a part of herself was connected to her mentor beyond the trance states. This sense of continuity between spirit and medium is noted by Diana Espirito Santo in Cuban Espiritismo Cruzado. Espirito Santo has also highlighted how, in mediumistic development, both spirit and medium are produced in this interaction and a developed medium produces 'the smoothest possible overlap or entanglement between her senses and cognition and those of her spirits' (Espirito Santo 2011: 104).

The *aparã* embodies the *obsessor's* pains, anger, suffering, as much as the attributed features of a spirit of light – for instance, the emotions and calm of the People of the Waterfalls, or the reason of the People of Aruanda. He or she also embodies the principles of the doctrine of tolerance, humility, and love, feeling them through the attitudes of the spirit. During their practice mediums experience the potential modes of a wide range of emotions and feelings that are shared with the spiritual agent on the bodily level. The understanding of the body as platform of shared emotions and feelings is the

key to the establishment of the conceptualisation of the self as extending into non-material beings, allowing to be transformed by them. Goldman addresses possession in Brazilian Candomblé as a ‘dynamic system that not only classifies but also aims to *produce* specific types of *persons* not, certainly, in the sense of generate “personalities” or “psychological types”, but in that of a certain conception of the human personhood”¹⁰ (1984: 168). In Candomblé’s initiation a particular type of person is, thus, made which is ‘multiple and “layered”, composed of a series of material and immaterial elements. These include the main *orisha* to which the person belongs ... the secondary *orishas*, as well as ancestral spirits, a guardian angel, a soul and so forth’ (Goldman 2009: 111). It is in Candomblé’s trance that the different layers converge ‘raising humans to almost a divine status’ (112).

In the Vale do Amanhecer, the self is conceptualised as multi-dimensional, that is constituted by multiple layers some of which are described by mediums as partially displaced during trance states, although maintaining a connection with the body. It is also extended into immaterial spiritual beings, and through time in the different past lives of the Jaguares. The body is porous since it may be penetrated by other extended selves of spirits, becoming a platform for shared emotions and feelings. It is also multi-layered, intertwining physical, etheric and astral bodies. Therefore, I argue that in a reciprocal movement bodily experience in rituals shapes the sense of self, providing the notion of the self with attributes of extendability and multi-dimensionality. This notion in turn informs the mediums’ conceptualisation of trance, that is, the extension of the medium’s spirit out of the body and the extension of the spirit’s aura inside the body, which leads to the experience of the body as a platform of shared emotions and feelings. Before coming back to the articulation of the self, I shall first examine the process of learning the mediumistic practice also through the lenses of multi-dimensionality.

Dimensions of Learning

The primacy of bodily experience over conceptual transmission in mediumistic development in the Vale, as illustrated so far, is resumed in the expression often used by mediums initiates: ‘our doctrine is more practical than theoretical’. When referring to ‘doctrine’ or ‘doctrinal knowledge’ mediums addressed principles and notions with a revelatory character – either contained in the Gospels or enounced by Tia Neiva through her clairvoyance – and grounded in practical experience. The temple itself is understood as a place where mediums may actively practice ‘doctrinal knowledge’ by serving

patients through their mediumship. Rather than a place for meditation and contemplation, mediums describe their temple as a 'spiritual first aid' where they rapidly pass from one ritual to the other in order to assist patients and indoctrinate discarnate spirits.

Mediumistic development frames the experience of mediumistic phenomena of those who arrive in the Vale either already spontaneously manifesting them or choosing to develop their mediumship. The process of learning in the Vale may be understood as a process of 'enskillment' (Ingold 2000), as an ongoing education of perception, initially guided by instructors, situating the practice locally, that is, in engagement with the environment. Indeed, another widely used expression is 'tem que sentir' ('you have to feel it') where 'sentir' means both 'sensing' and 'feeling'. Drawing on neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's definitions, I refer to 'emotion' as a bodily response to a stimulus, and 'feeling' as the subjective perception of emotion (Damasio 2000). Different dimensions of learning spring from these ideas, which I have identified as being predominantly: embodied learning (somatosensory), intuitive learning (whereby mediums attribute the source of intuition to spiritual beings), performative learning (ritualistic), conceptual learning and inter-subjective learning.

Cognitive approaches alone have addressed the mind almost independently from the bodily dimension of religious experiences (Boyer 2001; Cohen 2007; 2008). Recent ethnographic approaches to religious learning have tried to restore the prominence of the body, emphasising an embodied dimension of knowledge beyond the conceptual dimension. They consider the body precisely as the source of knowledge and experience, as being at the core of religious transmission (Berliner & Sarró 2009). As Vasconcelos has proposed in his research among mediums of a Brazilian Spiritualist Doctrine in Cape Verde, namely Christian Rationalism, 'that sense of revelation, of intimate certainty, which is usually called belief only springs when getting ideas about spiritual entities and being moved by them come together' (2009: 110). Likewise, Luhrmann distinguished between learning categories and learning practices in Pagan Magic, whereby Pagan cognitive categories were not straightforwardly accepted by new practitioners but 'They confirmed those ideas in their everyday experience of their world, and when their practice led them to experience magical power in their bodies, the discourse seemed much more real' (Luhrmann 2010: 220). As illustrated so far, in the Vale do Amanhecer spiritual knowledge and religious principles are transmitted primarily through practical learning and through the mediums' bodily experience rather than through doctrinal teaching. As an instructor explained me, 'you have to feel spiritual

knowledge: it is not a study (*estudo*), it is a state (*estado*). Hence, cosmology and spiritual knowledge become significant for mediums according to the way they are perceived and experienced, by the way they are embodied and act upon mediums producing a transformation in their cognition. In other words, the practice and experience of teachings precede cognitive transformation in beliefs.

'Performative learning' relies on the repetitive practical execution of rituals. Ritual performances in the Vale are highly repetitive and formalised, following prescribed written scripts that refer to both the verbal and the choreographic elements of the performance, indicating the different sequences of opening, invocations, and trance, among others. Mediums in development receive a short summary of the ritual sequence, they may refer to the written script before participating to the ritual, but to a greater extent the experiential aspects of the repetitive practice are at the core of learning how to perform a ritual.

'Conceptual learning' concerns the last course that leads to the third initiation called *Centúria*, when mediums already possess a certain amount of practical experience in assisting patients in rituals (which varies between six months and one year since the beginning of the development). During this course, the instructors explain the meaning of ritual actions in greater detail and their effects on life beyond matter. The rigidity of ritual scripts and more or less controlled bodily postures may be a common aspect with Afro-Brazilian religions, particularly in Candomblé Ketu and in the Xangô cult in Recife, whereby the mediumistic public learning process of the latter entails what is called 'indoctrinating the body' (Halloy 2014). However, the explanation of the meaning of ritual actions is almost absent from the initiatory process in Afro-Brazilian religions.¹¹ Learning in Candomblé, as Goldman has pointed out, does not entail a coherent set of teachings received from a master but requires putting together details gathered over the years of learning the practice (2009: 109). Conversely, in the Vale's last stage of mediumistic development there is a component of 'doctrinal mode of transmission' (Whitehouse 2000; Whitehouse & Laidlaw 2004) with masters/instructors explaining aspects of what is referred to as 'doctrinal knowledge', such as the dynamics of forces in rituals, descriptions of the afterlife, the spirit worlds and the categories of spirits, the aetiology of illness and different kinds of spiritual healing. They also explain the discourse about the joint reincarnations of the Jaguares in different ancient civilisations and the purpose of redeeming their negative karma from past lives through the spiritual healing of the others. In this sense, conceptual learning in the Vale concurs with other dimensions of learning in the articulation of notions of the self providing the process with the layer of discourse.

My use of the term 'intuitive learning' draws upon claims made by mediums that they receive teachings from spiritual agents by means of intuition: in some cases by spirits incorporated by themselves, in other cases incorporated by other mediums, or during states of mediumisation. *Aparás* claim that they retain certain memories of the teachings that the *preto velhos* pass on through them for patients when these teachings are appropriate for the similar situations they are experiencing. For instance, mediums held that the spirit mentors select patients who are going through similar situations to those of the mediums assisting them, so that the message passed on would be useful to all the participants. Another case is that of Marco, a *doutrinador* in his 30s, who held that during the beginning of his development every time he was going to work in a ritual with an *aparú*, even with different mediums, the same spirit of Pai João de Enoque (Father John of Enoch) used to incorporate and pass on instructions to him on how to use his mediumship inside and outside the temple. He held that he has been taught techniques to protect himself when entering different places or perceiving negative vibrations by using thought and images to create magnetic fields around him, and how to cleanse social and physical environments by transforming negative energies into positive ones. He said to use these techniques in his everyday life. He explained that in a case when he perceived an argument to be caused by a spiritual agent, he said he was able to mentally transfer the spirit into a ritual and the problem was suddenly resolved. One *aparú* held that she had a series of encounters with her mentor during a state of mediumisation where he taught her techniques to avoid losing connection with the spirit while in trance, and these techniques involved the visualisation of a specific symbol that would immediately deepen her trance. Another medium held he had dreams where he attended group lectures delivered by a spirit mentor, during which he received some spiritual teachings.

Since the beginning of the mediumistic development, instructors repeat that spirit mentors are responsible for teaching their mediums. The above cases are not isolated, but they form the basis of most relationships between a medium and his or her individual spirit mentors. This creates a bond through which the perception of one's self extends towards the spiritual being, and fosters the production and transmission of knowledge in trance states. Nonetheless, mediums hold that the doctrine of the Amanhecer had itself a revelatory origin. Tia Neiva, the founder of the Vale, claimed to follow the instructions of spirit mentors such as Pai Seta Branca (Father White Arrow),¹² Pai João de Enoque, Tiozinho, Amanto, among others, in order to establish the

material, ritualistic, and doctrinal foundations of the Amanhecer, including the ritual uniforms and the shapes and disposition of the sacred spaces. She also held she had astral travels to Tibet during which she was instructed on her mediumship by a Buddhist monk that she called Master Humarrã. The question of apprenticeship through spirit guides in Brazilian mediumistic religions has been also addressed by Camurça (2003) who highlights the 'pedagogical' character of some spirits. He presents cases of mediums reporting on their spirit guides who introduced them to theosophical, philosophical, spiritualist or metaphysical knowledge, and even speaking foreign languages through them. Similarly, in Shamanism the initial role of spirits is that of teachers (Noll 1985: 449).

This spiritual knowledge, which mediums claim receive intuitively in their relationship with their spirits, becomes relevant beyond an individual level once it is shared between mediums with other spiritual experiences. The expression used in the Vale 'mestre ensinando mestre' (master teaching master) refers both to the relationship between the instructor and the developing medium, and to the form of inter-subjective transmission of a lived-through knowledge that happens between mediums in informal situations. Knowledge transmission is not merely oral, but is experiential, with embodiment at the core of this process. For notions, before being accepted, are experienced, sensed, and felt.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have proposed to move beyond mind-centred approaches to explore the intertwining between cognitive, sensory and emotional processes in the production of notions of the self during the process of learning to become a medium. In my discussion, I have drawn on the inter-relational character of learning and on the inter-subjective construction of personhood within the relationship between mediums and their spirits as noted by Goldman (2009) and Espirito Santo (2011) in Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban religions, respectively. I have illustrated how this relationship between mediums and spirits is at work in the context of the Vale do Amanhecer according to the experiences reported by mediums, and particularly how it is established in trance states through 'multi-sensory imagery' (Csordas 1990).

Furthering this discussion I have argued that, along with inter-relationality, the different layers identified as being at work in the process of learning to become a medium concur to inform the articulation of notions of the self through the attributes of extendability and multi-dimensionality, and that

these notions may in turn inform the mediums' conceptualisation of trance. More specifically, the focus upon mediumistic development illuminated how the articulation of the sense of self is informed by the process of learning on a discursive level, concerning the discourse around the reincarnations of the Jaguares in ancient civilisations, so that the sense of self extends beyond the single lifespan; on a somatosensory level through the experience of rituals; and on an inter-subjective level through the experience of the relationships with spiritual beings. The articulation of the sense of self becomes crucial in the mediumistic development of the Vale do Amanhecer. For 'learning' as 'enskillment' implies situating the practice through the education of perception (Ingold 2000), becoming a developed medium also entails the development of a sense of self. Particularly, in a practice which requires the medium to both extend into the spirit mentors and discern between his or her self and that of those spirits that need to be controlled and released into the spirit world.

The ethnographic literature on spirit mediumship and possession is increasingly bringing to the scholarly attention the bodily dimension of the relationship with the divine. Subsequently, these studies are also raising a question which may have important implications for the broader field of Religious Studies, that of the need for a methodological repositioning of the focus from belief to the lived and somatosensory experience of participants. Such a shift not only allows to move beyond the difference in terms of belief between the categories of the researcher and those of the people he or she studies with (Goldman 2003), but also reframes cognition within the bodily dimension of religious practice, a dimension which may sometime trigger people's religious choices and trajectories.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Spalding Trust, the Read-Tuckwell Scholarship and the Royal Anthropological Institute's Sutasoma Award for funding the research upon which this article is based, and to the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidade de São Paulo for offering institutional support during fieldwork in Brazil. I am also grateful to Fiona Bowie, Bettina Schmidt, Margherita Margiotti and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the earlier versions of this article.

Funding

The research upon which this article is based was supported by The Spalding Trust, the Read-Tuckwell Scholarship and the Royal Anthropological Institute's Sutasoma Award.

Notes

1. Brazilian spirit mediums address their practices as 'práticas mediúnicas' (mediumistic practices). In some mediumistic religions spiritual beings are represented as enunciators of knowledge about the afterlife, assisting the living with their lives on Earth, or as opposing forces or pathogenic agents that need to be exorcised or removed from a particular person or place. Whether welcomed or not, these spiritual agents are understood as being able to communicate through, to be embodied by, or to influence, to differing extents, human beings. There are many ways and techniques through which this type of communication, embodiment, or influence may happen in different cultural contexts, in more or less controlled ways, which I also address in this article as 'mediumistic practices'.
2. The ethnographic fieldwork upon which this discussion is based was conducted in Brazil between 2009 and 2011 in the main temple of the Vale do Amanhecer in Brasília. For purposes of mediums' privacy, some names cited in this article have been changed.
3. According to the Brazilian National Census 2010, during the year of my fieldwork the town of the Vale do Amanhecer counted 10,238 inhabitants (IBGE 2010).
4. This figure is based on the registry of participants to the ritual of healing (*Cura*), and an estimation of the number of mediums required to perform different rituals and their interchange.
5. The Spiritist doctrine in Brazil is also referred to as Kardecism, from the name of its founder Allan Kardec (a pseudonym of the French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail who systematised the Spiritist doctrine in the 1850s).
6. The term 'ectoplasm' was introduced in parapsychology by the French physiologist Charles Richet (1850–1935) to designate the 'exteriorised substance' coming out from mediums' orifices in physical mediumship séances. The German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) believed that all objects and living beings had a magnetic fluid running through their bodies and that an imbalance of this fluid was at the origin of diseases; he developed his healing method known as 'Mesmerism' aimed at re-balancing the body's magnetic fluid. Differently from Anglo-Saxon mediumship whereby ectoplasm is held to be used by spirits to produce phenomena of physical materialisation, in the Vale ectoplasm is not visible.
7. I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out this difference.
8. The *Castelo do Silêncio* (Silence Castle) is room in the temple where mediums may go to pray and meditate, and to prepare themselves by 'mediumising themselves' (*mediumizar-se*) before rituals.
9. The *Tronos* (Thrones) refers to a sacred space in the temple with small yellow and red tables and seats that host mediums and patients in the homonymous ritual of communication with *pretos velhos*.
10. My translation from the original in Portuguese.
11. I thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this distinction.
12. Pai Seta Branca (Father White Arrow) is considered the spirit mentor leading the hierarchy of spirits manifesting in the Vale. He is represented as the spirit of an Amerindian Chief who is also held to have had an incarnation on Earth as Saint Francis of Assisi.

References

- Berliner, David & Ramon Sarró (eds.). 2009. *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn.
- Boddy, Janice. 1988. Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance. *American Ethnologist*, 15(1):4–27.
- Bourguignon, Erika. 1967. World Distribution and Patterns of Possession States. In *Trance and Possession States*, edited by R. Prince. pp. 3–34. Montreal: R.M. Bucke Memorial Society.
- Bourguignon, Erika. 1979. *Psychological Anthropology: An Introduction to Human Nature and Cultural Difference*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Boyer, Pascal. 2001. *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. London: Heinemann.
- Camurça, Marcelo. 2003. Espaços de Híbridaç o, Desubstancializa  o da Identidade Religiosa e Id ias Fora do Lugar. *Ci ncias Sociais e Religi o*, 5(5):37–65.
- Cohen, Emma. 2007. *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, Emma. 2008. What Is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing, and Explaining Two Possession Forms. *Ethnos*, 73(1):101–126.
- Csordas, Thomas J. 1990. Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos*, 18(1):5–47.
- Damasio, Antonio. 2000. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. London: Vintage.
- Desjarlais, Robert. 1992. *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetic of Illness and Healing in Nepal Himalayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Espirito Santo, Diana. 2011. Process, Personhood and Possession in Cuban Spiritism. In *Summoning the Spirits: Possession and Invocation in Contemporary Religion*, edited by Andrew Dawson. pp. 93–108. London/New York: Tauris.
- Fausto, Carlos. 2007. If God Were a Jaguar: Cannibalism and Christianity among the Guarani (16th–20th Centuries). In *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Carlos Fausto and Michael Heckenberger. pp. 74–105. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Firth, Raymond. 1967. *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- Goldman, M rcio. 1984. *Possess o e a Constru  o Ritual da Pessoa no Candombl * (Unpublished masters dissertation). PPGAS-MN-Universidade Federal Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Goldman, M rcio. 2003. Os Tambores dos Vivos e os Tambores dos Mortos. Etnografia, Antropologia e Pol tica em Ilh us, Bahia. *Revista de Antropologia*, 46(2):446–476.
- Goldman, M rcio. 2009. How to Learn in Afro-Brazilian Spirit Possession Religion. Ontology and Multiplicity in Candombl . In *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*, edited by David Berliner and Ramon Sarr . pp. 103–119. New York/Oxford: Berghahn.
- Gow, Peter. 2001. *An Amazonian Myth and Its History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Greenfield, Sidney. 2008. *Spirits with Scalpels: The Cultural Biology of Religious Healing in Brazil*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Halloy, Arnaud. 2014. *Dr vinif es Incarn es. La Fabrique des Poss d es dans un Culte Afro-br silien*. Paris: PETRA Editions, Collection Anthropologiques.

- Halloy, Arnaud & Vlad Naumescu. 2012. Learning Possession: An Introduction. *Ethnos*, 77(2):155–176.
- Hutton, Ronald. 2001. *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*. London/New York: Hambledon Continuum.
- IBGE, 2010. Censo 2010: *População Residente no Vale do Amanhecer – Planaltina – Brasília – Distrito Federal*. Brasília: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística.
- Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- Lambek, Michael. 1981. *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, Ioan. 1971. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Luhrmann, Tania. 2009. How Do You Learn to Know That Is God Who Speaks? In *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*, edited by David Berliner & Ramon Sarró. pp. 83–102. New York/Oxford: Berghahn.
- Luhrmann, Tania. 2010. What Counts as Data. In *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*, edited by James Davies & Dimitrina Spencer. pp. 212–238. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Luhrmann, Tania. 2011. Hallucinations and Sensory Overrides. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 40:71–85.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M., Howard Nusbaum & Ronald Thisted. 2010. The Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity. *American Anthropologist*, 112(1):66–78.
- Noll, Richard. 1985. Mental Imagery Cultivation as a Cultural Phenomenon: The Role of Visions in Shamanism. *Current Anthropology*, 46(4):443–461.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo. 1975. *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs among the Indians of Colombia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Saunders, Nicholas. 1998. *Icons of Power: Feline Symbolism in the Americas*. London: Routledge.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Stoller, Paul. 1994. Embodying Colonial Memories. *American Anthropologist*, 96(3):634–648.
- Strathern, Andrew. 1996. *Body Thoughts*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Vasconcelos, João. 2009. Learning To Be a Proper Medium. Middle-Class Womanhood and Spirit Mediumship at Christian Rationalist Séances in Cape Verde. In *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*, edited by David Berliner & Ramon Sarró. pp. 121–140. New York/Oxford: Berghahn.
- Whitehouse, Harvey. 2000. *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whitehouse, Harvey. 2004. *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Whitehouse, Harvey & James Laidlaw (eds.). 2004. *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion*. Walnut Creek, CA/Oxford: AltaMira Press.