

The Objectivity of Spiritual Experiences: Spontaneous Mental Imagery and the Spiritual Space

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Abstract The purpose of this article is to investigate the nature of spontaneous mental imagery that people experienced after ritualistically ingesting *Ayahuasca*. The combination of ingestion of Daime and the participation in a ceremony appear to reliably promote the occurrence of spontaneous mental imageries, referred as *mirações*, which were considered as a process of perception, the moment when different entities (physical body, thoughts, feelings, culture, emotions, mind, soul, spiritual space, etc.) become connected within consciousness. *Mirações* are believed to take place in a non-physical - although very objective - “spiritual space,” which is believed to be shared by participants in the ceremonies. The spiritual space is immaterial and multi-dimensional, precluding, nesting and informing the material world. The spiritual space is perceived as original, generating dispositions, intentions, and meanings, and as containing within it the physical and psychological levels of existence. The exploration of that space during a ceremony was considered a process of spiritual development.

Key-Words: Ayahuasca, Daime, *Mirações*, Spiritual Space, Consciousness.

“Distance ... their ability to express the fact of distance – that’s yet another reason why landscapes are the most genuinely religious pictures.” “Because distance lends enchantment to the view?” “No; because it lends reality. Distance reminds us that there’s a lot more to the universe than just people – that there’s even a lot more to people than just people. It reminds us that there are mental spaces inside our skulls as enormous as the spaces out there. The experience of distance, or inner distance and outer distance, of distance in time and distance in space – it’s the first and fundamental religious experience.” (Huxley, 1962, p. 213).

Introduction

I developed research at *Centro Espírita Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte* (from now on called simply “the Center”). The Center is part of the Barquinha, a syncretic Brazilian religious system that uses the psychoactive beverage known as *Ayahuasca*, locally called *Daime*.

The use of *Ayahuasca* is found throughout the Amazon: Venezuela to Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Brazil. It has been consumed by the indigenous people in this vast area for at least 4000 years (Naranjo, 1986).

The Amazonian beverage called, among other names, *Ayahuasca*¹ contains as its main active chemicals β -carbolines alkaloids and dimethyltryptamine, all of them powerful psychoactive substances. N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) has a chemical structure very similar to the neurotransmitter serotonin, activating the receptors of that substance at the surface of the neurons (Winkelman, 1996). Furthermore, the β -carbolines are inhibitors of monoaminoxidase, an enzyme responsible for controlling the levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine (Luz, 1996).

Ayahuasca, called *Daime* or *Santo Daime*² at the place of the *Barquinha*, is obtained through boiling in water (hence the appellation “tea”) for

¹ I write the terms *Ayahuasca* and *Daime* with initial capitals out of respect for the cultural beliefs of the people I will be discussing.

² *Santo Daime* is the name of another distinct Brazilian religious group that also uses *Ayahuasca* as a sacramental substance. In terminology there is the *Santo Daime* religious system and *Santo Daime* tea. To avoid confusion from now on, I will call the tea “*Daime*” and the religious system “*Santo Daime*.” Also, the most accepted meaning for this word (*Daime*) is that it is a contraction of the expression *dai-me*, “give me;” but see Monteiro da Silva 2004 for other hypothesis.

many hours pieces of a vine called *jagube* (*Banisteriopsis sp.*, Malpighiaceae, but most commonly *Banisteriopsis caapi*), source of the β -carbolines alkaloids, together with leaves of *chacrona* or *rainha* (*Psychotria viridis*, Rubiaceae), the source of DMT. It is possible to find many other different “recipes” throughout the Amazon (Dobkin de Rios, 1972, gives a list of 72 known plants that can be added to the brew), but the Barquinha and other similar Brazilian traditions have opted for the combination of only those two plants.

The combination of ingestion of Daime and the participation in a ceremony appear to reliably promote the occurrence of spontaneous mental imageries, referred as *mirações*, which were considered as a process of perception, the moment when different entities (physical body, thoughts, feelings, culture, emotions, mind, soul, spiritual space, etc.) become connected within consciousness.

Mirações are believed to take place in a non-physical - although very objective - “spiritual space,” which is believed to be shared by participants in the ceremonies. The spiritual space is immaterial and multi-dimensional, precluding, nesting and informing the material world. The spiritual space is perceived as original, generating dispositions, intentions, and meanings, and as containing within it the physical and psychological levels of existence. The exploration of that space during a ceremony was considered a process of spiritual development.

The *mirações* mediated and made conscious a coherent and workable whole, composed of the ritual, the Daime, the processes of self-transformation/knowledge/exploration, elements of the individual’s consciousness and physiological condition, and factors in the “spiritual space”.

Ayahuasca in Brazil

The traditional use of Ayahuasca in Brazilian territory has undergone a very peculiar transformation. Since the 1930s, three syncretic, Christian-based, and organized religious movements have evolved using this beverage as a sacrament. The first of these was the Santo Daime movement, founded during the 1930s by Raimundo Irineu Serra, called *Mestre Irineu*. The Barquinha movement emerged during the 1940s headed by Daniel Pereira de Mattos, known as *Frei Daniel*. And in 1960 the União do Vegetal movement, which was started by José Gabriel da Costa, the *Mestre Gabriel*.

Santo Daime

Santo Daime is by far the most studied religious movement of this group. It is comprised of two primary groups, the *Alto Santo* lineage and the *Padrinho Sebastião* lineage. It has spread to many countries, including Spain, Holland, Italy, France, Argentina, Uruguay, Japan, Israel, the United States, and Canada.

Santo Daime combines Amazonian shamanistic elements and popular Christianity. Mestre Irineu “received” the “doctrine” of Santo Daime in a vision, after seven days of isolation in the forest, eating only unsalted yucca, and drinking water and Ayahuasca. One spirit, first identified as the *Rainha da Floresta* (literally: queen of the forest), and later as the *Virgem da Conceição* (Virgin of Conception), told him during a vision how he would develop the ritual of Santo Daime.

The rituals in Santo Daime involve the singing of a sequence of songs called *hinos* (hymns), which are said to be channeled by some of the out-

standing members. Mestre Irineu channeled the first *Hinário*, a collection of hinos, and several others have since been “received” – as they call the process of channeling the hinos – by other persons. The ritual circumstances may vary, but the most common ones are the *Concentração* (concentration sessions) and *Bailados* (a synchronized and repetitive dancing).

In general, *Concentração* take place on the 15th and 30th day of each month. The participants stay seated most of the time. A sequence of hinos is chosen by the *Padrinho* – the leader of a Santo Daime center – to be sung, but a period of silence is also included. The session lasts from 4 to 6 hours.

The *Bailados* take place on festive days, such as the commemoration of a Catholic saints such as Saint Joseph, St. John, or The Virgin of Conception, as well as the holidays such as Christmas and New Year’s Eve, among others. This is a dancing ritual, and lasts 12 hours, through the night.

The common space where the rituals take place is the *Igreja* (church), which can be rectangular or hexagonal. At the center of the *Igreja* is the *mesa* (table), and an altar set over a table where the *cruzeiro* (a two-armed cross, called The Caravaca Cross) is positioned. The *mesa* can be, like the *Igreja*, rectangular or shaped like a six-pointed star. The most spiritually strong people of the community sit at the table. At its head sits the *Padrinho*, the spiritual leader of the community. At his right side and behind him are the spaces reserved for women, and the left side and in front of him are spaces reserved for men.

Another important aspect of Santo Daime’s organization is that, in general, members live in a community around the church, with most of the *daimistas* (what the Santo Daime members are called) housed on the land of the church. In Brazil, this situation varies slightly according to the place where the church is located. If it is in a rural area, there are more people living

in the community, but in an urban area, there is fewer living on its land. It is important to note that even though there are Santo Daime temples in several cities in Brazil, including cities as large as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, rural areas are preferred by daimistas.

This preference has its roots in the origin of the religion, when Mestre Irineu constituted the first temple in the rural area of Rio Branco, the capital of Acre State, south of the Brazilian Amazon. However, these roots were strongly reinforced by Sebastião Mota de Melo, who acquired some land in the middle of the forest, where he and his followers survived on rubber tapping, small-scale agriculture, and the collection of Brazil nuts. Sebastião envisioned that a communal-based living structure would make his group stronger. Padrinho Sebastião founded the *Mapiá* village, the “Mecca” of his lineage, from where the Santo Daime gained the World (for more details see also Mortimer, 2000).

União do Vegetal

União do Vegetal (U.D.V.) also exists in several different countries. Ayahuasca is called *Hoasca* or *Vegetal* by U. D. V. members, and their ceremonies, called *sessões* (sessions, plural of *sessão*, session), normally occur on the first and third Saturday of the month. These sessions are sometimes open to nonmembers, but there are sessions designated for members only on different dates. The session is presided over by the *mestre* (master), and it is centered on conversations based upon a series of questions from the members and answers given by the mestre. Eventually, the mestre *faz uma chamada* (makes a call), which consists of singing special songs to call the *força* (the force). Some conventional music, not the special songs sung only at the sessions,

played from a CD, may be played. These selections are chosen by the *mestre*, and come from a wide array sources.

The *mestre* sits under the *arco*, an arch upon which the words *Estrela Divina Universal* (Star Divine Universal) and U. D. V. are read. This arch is positioned at the end of a table where some members sit.

The União do Vegetal is very hierarchical, and the teachings are given only orally during the sessions, according to the *grau de memória* (level of memory) or *grau espiritual* (spiritual level) of each member (Gentil & Gentil, 2002). These are the factors determining the ascension of a member through the UDV's internal gradations. *Grâu de Memória* explicitly means the "capacity to listen to, comprehend, and memorize" (Gentil & Gentil, 2002, p. 516) the teachings received under the effect of the Hoasca.

The "power of words" is highly esteemed by the União do Vegetal members. During the ceremonies, stories are sometimes told to the participants. These stories are considered sacred, and they contain the essence of the spiritual teachings of the UDV. One of the myths tells the story of the biblical King Solomon, and how he was the first human being to brew the Hoasca.

The União do Vegetal is the most exclusive of the three religious movements, and participation at its ceremonies is permitted only by the *mestre* of each center.

Barquinha

The Barquinha movement will receive primary attention throughout this article. Briefly, it is a syncretic religious system based upon a deeply devotional Christianity, with the inclusion of mediumistic practices.

There are five centers belonging to the Barquinha religious system in Rio Branco, the capital of Acre state, south of the Brazilian Amazon. The first, the *Centro Espírita e Casa de Oração Jesus Fonte de Luz*, was started in 1945 by Daniel Pereira de Mattos (known as *Frei Daniel*). The second, founded in 1962 by Maria Baiana and Mestre Juarez, an ex-member of the original Barquinha, is the *Centro Espírita Fé, Luz, Amor e Caridade* (known also as the *Terreiro de Maria Baiana*). In 1980, Antonio Geraldo da Silva left the original center and founded the *Centro Espírita Daniel Pereira de Mattos*. Francisca Campos do Nascimento (also called *Madrinha Chica* or *Francisca Gabriel*) also decided to leave the original center in 1991, and founded the *Centro Espírita Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte*, the Center that is the primary focus of this article. The last center, the *Centro Espírita Santo Inácio de Loyola*, was founded in 1994, by Antônio Inácio da Conceição (Sena Araújo, 1999). All the centers share many characteristics, and comprise the same religious movement, though the centers are ritualistically independent.

According to Marcos, a former member of Santo Daime and now an active member of the Center, the Barquinha belongs to the “lineage of Saint Francis of Assisi, the line of charity, and of love, to heal the people and the brothers and sisters [of both religions] who are unbalanced. The Santo Daime belongs to the line of Saint John the Baptist, the line of justice, to correct the behavior of brothers and sisters.”

Daniel Pereira de Mattos, the founder of the Barquinha, first drank the beverage with Raimundo Irineu Serra, the founder of Santo Daime. When Daniel arrived at the Alto Santo church to participate in his first ritual, Mestre Irineu asked him why he was so late, because he had been expecting Daniel for a long time (Sena Araújo, 1999). Irineu was not talking about “being late” for that specific ritual, but being late to approach the religion and the Daime.

That event is understood by members of both religions as a proof that Irineu knew Daniel spiritually before he knew him physically, showing that their spiritual link is strong. Furthermore, the cultural contexts of both religions are very similar: both appeared in Acre and their members belonged, in the past, to almost the same social classes.

The Barquinha as a religious system has been developed around the ideas of devotion and charity. Charity unfolds in two complementary levels: towards the incarnated humans, and towards the assistance to the *almas*, the disincarnated souls of deceased people. Mediumship is the principal vehicle for practicing charity.

Spontaneous Mental Imagery

Spontaneous visual imagery, called *mirações*³, experienced by the members of Santo Daime and the Barquinha are transcendental moments for the participants, and are accessed in the rituals promoted by the Brazilian Ayahuasca religions. They play a central role in the development of the participants on these spiritual paths. The *mirações* can be defined as “spontaneous mental imagery.” The intention throughout this article is to explore the relationship between the spontaneous mental imagery experienced by sick people under treatment in the healing rituals of the Barquinha, lead by the Madrinha Francisca Gabriel, and their healing processes.

According to conceptual universe of the Barquinha the *miração* is related to the visionary experience during a ritual. A *miração* may involve other

³ The word *miração* is related to the Spanish verb *mirar*, suggesting *to gaze*, *to behold*, *to look*, and *to see*, and not the Portuguese verb *mirar*, which can be also translated as *to look at*, *to stare at*, but mainly as *to aim at*. The suffix ‘-ão’ denotes an action. This is probably a heritage from the Peruvian Ayahuasca tradition, much older than that of the Brazilian. *Mirações* is the plural of *miração*.

perceptual modalities, such as sounds, tastes, or odors. However, even when an experienced *miração* is not limited to its visionary aspect, the visual elements are most often its most intense aspect. The *miração* is, in general, a very emotional experience, and the most anticipated one; it is the moment when people receive the teachings of spiritual beings, a source of knowledge and of self-transformation. The *miração* is the highest moment in the ecstatic experience. It has a powerful introspective aspect, and sometimes bears with it the power of a revelation, occupying a vital place in rituals. It is the transcendence medium par excellence.

People at the Center are accustomed to say that a *miração* comes to the person, or is *received*; it cannot be evoked at will. They understand the *miração* as a spontaneous process, at least at its beginning. After the *miração* begins, the person can interact with the process, but again, they cannot initiate it (see Shannon, 2002). In my personal experience, during the trance induced by the combined use of Ayahuasca and participation in a ritual, a person can enter into a dream-like state, the emergence of *miração*. The difference here with common dream is that, unlike a common dream, the person is able to move by his or her own will in the vision.⁴ That is not a complete freedom, because the *miração* can change without the voluntary control of the person, and he or she can find himself or herself suddenly immersed in another realm or reality, one that was not apparently of their choosing.

However, beyond transcendence there is “deservedness,” or merit. The person needs to be ready to receive a *miração*. Readiness and deservedness are two related states, and the person prepares himself or herself in this regard principally through self-knowledge and spiritual work. However, before the

⁴ However, this difference would not be so sharp when lucid dreams are taken in consideration. See Krippner, Bogzaron, and De Carvalho (2002).

person is fully ready, he or she can have small “samples” of *mirações*, such as vision of colors, sounds, and faces. One of my informants said that these are the moments when the spiritual world is “opening” to the person, but he or she does not have the correct level of understanding to follow the *miração*, and it vanishes.

The visual experiences also integrate various aspects of consciousness (Farthing, 1992; Laughlin et al., 1990; Shannon, 1992; Taussig, 1987), and they seem to play the role of interconnection among perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Alverga, 1984), principally after the psychointegration of the whole nervous system promoted by Ayahuasca and ritual (Winkelman, 2000). Such visions can play an important role during processes of intense physical transformation, as do those ones experienced during episodes of sickness and healing.

I would like to add one more thought to the above-mentioned word “mental,” as employed in “spontaneous mental imagery.” Mental by no means indicates something that is exclusively intellectual or logical. Mental means that the person experiencing a *miração*, whether or not it is visual, he or she experiences it in the mind even when the experience is deeply rooted at the level of the body.

I have found some useful tools in Rudolf Steiner’s (1968, 1986) ideas concerning this topic. According to him, thought is, at the same time, both the thread that connects meaning among raw experiences, and another experience in itself. This means that thought is not something *produced* by our mind as that thread, but it emerges from the experience as another experience explaining a group of experiences. Steiner (1968) noted that, “The form in which thought enters into manifestation is the same as that of the rest of the experience” (p. 31).

However, although thoughts manifest themselves as another experience, Steiner distinguishes two realms of this reality, the sphere of experience and the sphere of thought (Steiner, 1968, p. 63). It is through knowledge that this duality is perceptually brought back into unity. Knowledge is achieved through thinking. Though in this model people do not think thoughts. Rather, people perceive thoughts through the mind. According to Steiner (1968), “our mind is not to be conceived as a receptacle for the ideal world, containing the thoughts within itself, but as a organ which perceives the thoughts” (p. 64).

Thinking, then, would be a subjective force allowing perceived thoughts to move inside the perceiver’s mind. According to Steiner (1986), “Observation calls forth thinking, and this latter first shows me the way to join the single experience to another” (p. 48). Experience emerges within the subject’s consciousness, no matter whether the subject is manifest in the physical or in what people in the Barquinha call the astral (spiritual) plane of existence. (The parameter here is the subject, but a subject who is not restricted by his or her skin: a person experiencing a *miração* would describe the process using expressions like “I was there watching this and that happen”).

Shanon (2002) was aligned with Steiner’s ideas when he observed that cognition takes place in the “interface between the cognitive agent and the environment” (p. 306). Shanon’s concept of “cognition” would be equivalent to that of Steiner’s “thoughts.” However, Steiner’s “thinking” is the movement within the cognitive agents’ consciousness that apprehends those thoughts in a reflexive way.

The *miração* can be only subjective, however, the *miração* can be also collective: more than one person share the same vision. For example, a member of the Barquinha said that she had seen a *farda* (the uniform used by the

members) in a *miração*. After participating in the *Barquinha* for some time, and before the *farda* was adopted, she left that religious system and became a member of Mestre Irineu's center, the Santo Daime church of the Alto Santo. Years later, when she returned to the *Barquinha*, she was extremely surprised to find them using the same uniform she had seen in her *miração*: it was later introduced by the actual leader of the *Barquinha*, after he too had a *miração* showing the *farda*.

The Spiritual Space

One idea repeated itself consistently during my residence in the *Barquinha*: for the people there, spirituality was not something immaterial or evanescent; it was something concrete, solid, and three-dimensional, although it did not exist in the same dimension as physical objects. It interacts, via mediums and *miração*, with the physical plane. For them the spiritual dimension occupies a space. This idea was not something explicit or manifest, but was present in their very way of living and believing.

The images used in their songs, in their description of *mirações*, and during the rituals are not just metaphors, but memories of experienced events. "I was there" is a common expression when someone is describing a *miração*, as well as other sentences like "I flew," "I swam," "I walked." These words imply movement, movement through space, a non-physical space, but a space. Distance is present in the spiritual space.

The spiritual space is an immaterial, multidimensional, and original place where powerful forces are at play generating dispositions, intentions, and meanings, as well as sensorial, emotional, and mental impressions.

The spiritual space is not one identified with the psychological or the physical side of life. However, the physical and psychological planes are contained within the spiritual space. The spiritual space comprises many dimensions, and the unfolding of those dimensions happens in accordance with the breadth of the awareness of the observer/participant in the spiritual space. The exploration of that space would be the process of spiritual development itself, and each dimension of life is contained in the spiritual space. During his or her spiritual development, one would become conscious of the many different dimensions composing the spiritual space. The unfolding of those dimensions happens in accordance with the breadth of the awareness of the observer/participant in the spiritual space.

The physical space would be the manifest result of the relationships established among the many forces present at the spiritual space, and that is why I say that the spiritual space is original. For some time I struggled with the use of the words “emergent” or “original.” My first option was emergent (see Varella et al., 1993), in the sense that the spiritual space would emerge out of relationships between individual and society, between individuals, between the individual and the universe, and between society and the universe. Relationships among those elements would create the spiritual space, even if the spiritual space latter enfolded and involved the very elements that created it. Here, spiritual space would have a very close relationship with the concept of culture (see Langdon, 1996).

However, my experience in the Barquinha showed me that the spiritual space is transcendent (in the Kantian meaning of this word, i.e., it will have an *a priori* characteristic. see Kant, 1929). Culture, then, would be included in the spiritual space. Spirituality and culture have been essentially linked since the beginning of anthropology (see for example Durkheim, 1989). The French

founding father of social science indicates that social morphology would dominate religion. However, Bastide (2001) assumed in his book *O Candomblé da Bahia* precisely the opposite, that social morphology would follow the mystic and spiritual aspects of religion.

Culture would act as a lens, focusing the attention of the participants on certain areas of the spiritual space, and thus, influencing the shape of ritual. However, the spiritual space would not be limited solely to that perceived area. Culture would be changed precisely by the perception of previously imperceptible or unconscious areas of the spiritual space⁵.

The role of mediator between spiritual space, culture, and the individual would be performed by the *mirações*. *Mirações* would be, therefore, the result of a combination, in the individual's consciousness, of ritual, ingestion of Ayahuasca, processes of self-trans-formation/knowledge/exploration, and elements of the spiritual space. The *miração* can be influenced by culture, but what is seen during a *miração* would not be in an absolute way shaped by culture. Culture, as I said above, would act as lens, both directing the gaze toward certain events in the spiritual space and shaping the way in which a force *a priori* to an event or entity is perceived, but culture would not be the generator of that force. That force would reside within and emerge from the spiritual space. Thus, a *Caboclo* is regarded as a the spirit of a Native American, but the forces behind the manifested *Caboclo* are not created – although they are focused – by culture. Culture would have a strong influence on the way people describe what they experience in a *miração*, but many aspects of a *miração* are not mentioned during its description because people do not have words to describe them. These elements are there in the spiritual space, they show up in the *miração*, they are felt, they influence people's lives, and they

are shared by those having similar experiences, although in a non-verbal way. People are always in the process of becoming conscious of this space. In this spiritual space the relationships between cause and effect are not aligned in a direct and strict way: for example, an event happening in the spiritual space can generate a consequence in the physical plane only after a long time, which makes very difficult for the person experiencing that consequence to trace back its causes. At the same time, a spiritual event can have different impacts over different people.

The spiritual space is, in the Center's cosmology, a very objective level of existence. It becomes manifest via mediums and *miração*, and interacts with the physical plane. In fact, the physical plane would be the manifest result of the relationships established among the many forces present in the spiritual space.

The remission of the "I" is the first step of the individual required to enter the spiritual space. The "I" becomes passive to that space, that the whole can become manifest and act. The prayers support this remission, as too does the singing, for one accepts the guidance of someone else in order to enter the spiritual space (as both the prayers and songs are lead by experienced members during the ceremonies). The individual thus becomes a channel for the collective: images flow from one person to another; spiritual guides who work normally with one person manifest themselves to (and sometimes even through) other people; someone receives the lyrics of a Salmo of someone else's spiritual guide, and a third person receives the music of that same Salmo. The most intense exercise of that remission comes through mediumship, when the "I" yields to another "I" to assume his or her physical body.

⁵ I am not making the naïve assumption here that *only* the spiritual space would have the power to change culture.

Through remission, the many individual spiritual spaces become integrated within the body of the single spiritual space.

However, by contrast, the more that the ego is surrendered the more the *Eu superior* (the superior I), becomes enhanced. This is the spiritually working “I,” the “I” that is surrendered to God, but that is also active within God, actively promoting God’s wishes and accomplishing His will. This “I” does not disappear in the experience of those in the Center, even during the process of incorporation of the spiritual guides.

The spiritual guides are called *os curadores* – the healers, those who come from their realm of light for making charity, for helping people to achieve a better life. Ordinarily, people having a *miração* are present in the spiritual space: a conscious action is taking place, and they are there with a non-physical body. However, the physical body becomes very involved in the process of *miração* when the *miração* is coordinated along with mediumship.

Conclusions

Barquinha’s cosmology is circumscribed by its spiritual space. Space assumes a double connotation: it has an outer-sense aspect (the physical space) and an inner-senses aspect (the spiritual space). In Barquinha people are lead to fuse that division of inside and outside. The images of *mirações* are not experienced inside the head/brain, but “out there,” in the astral world, which is perceived inside the subject’s mind. The inside generates the outside, and the limits become much more flexible and fluid.

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spiritual space can generate a consequence in the physical plane only after a long time, which makes very difficult for the person experiencing that consequence to trace back its causes. At the same time, a spiritual event can have different impacts over different people.

According to their cosmology, the Barquinha was not brought forth by the aggregation of people around Frei Daniel and thus emerging as a religious system. Rather, the Barquinha was revealed to and through Frei Daniel, and was brought by the spiritual beings living in the spiritual plane or space. The Blue Book was given to Daniel, and he became conscious of his mission. The vision of the Blue Book has no phenomenal or empirical antecedents: Daniel had been living a very profane life, and was lying on the ground by a river, deeply drunk. The Barquinha is constituted by many elements shaped by cultural forces, though the arrangement that these elements, through Daniel's influence are new. As such, culture here is not provoking the emergence of a new system: culture itself is being transformed.

Syncretic systems like the Barquinha emerge under the influence of cultural matrixes. These matrixes act as lens for those experiencing the spiritual space: they influence the form assumed by the elements filling the spiritual space, yet these lens do not determine the space or create the forces within that space. One of the Center's members came to me one day and, spontaneously, without being questioned, told me that the spiritual guides show themselves using forms that people can recognize them, but it doesn't mean that those guides would really have that form.

In the Barquinha, this space is revealed during the ceremonies, through the *mirações*. The spiritual space becomes the source of the intention to see materialized, at the more at-hand levels of life (social, cultural, mental, emotional, and physical) the spiritual space itself. The achievement of that materi-

alization cannot be accomplished without the use of elements provided by culture. Yet, the force moving the materialization would not be cultural. Disposition, intention, and meaning emanate from the spiritual space, and cannot be actualized without their translation through cultural elements. The spiritual space promotes the encounter of those elements. An attempt at finding the proper elements for materializing those evanescent and subtle – although extremely strong and effective – forces of the spiritual space is discovered in the basis of the inclusion and exclusion of cultural elements in life. Each individual would be included and would have the source of his or her life forces at the spiritual space.

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