

Disobsessing Disobsession: Religion, Ritual, and the Social Sciences in Brazil

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1. A Word While Waiting Outside

If it has become commonplace in some corners of anthropology to read rituals as texts, the inverse of this proposition, that anthropological texts are rituals of a sort, is perhaps less obvious and less well explored. To treat texts as rituals and rituals as texts is to collapse both categories under a broader realm of ideology and to explore how the structures of the anthropologist's text repeat those of the interpreted ritual. As a result, this kind of ethnographic writing and reading involves rethinking the hierarchy of observer and observed by looking for points where the discourse of the other affects one's own discourse.

This article explores the relations between text and ritual, observing discourse and observed discourse, by articulating Geertz's position (1973:448) that culture and ritual can be interpreted as texts with Jonathan Culler's argument that "critical disputes about a text [read 'ritual,' 'religious system'] can frequently be identified as a displaced reenactment of conflicts dramatized in the text [ritual, religious system]" (1982:215). The case study adopted for analysis here involves *desobsessão* (disobsession), a type of exorcism ritual found among the Spiritists of Brazil, and the various mappings of the Brazilian religious system.

This article examines critical disputes among sociologists and anthropologists regarding the disobsession ritual and the position of Spiritism in the Brazilian religious system, and it traces these disputes back to conflicts dramatized both within the ritual and among the different actors in the religious system (see section 4). Within the ritual, Spiritist mediums receive errant spirits that represent non-Spiritist social categories and discourses; for example, Spiritists frequently "disobsess" spirits that represent the Catholic or Afro-Brazilian religions. Likewise, followers of Spiritism, Catholicism, or the Afro-Brazilian religions all have implicit maps of the Brazilian religious system, and these conflicting maps play themselves out in the conflicting interpretations of sociologists and anthropologists.

2. Preliminary Preparations

The word "Spiritism" will be used here to refer to the religious movement that adheres to the teachings of Allan Kardec, a 19th-century French pedagogue

who developed a doctrine about spirit mediumship and the spirit world. Although the Spiritist movement is international in scope, it is strongest in Latin America and especially in Brazil (see Hess 1987a, 1987b, 1988). Spiritists believe that their doctrine is a synthesis of science, philosophy, and Christian morality. Their central beliefs are that mediums can communicate with spirits of the dead, that all human beings possess a “perispirit” (more or less an astral body), and that human beings pass through many reincarnations in a process of increasing spiritual purification. Spiritism is a sibling of Anglo-Saxon Spiritualism; however, the two movements differ on several features, of which the most frequently mentioned is Spiritualists’ tendency not to make reincarnation one of its central tenets.

The largely white, middle-class Spiritist movement mediates between two strong religious traditions in Brazil: Christianity, which is dominated by Catholicism but has a rapidly growing Protestant sector; and the Afro-Brazilian religions, of which the two most salient are Candomblé, a West African religion brought to Brazil with the slaves, and Umbanda, a religion that emerged in Brazil during the 20th century. Both Candomblé and Umbanda have spirit mediums, but their spirit pantheons differ. In Candomblé mediums (called “mothers-of-the-saints”) receive the Yoruba deities called *orixás*, and in Umbanda, the mediums receive Brazilian spirits of Indians, black slaves, and other social categories from popular culture.

In everyday language, the term “Spiritism” (*espiritismo*) may refer to any spirit mediumship belief and practice (including Candomblé, Umbanda, and Spiritism), to only Umbanda and Spiritism (as many Umbandists use the term), or to only Spiritism (as Spiritists use the term). These different definitions of the term mark different positions both within the religious system and the social sciences, a point which this article will explore in further detail.

Disobsession (*desobsessão*) might be defined as an important Spiritist “exorcism ritual.” However, Spiritists reject both the word “exorcism,” because they believe that demons are only misguided spirits of the dead, and the word “ritual,” because to them the term connotes “primitiveness” and “superstition.” Spiritists view themselves as much more enlightened than both of the two dominant religious traditions in Brazil, and furthermore they reject orthodox science for its superstitious clinging to “materialistic” or “positivistic” philosophies. As a 19th-century doctrine, Spiritism situates other philosophies on a scale of unilineal cultural evolution that runs from “primitive superstition” through Christianity to materialist science to Spiritist doctrine.

Spirit obsession occurs when a person’s impure thoughts attract errant spirits. At the minimum, spirit obsession can cause evil and impure urges, but at the other extreme it may cause illness and psychological disorders. (Spiritists also accept a category of possession, which they believe to be relatively rare.) The treatment for spirit obsession is complex. First, victims may go to a Spiritist center, where mediums drive out the evil forces and spirits by giving the victim spiritual passes, and the mediums also evangelize the errant spirits during the “disobsession session.” However, these two solutions are just spiritual band-aids; Spiritists believe that the victim must study *The Gospel According to Spiritism*

(1983), that is, Kardec's interpretation of Christian morality. Only an inner change, which may involve conversion to Spiritist doctrine, can correct the root cause of the spirit obsession. Otherwise, the victim will attract more errant spirits and fall prey again to spirit obsession.

Despite Spiritists' denial that disobsession is the key to curing spirit obsession, anthropologists and sociologists have tended to focus on the disobsession session.¹ During disobsession, a medium receives the obsessing spirit, while another member of the center, usually not in trance, "indoctrinates" the spirit. The spirit is usually lost and does not know that it is dead, but by the end of the indoctrination, it usually leaves in a much-enlightened state. The afflicted are passive observers in some centers, but in other centers (often the more elite centers) they do not even attend the disobsession session, and instead they attend an evangelization session in another room.

This article is not a study of the disobsession ritual itself; instead, it examines the interpretations of the ritual. This reading of readings assumes that these texts (like this one) are victims of "discursive obsessions." Just as spirits may obsess the thoughts of the living, so the discourses of religion (i.e., Catholicism, Candomblé, Umbanda, or Spiritism) may obsess those of sociology and anthropology. This reading will ask, "What are the discursive obsessions of these interpretations of disobsession?" In the process, this text itself becomes a kind of ritual of disobsession.

3. Interviewing the Victims

I begin with three social science texts, all of them marked by date, profession, and location: the book *Kardecismo e Umbanda* (*Kardecism and Umbanda*), published in 1961 by the São Paulo sociologist, Cândido Procópio Ferreira de Camargo; "Le spiritisme au Brésil," published in 1967 by the French sociologist Roger Bastide, who is associated with the neo-Marxist São Paulo school of sociology and who is best known for his masterpiece, *The African Religions of Brazil* (1978), for which his 1967 article serves as a postscript; and *O Mundo Invisível* (*The Invisible World*), published in 1983 by the Rio de Janeiro anthropologist Maria Laura Cavalcanti.

Each of these three texts provides a reading of the disobsession ritual, yet the three readings differ among themselves. To begin, São Paulo sociologist Camargo discusses disobsession as a therapy directed toward spiritual illnesses provoked by spirits and undeveloped mediumship (1961:101). For Camargo, disobsession is one of four possible therapies in Umbanda and Spiritism; the others are releasing spells, developing one's mediumship, and achieving spiritual understanding (1961:105). Camargo classifies Spiritist disobsession and Umbanda exorcism together.

The etiological importance of [spirit obsession] has already been stressed. The favored therapy in these cases consists of identifying the perturbing entity and freeing the victim of its influence. In Kardecism, the emphasis is on evangelizing and "enlightening" the entity, with the "spirits of light" assisting the task of persuasion. [1961:105]

Camargo therefore diagnoses disobsession as a practice that has psychotherapeutic effects for victims who are disturbed by spirits.

Although Roger Bastide continues to view disobsession through the prism of psychotherapy, he dissents slightly from Camargo's interpretation of disobsession. Instead of viewing the mediums as the providers of ethnomedicine and the victims as their patients, Bastide argues that disobsession is psychotherapeutic for the mediums themselves. He interprets Spiritist disobsession as a psychotherapy for the lower-middle class, which he describes as caught between the "veneer" of puritan morality and the lull of tropical sensuality. He argues that this conflict is displayed in the drama of the two major types of spirits who appear in disobsession meetings: the spirits of light, who correspond to the superego, and the errant or perturbing spirits, who correspond to the id. In the drama of disobsession, Spiritists and spirits of light work together to help the errant spirits mend their ways and evolve to a higher spiritual plane, and therefore the superego triumphs over the forces of the id. Bastide further argues that this drama plays out the psychological conflicts generated by a particular class situation. He writes,

Hence the Oedipal complex, where all the domestic conflicts are manifested, appears with an overwhelming monotony from one session to another, assuming the form of obsessing spirits. . . . All these interior dramas demonstrate that the puritanism of the lower-middle class is but a superficial veneer, a symbolic expression of a certain social status, the exterior manifestation of a class behavior, but one which has not yet destroyed the polygamous tendencies of the Moslem, the castrating tendencies of the mother, or the incestuous dreams of childhood. . . . We therefore find the mentality of the lower-middle class of Brazil attached to its puritanism as a defense, and all the more rigid as it is threatened by the sensual climate of the big tropical city or by the sexual liberty of the lower class, from which this lower-middle class is only with difficulty disengaging itself. [1967:15]

Like Camargo, Bastide argues that disobsession has a psychotherapeutic effect. This is because disobsession allows the mediums of the lower-middle class to discharge their sexual and aggressive fantasies, and at the same time the practice reinforces the class's puritan defense mechanisms that keep such fantasies in check.

Cavalcanti interprets disobsession not as a form of psychotherapy (either for the victim or for the medium) but instead as a display of basic values; her reading follows current interpretations of ritual as theater, text, or representation. Using Louis Dumont's comparative sociology (1980), Cavalcanti reads disobsession as an expression of Western values of individualism, free will, and equality, values to which Spiritists themselves consciously refer when discussing their own doctrine. Once Cavalcanti opens the Pandora's box of looking for the meaning of the ritual instead of its function, disobsession becomes enormously more complex than it appeared to Bastide or Camargo. Although it is true that Spiritists themselves will represent disobsession in terms of its therapeuticity, this is often a discourse that they reserve for non-Spiritists, and any attempt to understand the Spiritists' own interpretations of disobsession inevitably leads one into the world of multiple readings. In a sense, then, Cavalcanti's reading can, if opened up, en-

compass those of Bastide and Camargo by viewing therapicity as one aspect of the meaning of disobsession to Spiritists. But it does so on different terms, by examining the ritual in terms of social meaning instead of social function.

What is the meaning of the contrasting readings of disobsession? One is tempted to look at them through a prism of the oppositions of the historical context: São Paulo sociology of the 1960s versus Rio anthropology of the 1980s. The different interpretations appear to hinge on historically rooted methodologies: not only do these differences appear to be reflections of academic fashion changes (from functionalism or Marxism to structuralism), but they also may reflect the transition from the early influence of psychiatric and forensic medicine in studies of spirit mediumship religions to the subsequent development of a vigorous and independent social science profession. But such an approach also disentangles a triangle of readings and makes of it a series of binary distinctions, a move that, according to anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1982), represents a mistake that Anglo-Saxon anthropologists typically make when describing the Brazilian reality, which he insists is indivisibly triadic. So, let us try an alternative reading of the readings, this time by receiving some spirits of religious discourse that appear to be in the air.

4. A Dialogue with Three Religious Readings

The disobsession ritual dramatizes conflicts between Spiritists and errant spirits; the latter reflects categories and values outside the Spiritist movement. The errant spirit is often a victim of black magic, but sometimes it is a priest or an arrogant intellectual and less frequently a Protestant, sex maniac, gambler, etc. The dialogue with the spirit within the Spiritist center reproduces the dialogue that Spiritists have or would like to have with non-Spiritists outside the center. Thus the most private, inner part of Spiritism is also the point of dialogue with the outside; disobsession is a kind of dress rehearsal for the theater of external discourse. But it is a dress rehearsal that portrays Spiritism as triumphant: Catholics discover that there is no hell, materialists are surprised to find that there *is* an afterlife, recalcitrant earthbound spirits learn Christian forgiveness and agree to study in celestial schools, and victims of black magic respond to spiritual shock treatments or offers to let the spirits of light ferry them away to spiritual hospitals. The disobsession session therefore gives voice to rival points of view in the religious system, but it does so in a way that lets Spiritism encompass these other discourses in an evolutionary scheme which poses Spiritist doctrine as the apex of human thought.

The alternative viewpoints dramatized within the disobsession ritual also provide a clue to some of the groups within the religious system with which Spiritists are in dialogue. This section will follow up the clues from the disobsession ritual and examine some disputes between Spiritists and other groups within the religious system. I begin with a leading Catholic critic of Spiritism, Boaventura Kloppenburg, a Franciscan who is presently a bishop in Bahia. Kloppenburg has continued to irritate Spiritists by using the word "Spiritism" to include Umbanda.

In his book *A Umbanda no Brasil (Umbanda in Brazil)*, Kloppenburg devotes an entire chapter to the defense of “the Spiritist character of Umbanda” (1961:60). This chapter includes a rebuttal to a radio commentary of 1956, in which leading Spiritists criticized Kloppenburg’s use of the term “Spiritism” as including Umbanda. In his rebuttal, Kloppenburg cites passages from the “codifier” of Spiritist doctrine, Allan Kardec, to defend the idea that Spiritism includes “all spiritualists who admit the practice of the evocation of spirits,” which therefore includes both Umbandists and the North American Spiritualists, two groups from which Spiritists attempt to distinguish themselves (1961:66). Kloppenburg continues to defend this position even today, as he stated to me in an interview in February 1986.

In contrast to the conjunction of Spiritism and Umbanda that this Catholic intellectual proposes, Spiritists emphasize a disjunction. In the Introduction to Deolindo Amorim’s *Africanismo e Espiritismo (Africanism and Spiritism)*, Spiritist writer Lippman Tesch de Oliver makes this position clear.

When we speak of Spiritism, the reader should know that we refer to the scientific, philosophical, and moral codification of Allan Kardec—the only doctrine with the privilege of using this title—that the master propounded in a series of notable works, edited in France between 1857 and 1869, and not this conglomeration of witchcraft and fussy rituals, where one finds the fetishism of savages and the aberrations of bastardized mediumship; in short, the carnival of Umbanda. [Amorim 1949:5–6]

To Oliver, Amorim, and Spiritists in general, Umbanda can be approached in terms of a continuum running between the African religions and Catholicism. In his study of Umbanda, Amorim argues that there are numerous similarities between Catholicism and Umbanda, including the use of altars, the belief in divinities and miracles, the use of “ritual,” etc. (Amorim 1949:46, 73–74). He argues that Spiritism, in contrast to Umbanda, is characterized by “an absence of rituals” and a “doctrinal base in natural laws” that “excludes miracles and the supernatural” (1949:73–74). Just as Kloppenburg uses the term “Spiritism” to lump together both Umbanda and Spiritism as instances of the primitive and/or heretical, so Amorim’s discussion of rituals, miracles, and the supernatural links Umbanda and Catholicism and distances them from the more scientific doctrine of Spiritism.

From the Afro-Brazilian perspective, Spiritism tends to get lumped together with the Catholic Church as religions of the white, middle class, as opposed to religions of the people. In an unusual moment of candor and polemic, one Candomblé diviner said to me that Spiritists think they are “know-it-alls” (*donos de verdade*). Bastide, who devoted the bulk of his research to the Afro-Brazilian religions, also noted that “the African priests are very set against Spiritism, more so than Catholicism” (1967:11). In this case, Bastide probably used the word “Spiritism” to include Umbanda, and this usage accurately reflects the general feeling among the Candomblé adepts that their religion represents the “pure” African religion in contrast to Umbanda, which is relatively influenced by the white, middle class (see Brown 1986; Negrão 1979; and Ortiz 1978). To summarize, from the Candomblé perspective, there is a conjunction between Cathol-

icism and Spiritism on the grounds of their class and racial similarities, and Umbanda lies somewhere in an ambiguous middle ground between the white, middle class and the Candomblés of the people of color of the lower classes.

5. Tracing the Obsessions

Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (1980) noted that in Brazil each religion tends to have a different map of the entire religious system, and the pattern of conjunctions and disjunctions discussed above confirms this finding. What perhaps is less obvious is that each social scientist also appears to have a different map of the religious system and that these maps correspond not only to those of different religions but also to the different readings of the disobsession ritual.

In his book *Kardecism and Umbanda* (1961)—significantly not *Spiritism and Umbanda*—Camargo invented the term “mediumistic continuum” to refer to the mixture of Spiritist and Umbandist beliefs, spirits, and rituals as one goes from a pole of pure Spiritism to a pole of pure Umbanda. However, as a text, Camargo’s book is itself structured around a disjunction, a division between his analysis of structure and function. Camargo argues that empirically there is a conjunction between Spiritism and Umbanda (which is why he uses the term “Spiritism” to refer to both and uses “Kardecism” in the sense that I am using Spiritism), but his first section, on structure, discusses Spiritism and Umbanda as ideal types and as a result brings out the disjunction between the two religious movements. Only in the second section of the book, which is devoted to functionalist analysis, does Camargo emphasize the conjunction of Spiritism and Umbanda. The functionalist methodology is therefore crucial to his map of the religious system, which involves a conjunction between Spiritism and Umbanda.

Cavalcanti dissents with Camargo by arguing that the point of departure should be “the view of the groups about themselves” (1983:15, 139). From this perspective, there is no continuum, because Spiritists—and note that she uses the term, even in the title of her book, in the restricted sense of *not* including Umbandists—emphasize their differences from Umbanda. She concludes by emphasizing a disjunction between Spiritism and Umbanda. Again, this map of the religious system is related to a methodological position; the map is made possible by Cavalcanti’s *verstehen* anthropology, which is opposed to the *erklären* method of Camargo’s sociology.

What does Bastide’s map look like? Like Cavalcanti, Bastide disputes Camargo’s continuum, but he uses a different argument.

Camargo has clearly seen the opposition between Umbanda and Spiritism; he made them into two poles of an opposition. In a way, the idea of a continuum could appear to be correct, because one finds between Kardecism and Umbanda a whole series of transitions. However, in our opinion, the image is false, because this so-called continuum is composed of one true pole, Kardecism, and innumerable Umbanda tents that could not possibly make up an opposing pole. Without a doubt, Camargo proposes a second pole, that of pure African religion, such as the form that it takes in Bahia [Candomblé]. . . . We therefore have less a continuum than two concurrent groups, one well-organized and the other in a welter of sects. And this concurrence—

as well as the Kardecian seduction, which plays itself out in certain Umbanda sects and could be responsible for Camargo's illusion of a continuum—can be definitely explained by the struggle between two classes, the middle and the proletariat, that is hidden in Brazil under the veil of religious ideologies. [1967:11]

Instead of a continuum between Umbanda and Spiritism, Bastide finds a “concurrency,” which is to say a gap or even a confrontation.

Between the lines, Bastide criticizes Camargo's map of the religious system as one that implicitly sides with white, bourgeois ideology, because it fails to recognize the importance of the pole of the poor and the people of color. But this does not make Camargo's reading a Spiritist reading; for Bastide, Spiritism is only a continuation of Catholic morality, in which “the virtues of charity, and not justice,” triumph (1967:14). Thus Bastide produces a map of the religious system that inscribes a conjunction between Spiritism and Catholicism, a disjunction between them and the Candomblés, and an ambiguous, mediating position for Umbanda, but one leaning toward the experience of the urban workers of color (cf. Negrão 1979, for a discussion and review).

Bastide therefore lines up a series of oppositions: the rich and the poor, the white and the black, the Catholic/Spiritist and the Candomblé. As with Camargo and Cavalcanti, his set of oppositions stems from a methodology, in this case a form of Marxism that he discusses explicitly in the Introduction to *The African Religions of Brazil*. Here he lumps together all of the previous studies of Afro-Brazilian religions—from Nina Rodrigues (1935) to Artur Ramos (1940) and even Melville Herskovits (1937, 1941)—under the rubric of “psychologism and ethnology” (1978:19–22). In their place, he argues for a psychiatry and an ethnology that are embedded in sociology, meaning a sociology that accepts race and class as the fundamental divisions and not a “consular” sociology that applies European or North American categories to the Brazilian reality. This methodological opposition—psychologism and ethnology versus sociology—lines up with the other oppositions of race and class, and it implies that Camargo and Cavalcanti are more similar to each other than they are to Bastide.

The three social scientists therefore form both a triad of paired methodological oppositions and a triad of maps of the religious system. From Bastide's point of view, both Cavalcanti's *verstehen* perspective (ethnology?) and Camargo's functionalism (psychologism?) fail to situate the Brazilian religious system in terms of race and class oppositions. From Cavalcanti's point of view, both Camargo and Bastide fail to adopt “the view of the groups about themselves.” And from Camargo's point of view, both Bastide and Cavalcanti have failed to identify the reality of the mediumistic continuum.

It is neither new nor surprising that three social scientists have different methodological stances, contrasting readings of the disobsession ritual, and variant maps of the religious system; that these differences correspond to the different religious perspectives described above is perhaps less commonsensical. Camargo's emphasis on the continuum between Spiritism and Umbanda as well as on the common denominators of Spiritist disobsession and Umbanda exorcism, together with his definition of the term “Spiritism” to include Umbanda, is similar

to the Catholic position, which emphasizes the conjunction between Spiritism and Umbanda. Likewise, Cavalcanti's emphasis on disjunction, her reading of disobsession in terms of Western values, together with her use of the term "Spiritist" to exclude Umbanda, parallels the Spiritist position. And Bastide's conjunction of Spiritism and Catholicism in opposition to Candomblé, together with his use of the term "Spiritism" to include Umbanda (and therefore to stress its difference from Candomblé), represents the Candomblé perspective on the religious system (a reading of Bastide similar to ones which scholars in Brazil have been exploring in somewhat different contexts; see Dantas 1982; Fry 1986; Maggie 1986).

In other words, the debates among sociologists and anthropologists—their different uses of the word "Spiritism" and their different maps of the religious system—now appear less as products of methodological disputes within the field of the social sciences and more as readings that are overdetermined by, or obsessed by, disputes within the field of religious discourse. Of the three social scientists, Bastide is probably the most aware of this obsession, for at the end of the Introduction to *The African Religions of Brazil*, he writes the following:

I can therefore say at the threshold of this book: *Africanus sum*, inasmuch as I have been accepted by one of those religious sects, which regards me as a brother in the faith, having the same obligations and the same privileges as the other members of the same degree. [1978:28]

Could Cavalcanti have just as easily have said "Spiritus sum"? And Camargo "Catholicus sum"?²

The idea of discursive obsession becomes even more credible—and more Brazilian—when one considers the personal relationships among the writers considered here. For example, Camargo, who was a professor of the Catholic University of São Paulo, also published a Spanish-language edition of his book *Kardecismo e Umbanda*, and the preface of this edition (but not the Portuguese-language edition) was written by Boaventura Kloppenburg. Furthermore, it was published by the International Federation of Catholic Institutes of Social and Socio-Religious Investigations, which the Portuguese edition acknowledges, but without the word "Catholic." Likewise, one of the Cavalcanti's two field sites was the Institute for Brazilian Spiritist Culture, of which the President at the time of her research was Deolindo Amorim, whom she cites in her acknowledgments. These personal connections do not make Camargo and Cavalcanti into disciples of the Catholic and Spiritist intellectuals; one can easily find many divergences between the Camargo/Kloppenburg and Cavalcanti/Amorim texts. Such a simplistic view of discursive obsession is not necessary; it is enough to recognize that the differences among the social sciences positions are repeated, in Culler's phrase (again), "as a displaced reenactment of conflicts dramatized" among the religious positions (1982:215). Methodological and definitional divergences within the social sciences have a slightly different meaning when they are placed in a comparative context that includes the discourse of the religious arena. But in addition to the elective affinities between the social scientific and religious perspectives (like those between humans and spirits), there appears to be a certain

degree of permeability and interaction across these two fields of discourse, and this is why religion in Brazil needs to be analyzed as part of a broader “ideological arena.”

It would not be difficult to find other perspectives on disobSESSION and the position of Spiritism in the religious system; far from disproving the concept of Camargo’s mediumistic continuum, this session has merely discovered many others. Among the other perspectives is the Protestant viewpoint and readings inspired by comparison with the Protestant, North American culture. These readings focus on the Latin American values of personalism, patronage, and hierarchy as seen in the relation between the mediums and the spirits of light, or between either of these and either the victim or the errant spirit (see DaMatta 1982; Greenfield 1987; and some of my own writings, e.g., Hess 1987a, chapt. 3). One might now discern that the work of discursive disobSESSION is far from over, but perhaps I should call this session to a close, before this text/ritual finds itself caught in dialogue with the spirit of yet another discourse.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This article was first presented at the Cornell University Anthropology Department Colloquium during the spring of 1986 and also at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting of December 1986. I would like to thank the participants of those sessions as well as James Boon, Patric Giesler, Roberto DaMatta, David Holmberg, and Thomas Holloway for their help and comments. This article is based on doctoral field research done in Brazil from September 1984 through March 1986; the research was supported by Fulbright-Hays and S.S.R.C. grants. As this article was going to press, I was informed that Cândido Procópio Camargo died; this article is dedicated to his memory.

¹This disjunction between the social scientists’ and Spiritists’ emphases is related to the peculiar history of social studies of spirit mediumship religions in Brazil, which emerged out of a critique of the psychiatric and forensic medical studies of the first half of the century. Many of the medical studies treated spirit mediumship religions as laboratories of insanity, and they focused on the dramatic aspects of trance episodes (see Hess 1987a, 1988). In criticizing the medical interpretations, social scientists inevitably maintained the emphasis on trance episodes.

²It is perhaps worth noting that when I met with Camargo in July 1983, shortly after Cavalcanti’s book was published, he expressed his opinion that her book read like a Spiritist text, but he added that perhaps she would say much the same about his own work.

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