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VARIETIES OF POSSESSION EXPERIENCE

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I felt an almost electrical interaction between myself and the spectators. Their mounting excitement had the effect of heightening my physical strength until I was dancing with a sustained force that seemed far beyond my reach at other times. For one moment it seemed as if some other person within me was performing the dance. *Massine, in his memoirs for the performance of The Three Cornered Hat.*

Preamble

Even though about an arguably different event, the remarks of the brilliant turn-of-the-century dancer Massine underline some of the principal themes that make the study of possession central to an understanding of human personality. In accounts of artists and athletes there are occasional descriptions of some form of bodily energy and a capacity that apparently goes beyond the self's usual limitations. Less common, but still not absent from some of these reports, are references to actions apparently not initiated deliberately by the person him/herself but by something else, be it inspiration, the "unconscious", or the enthusiasm (etymologically, "being filled with the gods"), that Plato described.¹

Possession, as described in the anthropological literature, frequently involves notions that the affected individual might be in a different form of consciousness or "trance state", and that a common traditional explanation for this alteration is that a spirit or possessing entity has temporarily displaced the personality of the individual to take over his/her physical and mental functioning (Bourguignon 1976). In some instances, the explanation is not that a discrete external entity takes over the person, but that s/he might be "manifestada", or manifesting some form of general universal force that is also a part of the individual.²

SPECIAL ISSUE ON TRANCE AND POSSESSION

Regardless of the forms that possession experience may take,

its sheer presence challenges at least two basic premises of how we ordinarily conceive of our selves: that we have, despite some personal conflicts and contradictions, a basic, *single*, specific identity; and the sense that, other than in disease or decay, we own our bodies and mental life. The treatment of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, but they suggest that functionalistic psychological or anthropological analyses by no means exhaust the implications of this phenomenon.

Possession and Magical Flight

Possession manifestations and the classical shamanic "magical flight" have been considered by some writers on the field as distinct phenomena, with Eliade (1964) concluding that possession is a later, "degenerate" and essentially distinct form of the magical flight (see Lewis 1989). Leaving aside the questionable phraseology of Eliade, some cross-cultural studies support a distinction and suggest that what has been called "magical flight" involves primarily a visual imaginal experience (the shamanic journey) and subtle or absent mobility, sensory stimulation and recollection, whereas "possession" is mainly characterized by intense movement, vocalizations, amnesia (but see below) and a number of other bodily expressions and changes in somatic sensations and body image (cf.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Varieties of Possession Experience	1
From the Editor	3
AASC Annual Conference	3
AASC News	4
Transition	4
Call for Papers	4
Organizations	4
Levels of Possession Awareness in Afro-Brazilian Religions	5
Publications	12
Book Reviews	18

Rouget 1985; Winkelman 1986). Leaving aside the less characteristic instances of simultaneous magical flight and possession phenomenology, possession can be typically conceived as the way through the body to attain the existential unity and continuity, the sacred bind that humans desperately seek; the magical flight has the same existential purpose but through a mostly imaginal, disembodied, non-corporeal path. The beginning and end point of both techniques is the same earth-bound creature seeking to subvert his/her "eccentric" existential position with respect to an ambiguous ownership and identification with the body, the stream of consciousness, and one's actions (cf. Cardeña 1989).

The different manifestations of "possession" and the "magical flight" may be the result of a basic interaction between subjective experience, behavior, and physical activity, rather than solely of local practices or beliefs. For instance, there is some indication from laboratory research that immobility might be associated with increased imaginal experience (cf. Cardeña 1988a); and that intense emotional arousal found in the physically and sensorially charged context of a possession ritual, is associated with amnesia (Christianson 1984). Besides, the importance of cognitive individual differences is stressed by a recent finding that highly hypnotizable individuals can be divided among those who experience a "hypnotic state" mostly through visual imagery and those who experience an alteration of consciousness without a strong imaginal mediation but as a general sense of being in an "altered state" (Pekala 1989). The evidence is still scant and these areas require further exploration, but even if supported they would not imply that "in the field", imaginal flight and possession may not coexist geographically or be part of the repertoire or even simultaneous experience of some practicing shamans (Rouget 1985; Stoller 1989; Heinze 1988); they are, rather, "fuzzy" categories of associated phenomena that may show areas of overlap among practitioners with unusual abilities or training. Frigerio's (this issue) description of *en transe*, in which the "medium's spiritual self is believed to leave her body to journey to other parts of the city" is an excellent example of this and, not surprisingly, seems to be a rare event, as judging by Frigerio's observations in Argentina and the general distinctions found in the literature.

For the remainder of this paper I will restrict my remarks to possession, hereby broadly defined as an experience involving a radical alteration of embodied identity, in contrast to a disembodied and/or mostly imaginal transformation. The changes of identity in the possessed individual occur, at least partly, within the physical world of mud, sweat, blood, movement, and sound; instead, the magical flier imaginably abandons the "middle world" to subvert in different realms the usual sense of human boundaries.

Not One But Many Possessions

The most common approaches to explain possession events have been psychological/functionalistic (e.g. van der Waelde 1968; Mischel and Mischel 1958), cultural/functionalistic (e.g. Métraux 1972), socio-political (e.g. Laguerre 1980), and even dramaturgical analyses (e.g. Métraux 1955). Almost absent have been what Frigerio (in this issue) calls emic studies and extensive phenomenological description of possession occurrences (for a brief, and rare, exception, see Deren 1953). This lack of information about possessions as lived from within has supported the a priori categories of the usually inexperienced and more or less sympathetic researchers, instead of providing an understanding of what Husserl called "the things themselves". A different approach has been to "explain" possession as a form of hypnotic trance or of multiple personality (e.g. Ravenscroft 1965; Kenny 1981), a dubious strategy that, at best, displaces the problem to an explanation of the nature of the particularly unclear and ethnocentric terms of "hypnotic trance" and "pathological multiplicity".

In the various *vodun* ceremonies occurring throughout the year in Haiti, one of the most striking aspects is the enormous variability of possession manifestations not only with regards to characterization, but to essential aspects of the phenomenon. One might be confronted by a *houngan* (male priest) who subtly becomes silent for a moment and then adopts a nasal voice and a slightly different demeanor to proceed in a melancholic but perfectly rational description of *vodun*; by a festive ceremony where different initiates display what seems to be a great histrionic ability to characterize the *loas* (spirits); or by mud covered creatures in loincloth rolling in apparently uncontrollable frenetic madness through a mud pit, limbs flailing at impossible angles, to end their journey with their heads buried in the mud for a few minutes. It seems a disservice to their nature to suggest that these, and other different manifestations, are but small variants of the same phenomenon.

The following classification of types of ritual possession experience is proposed as a working model (see Rouget 1985 for a somewhat different classification of possession and related phenomena). Although mostly analytical and cross-cultural, it centers on the general mode of experiencing of the individual and it is remarkably consistent in many points with the 'emic' model discussed by Frigerio in this issue. The categories proposed henceforth should be considered as general modalities of experiencing at a specific time, rather

Continued on page 12

FROM THE EDITOR...

Special Issue on Trance and Possession

At last year's annual AASC meeting there were several excellent papers on levels of trance and possession, two of which are presented in this special issue. These two papers were selected because they challenge old assumptions and present important new directions in the study of trance and possession states.

Unlike most prior studies of possession the two authors take as their starting points first hand accounts by mediums of their possession experiences. Frigerio, in particular, in his paper stresses the importance of this emic perspective for a fuller understanding of possession phenomena. He presents a model of possession based upon the experience of Umbandista mediums in Argentina. He argues that possession is not a simple polar opposite to being non-possessed, i.e., normal waking consciousness. Rather there is a large gray area between these polar extremes in which a wide range of possession experiences are recognized and classified by Umbandista followers. Cardeña, working from both an emic and a cross-cultural perspective, arrives at a similar classification of possession states. It is the similarity of their findings, based on separate research projects, which makes their two papers natural companions in this issue.

Both authors bring serious objections to the traditional anthropological and psychological *a priori* view that possession is a unitary state of consciousness in which the possessed individual has amnesia about the events which occur while s/he is possessed. Based upon their research they show that possession should be considered as a process involving a series of states of consciousness in which varying levels of conscious awareness are present in the possessed individual. They note, however, that most entranced mediums claim amnesia whether they remember anything or not. Frigerio suggests that many mediums feign amnesia because this is the preferred situation for both the medium and the client. Amnesia implies a more complete possession for the medium whose entranced utterances then gain validity for the client who thinks a spirit is truly speaking through the medium. Although this may seem fraudulent to us as outsiders, it is really a side effect of the varying levels of trance and involvement which a medium may feel during a possession. In the course of a possession, the medium may vary from complete deep possession to a light trance in which normal awareness is only slightly altered. The faked amnesia also reflects the fact that a medium is not always able to become deeply possessed on demand even in a ritual situation. Hence a certain amount of faking or role playing is resorted to, and as Cardeña points out such role playing may alter autonomic arousal and experience to create a true deep possession.

Such faking is not unknown in many areas involving trance and possession especially in the spiritualistic movement earlier this century. During that time investigators would automatically discard any medium's claims to validity if there was even the slightest disclosure of fraud during a trance. Fraud of any sort became a rule of thumb for falsifying any truthful aspect of a seance. However, as Frigerio and Cardeña point out such role playing may be a necessary part of any spirit possession. Such faking is also known in shamanistic trance and healing which shares much with possession phenomena. Shamans are well known to use conjuring in certain types of healing such as extracting bits of bone, feathers, crystals, and so on from their patients. Yet such faking and role playing should not automatically disqualify everything a shaman does, since the conjuring may serve a similar function as in possession.

Frigerio brings up another important point concerning the validation of a possession by clients and other possession initiates which has points of similarity with other intuitive and psychic practices currently in vogue. This is the fact that practical results obtained through a possession are more validating of the experience than the experience itself. If something a medium says while entranced comes true or has practical results in the life of the client than this validates the possession as true. A similar validation process is common today in such practices as dowsing and what is known as "applied psi". Here some practitioners are not concerned so much with the why or how of their practices, but whether or not they can produce practical results. Those involved in these fields take as a given that dowsing or psi are proven abilities and then find ways to apply those abilities to everyday life. As with possession if the practice fails to have practical results the fault lies not with the reality of the ability but in the practitioner who for some reason was unable to apply his/her abilities correctly.

Finally, it should be noted that in their research and papers, both Frigerio and Cardeña have advanced anthropological and psychological understanding of a very complex phenomena of human consciousness and personality. In this they have made a significant contribution to description, explanation, and theory concerning the cross-cultural aspects of altered states of consciousness.

AASC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The AASC will be holding its sixth annual Conference in Pacific Palisades, California (in the Los Angeles area) on **February 28 - March 4, 1990**. Anthropological and other interdisciplinary contributions to the study of human consciousness will be represented. Individual papers, organized sessions, informal discussion groups, workshops, and media presentations will be given on states of consciousness, indigenous healing practices, linguistic, philosophical, and

symbolic studies, and the ethnography of shamanic, spiritual, and magical training. For information regarding submissions, conference registration fees, and accommodations, interested participants and AASC members should call or write to **Geri-Ann Galanti**, Program Chair, AASC, P.O. Box 1391, Venice, CA 90294-1391, (213) 827-0937.

AASC NEWS

The AASC is continuing its efforts to become an affiliate member of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). This coming November President Geri-Ann Galanti will attend the AAA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. to chair an organizational meeting for interested anthropologists at 6:30 P.M. on Wednesday, November 15, 1989. Interested members who plan to attend the AAA meeting should contact Dr. Galanti at the AASC address.

TRANSITION

Victor Barnouw, 73, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, died May 8, 1989 of pancreatic cancer. He was one of the most distinguished members of AASC, which he joined in 1985. He was associated with the greats of the Culture and Personality school in the 1940's, when he gave what were among the earliest cross-cultural accounts of ESP testing and other paranormal phenomena (see Barnouw 1942 and 1946). His *Introduction to Anthropology* went through five editions and made references, sometimes substantial, to the ostensible significance of ESP in religion and shamanism, at least as early as the second edition (1975: 248-49). His textbook, *Culture and Personality*, was the standard one used for more than two decades, and the latest (1985) devoted substantial space (pp. 182-86) to a discussion of the anthropology of ESP and consciousness (see review, *AASC Newsletter*, 1(2): 6, 1985). He and I carried on occasional correspondence beginning in 1975. An example of his typical understatement: "It seems to me that [Margaret] Mead is usually frank in expressing her views" (letter to reviewer, dated Nov. 21, 1975). It is too bad that Barnouw's main activities in the psi field did not come later (or ours earlier), to create a synergistic impact, but his support and impact on our goals was substantial, and he will be sorely missed. For a fuller report on Barnouw's life in general, see Obituary in *Anthropology Newsletter*, 30(6), Sept. 1989, page 4.

References to Barnouw

Siberian shamanism and Western spiritualism, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, (1942), 36:140-68.

Paranormal phenomena and culture, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, (1946), 40:2-21.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Person and Property:

The Psychology of Possession and Ownership

The relationships of people to things, and of people to one another in respect to things, are among the most important aspects of personal life, of social life and of economic and political beliefs and behaviors. However, quantitative and qualitative empirical research on possession and ownership has been neglected by the social and behavioral sciences, and has been scattered and isolated within various sub-disciplines.

The *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* is planning a special issue on property, ownership, and possession. Papers from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives are sought. Whether by review, by theoretical analysis, or by empirical research, papers should present issues and pose problems that might guide or provoke wider interest and study of the topic. For details, contact: **Dr. Floyd Rudmin**, Faculty of Law, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6 (BITNET: RUDMINF@QUCDN)

ORGANIZATIONS

The **International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality & Dissociation (IISMP&D)** is a non-profit association organized for the purpose of information sharing, international networking of clinicians and researchers, providing professional and public education, and promoting research and clinical training in multiple personality disorder and other dissociative ailments. The Society holds annual conferences and publishes the *IISMP&D Newsletter* and a journal, *Dissociation*. A variety of membership categories are available to professionals and students in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, nursing, sociology, social work, anthropology, philosophy, theology, and other disciplines. For information, contact: **IISMP&D**, 2506 Gross Point Road, Evanston, IL 60201.

LEVELS OF POSSESSION AWARENESS IN AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGIONS

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Introduction

Thirty years ago, in their study of the Shango of Trinidad, Mischel and Mischel stated that "possession does not appear to be an all-or-none process, utterly separated from the individual's usual state . . . it would appear more useful to deal with different levels of involvement in possession behavior rather than 'possession' versus 'normality'" (Mischel and Mischel 1958:253). This remark has not yet received the attention it merits, and possession is still regarded as a separate and distinct category, i.e., either an individual is considered to be possessed and unconscious, or, if he is conscious, then he is seen as faking possession. The possibility of gray areas between these two extremes has not been sufficiently considered. Many recent studies on possession approach the phenomenon from an etic perspective, and seem to be particularly concerned with its psychophysiological basis (Ward and Beaubrun 1979; Kehoe and Giletti 1981; Prince 1982; Lex 1984; Ward 1984; Locke and Kelly 1985; Winkelman 1986). It is my contention that by using an emic perspective, we have access to these gray areas that can provide new insights into the field of trance possession.

This paper will discuss the various levels of possession and awareness distinguished by practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions in Argentina, and the different settings in which they may occur. For the practitioners, the existence of these different levels and the widespread occurrence of conscious possession, make the evaluation of the possession experience difficult. It is argued that anthropologists, in order to gain a better understanding of the possession experience, must consider the finer shades of the phenomenon which are distinguished emically.

In this paper I will be employing my own data on Afro-Brazilian religions in Buenos Aires, Argentina, collected from 1985-1987. In addition, I will refer to the literature on Afro-American religions in other parts of the New World. In this way I will show that, even though an in-depth analysis has yet to be made, many of the possession phenomena I discuss have also been observed by other scholars.

Levels of Possession

For the Umbandistas of Argentina, trance is not a uniform state, for they recognize three levels or degrees of possession: *irradiación* (irradiation), *encostamiento* (to be beside) and *incorporación* (incorporation).¹ *Irradiación* (irradiation) means that some of the entity's energy² is

reaching the medium, but does not have full control over his body; the medium may experience strange sensations in certain body parts, or may have intuitions about certain problems, but is still basically himself.³ *Encostamiento* (to be beside) means that the spirit is leaning against the medium, is by his side, touching him and in this way controlling his body. It may also cause the medium to forget some of what he is witnessing. In daily usage, these two terms, *irradiación* and *encostamiento*, are frequently used interchangeably, to denote a state of halfway possession. *Incorporación* ("incorporation"), on the other hand, means that the entity has fully entered the body of the medium and he is therefore completely possessed.

Different levels of possession have also been noted by other authors dealing with Afro-Brazilian and Afro-American religions. Lerch (1980), researching Umbanda Evangelizada in Porto Alegre, notes that a medium may be *incorporado*, *encostado*, or *en transe*. The first two categories are exactly the same as those found in Argentina. In the first stage the medium is completely possessed by the spirit, in the second the spirit is not inside the medium but next to him. The third category the author distinguishes, *en transe*, means that "the medium's spiritual self is believed to leave her body to journey to other parts of the city" (Lerch 1980:143). I have not found this category in Argentina. Leacock and Leacock (1972), in their analysis of the syncretic Batuque in the Brazilian city of Belem, note that, since two people cannot be possessed by the same spirit at the same time,

if two or more mediums appear to be possessed by the same *encantado* (spirit), cult members argue that only the first medium to enter trance really 'has' the spirit. The other devotees who are apparently possessed are only *sombriado* (shaded) by the *encantado*, or in a state of halfway possession (Leacock and Leacock 1972).

The same authors note that some individuals never get to sing or speak when possessed, and are thus considered by other members to be never fully possessed but only "shaded." Devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions in Uruguay also make the distinction between *encostado* and *incorporado* according to the testimonies recorded by Moro and Ramirez (1981:123) in their conversations with different leaders. Again, to be *encostado* means to be only half-possessed.

Marton, when analyzing possession and dancing in what he terms the "Pan-Yoruba spiritual tradition," underscores the importance of the variable intensity of possession. From an emic perspective, "being touched by the Orisha," or partial possession, is distinguished from total possession (1986:69-76). A similar distinction is reported for the Shango, the Afro-American religious variant found in Trinidad. Mischel and Mischel (1958:253) state that

the level of possession, (the depth, involvement, loss of control and consciousness and intensity of behavior) is by no means constant, either among individuals or at different times with the same person. At times it appears to consist merely of a brief 'overshadowing' (an emic term) or momentary loss of control, dizziness and a partial and temporary loss of consciousness.

Bourguignon (1976:40) makes a similar point in her study of possession in Haitian Vodun.

Levels of Awareness

Practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions in Argentina distinguish three different levels of awareness during possession: they say that the medium may be conscious of what transpires during trance, he may be semiconscious, or he may be unconscious. In the first case he is aware of and later remembers everything that happened while he was possessed, in the second he only remembers certain things, and in the third he remembers nothing.

In some temples these degrees of consciousness during trance are linked to the qualities of mediumship of different individuals (i.e., an individual who has a conscious mediumship will retain awareness at all levels of possession).⁴ Most commonly, however, these levels of consciousness are seen as having more to do with the level of trance being experienced than with qualities of the individual mediums. Thus, it is thought that if a medium is *incorporado* he will be unconscious, if he is *encostado* he will be conscious or semi-conscious, and if *irradiado* he will be conscious.

Again, the literature provides examples of the widespread existence of notions linking levels of possession and awareness. For Porto Alegre, Lerch (1980) relates *encostamiento* to semiconsciousness or consciousness and *incorporación* to unconsciousness (although she says it may vary in intensity). Pressel (1974:196-97), studying possession in Umbanda in São Paulo states that her informants differentiated between conscious, semiconscious and unconscious mediums. The same author, however, states that a medium may alternate between states of consciousness and unconsciousness. This would imply that rather than indicating different types of mediumship, these three states express different levels of intensity and awareness of the possession experience. One of Moro and Ramirez's informants from Uruguay also relates consciousness to level of possession when he states:

What is it that we feel and see? Because we feel and see. I feel that I am going, and later I feel, I feel that I am big, you see? I feel as if I was inflated, I feel like I am another person. I do not know if you can

understand. That is when I can see. *When I cannot see, when I am gone, meaning when the Orixá or the spirit has completely taken over me, and I do not feel anything until I "disincorporate"* (Moro and Ramirez 1981:107, my translation and my emphasis).

A Candomblé practitioner interviewed by Marton (1986) likewise distinguishes partial from total possession by stating that the first involves consciousness and the second one not. The same author also provides examples from the literature on Afro-Cuban Santería where a similar distinction is made. Another example for the Caribbean area was provided by Mischel and Mischel (1958) discussing the Shango of Trinidad. Here, as we saw, an individual who was "overshadowed" lost consciousness only partially or temporarily.

Religious leaders in Argentina, when talking with fellow Umbandistas, or with advanced mediums, generally acknowledge that most of the possessions are conscious. They will explain this fact either by saying that the conscious type of mediumship is more common, or by admitting that full *incorporaciones* are rare, and that most mediums usually experience only *encostamientos*. Some of the scholars mentioned above also hint that conscious possession seems to be more common (at least in Afro-American religions) than what it is usually thought to be. Pressel states: "Although Umbandistas expressed preference for unconscious ASC, they estimated that only 15 to 35 percent of their mediums experienced it. My own estimate was considerably lower, or about 5 percent" (Pressel 1974:196). Leacock and Leacock, even when noting that "there is a strong convention among Batuque members that they have complete amnesia for the trance experience" (1972:206) remark:

It became obvious early in our research that a fairly large proportion of those mediums whom we interviewed about their participation in public ceremonies had good recall for their activities while in trance. . . . Although it was never possible to determine how much a medium remembered, there was no question that most mediums did remember some of their experiences while in trance (1972:208).

Mischel and Mischel (1958:253) espouse a similar belief regarding the Shango mediums in Trinidad. Métraux, in his seminal work on the "dramatic elements" of ritual possession in Haiti, expresses his belief that: "the loss of consciousness, without which classic possession cannot take place, is, if not entirely absent, at least only partial in a large number of cases" (1955:31). Noting that after possession, the individual pretends not to remember anything he said or did, Métraux explains this behavior by saying:

the forgetfulness of the possessed is not always a gross mystification. To admit that one remembers what he has said or done as a god is to recognize that he has not really been possessed, given that it is impossible to have been at the same time himself and a loa . . . whoever puts himself into a trance is obliged to play the game to the end (1955:33).

Métraux's acute observation raises an important question. As Peters and Price-Williams (1980, 1983) note, spirit possession has traditionally been linked to amnesia in the anthropological literature. These authors sustain that, to the contrary, "spirit possession does not necessarily (and usually indeed does not) involve loss of memory" (1980:404). The data presented above, both from my own fieldwork in Argentina, and from other studies done on Afro-American religions suggest that mediums are frequently aware of what goes on when they are undergoing possession and have a good (if not always complete) recollection of events during that state. The reason behind the general linkage established between possession and unconsciousness seems to rise from the emic preference (which is not always attained) for an unconscious trance. A closer look at the phenomenon of possession as it occurs in Argentina will help us understand the reasons for this emic preference.

Consciousness and "Information Control"

Gathering from information collected from my informants (when conscious), it would appear that possession implies not so much a total oblivion and loss of self but more the total or partial loss of control of the body and the feeling that someone else is moving and talking through the possessed individual. As was aptly expressed by an old Brazilian medium who was visiting a temple in Argentina: "It is as if the mediums put on certain clothes, and these clothes would start commanding their movements and their words."

If this image of the clothes that start to command the medium's movements comes closest to describing the possession experience, the actual way in which possession is presented to the public is more as if a spirit completely took over a medium's body and mind. The way in which the entities are treated during the session, and the way in which they behave and talk, highlights the fact that it is the spirits who are there instead of the medium. The possessed mediums will not only behave like a certain entity would, but they also say "I am Pai Joaquin" (an Umbanda Preto Velho spirit), or "I am Exu Tranca Rua" (a Kimbando Exu spirit). When talking about the medium they are possessing they will refer to him as "my matter" (*minha materia*), clearly indicating that it is the entity that is speaking, and not the medium.⁵ Therefore the knowledge that it is the conscious medium who pronounces these words would tend to deny the impression that it is the entity who is speaking.

Elsewhere (Frigerio 1989) I have maintained that Goffman's dramaturgical approach may be fruitfully utilized in the analysis of possession phenomena. A successful presentation of the possessed self is vital to the medium, since he must convey the idea that it is not the human being who is there anymore but the spiritual entity possessing him. For the client to know that it is the conscious medium who speaks, gives advice and performs cleansings, would go against the image fostered by the performance, namely that a spiritual entity is there. In Goffman's (1959) terms, the pervasive existence of consciousness in the mediums would be a fact providing "destructive information", that is ". . . facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt or make useless the impression that the performance fosters" (Goffman 1959:141). More specifically, it would be a "dark secret . . . (which) consists of facts about a team which it knows and conceals and which are incompatible with the image of self that the team attempts to maintain before its audience" (Goffman 1959:141). Thus, when a client goes for a consultation with a spiritual entity, the fact that the medium possessed by this entity is aware of what is being said must be concealed because this knowledge may diminish the confidence of the client in the spirit. The client may also be less eager to reveal his problems if he knows that not only a spirit, but also a human being, is listening to them.

The existence of conscious possession not only creates a problem for the medium in terms of his presentation of the self as possessed *visa-vis* the client, but it also often times even creates in the possessed individual himself the doubt about whether the entity is still with him or not ("*si la entidad aun esta colocada o no*"). This will especially be the case when the entity's grasp on him has relaxed and he does not feel the energy located in certain parts of his body. So when in a public session a person comes to him for a *consulta* (consultation), and he finds himself telling the client what his problem is and how to solve it, many times the possessed medium will doubt if it is truly the entity speaking through him or if he is just inventing what he is saying.⁶ The way some leaders recommend overcoming this problem is for the medium to concentrate and abandon himself to the entity ("*entregarse a la entidad, concentrarse y desprenderse de si mismo*"). Thus, it is believed that whatever one may say or do it will be caused by the entity that one is incorporating.

The doubt, however, always persists, and the medium only gets to know that the entity possessing him was "well positioned" (*bien colocada*) when he tells the client something which he (the medium) ignored that turns out to be true. Sometimes the proof comes *a posteriori*, as when people return to another session weeks after the *consulta* took place and tell the entity (or sometimes the medium himself, or the leader) that they have been helped, or that their advice has worked.⁷ As proof of the reality of their possession, mediums continuously cite cases in which their

entities told people things that they had no way of knowing. They generally hold their *camponos* (translators) as witnesses to this (indeed, in most cases mediums will say that it is their *campono* who told them about their entities' feats, since they rarely publicly admit their consciousness during possession).

A common practice in Argentina, even in temples where it is recognized that most possessions are conscious, seems to be to pretend that most possessed mediums are unconscious. The subject of consciousness during possession remains a touchy issue, to which no satisfactory solution seems to have been found. It is therefore always treated backstage, almost never in front of non-mediums, and preferably mainly among older mediums.⁸

Encostamiento and Irradiación in Daily Life

All my informants agreed that possession should ideally occur in the appropriate ritual setting, mostly in a temple, where the accumulation of *axé* or mystical force may better attract the spiritual entity. It should also happen at the appropriate time, when the entities are in effect, being called to possess the mediums. The ideal setting is during the weekly Umbanda public ceremonies, where the ritual singing and drumming are "calling" the spiritual entities "down" so that they may help clients with their consultations. Possessions, however, can and do occur in other settings and at other times. Entities can arrive in secular contexts, like the mediums' house. It is believed, however, that this should only happen if the medium has not totally developed his mediumship, and therefore cannot fully control it, or if the entity has an urgent reason to come down, like delivering an important message or curing somebody who is in great danger.

Irradiaciones and *encostamientos* are regarded to be more common than possession in secular contexts or inappropriate moments of ritual life. Temple leaders have told me that the spiritual entities may become *encostadas* in the mediums during their daily lives. A medium, for example, told me:

If I go to bed and that day I have made many mistakes, and done things that I shouldn't have done, I know that I was *encostado* with my Exu (a carouser spirit) . . . if I am grumpy and sulky the whole day, I know I was *irradiado* (irradiated) with my Preto Velho (Old Black) . . . if I was very irritated and fierce it was because I was irradiated by my Ogun (warrior spirit).

In another case, a young female medium was going out too frequently and returning very late at night. Concerned with her behavior, her mother and aunt, both temple leaders, said that this was because she was always *encostada* with her

Pomba Gira (these are spirits of women who have led a sinful life). Other mediums also state that sometimes, when having an argument, they can feel their warrior spirits becoming *encostados* in them, and they get more violent.

There are times when the effect of an *encoste* can be more beneficial for the medium. The testimony of a temple leader is illustrative in this respect:

. . . sometimes you are undecided, you don't know what to do, and the entity comes to help you, there is an *encoste* . . . You can feel it in the body, and also by analyzing things you say. Sometimes you are talking with one of the mediums, and you know you should scold him about something he did, but prefer not to do it because you like the person and do not want to have an argument with him. And then, suddenly, you hear yourself saying what you did not want to say! And you feel the entity, you feel it through the places (of your body) where it enters. And then you realize that your obligation as a spiritual leader was to tell the person what he was doing wrong

Encostamiento and Irradiación in Ritual Settings

A) Clients: *Encostamiento* and *irradiación* are generally felt by clients either at the weekly Umbanda sessions or when individual spiritual cleansings (*trabajos*) are performed for them. Such experiences, in fact, are a common motive driving many individuals to join a temple. When sitting in the audience, but more commonly when consulting a spiritual entity and being cleansed by them, individuals may start feeling dizzy, start crying for no apparent reason, they may feel energy running through their body, or other physical sensations, as is evident in this testimony of a medium recalling his second visit to a temple:

Talking with the spiritual entity, I felt all the muscles in my neck and shoulders start to contract, it was as if a force was squeezing me in that area. It was a strong physical sensation. The entity asked ironically: 'Are you feeling anything, my son?' She told me that it was my 'guardian angel' who was close to me (thirty year old male *hijo de santo*).

Other times clients may be made to whirl by the spiritual entity (the technique most commonly used to facilitate possession)⁹ and when whirling may experience the first levels of possession:

After my first consulta with *mãe* Graciela I stayed for the session. In it, the spiritual entity made me whirl, and I started spinning at an incredible speed. I felt like a top that spins up into the air (26 year old male *hijo de santo*).

It is not uncommon for clients to experience *irradiación*, with much the same symptoms described above, when undergoing the individual cleansings performed during the week. Since, for the Umbandistas, both the cleansings and the sessions are occasions when strong spiritual energies are mobilized, for them it comes as no surprise that their clients should feel them or be affected by them.

Not only is it “evolved” spiritual entities that may become *encostados* in clients, but also more harmful or “obsessor” spirits called Eguns. Eguns have a low degree of spiritual development, and by becoming *encostados* near or on a person may cause many kinds of problems in his life. Generally when individuals are being cleansed by an entity and they start crying or feeling badly it is because they unknowingly had an Egun *encostado*, which feels threatened by the beneficial energies of the entity doing the cleansing, and therefore manifests itself producing these symptoms in the client.

B) Mediums: Mediums may experience *encostamientos* or *irradiación* not only in public sessions but also when leaving ritual offerings or when near the altars of the spiritual entities. In both cases the energy of the entities is thought to reach the mediums, either because they are being called, as in the case of the offerings, or because part of their energy is considered to be present in the altars. For example, after I had gone with one of my informants to perform an offering for the Exu spirits in the crossroads of two streets near his house, he commented to his wife: “Everything went fine, I felt the presence of *el señor* (the Exu spirit) beside me when I was doing the offering.” The same informant told me how once, during a public ceremony his wife had gone to the “house of Exu” to leave an offering for these spirits, and when she came back he could see she was *encostada* with her Pomba Gira (female Exu) spirit because of the way she walked and how she smiled at him. Since he was playing the drums, he started singing for Pomba Gira, and shortly after that his wife became possessed by this spirit. A similar belief was espoused by another of my informants. This leader was inaugurating her new temple and was expecting various other leaders and a big audience turnout for the public ceremony she was going to perform. Before everything started she was very nervous, and said that she was going to go into the “house of Exu” so that her Pomba Gira would become *encostada* in her and she could be charming and unafraid.

Mediums also undergo *irradiación* or *encostamiento* in sessions. There are three ways in which this may happen. The first is when visiting other temples just as part of the audience. On these occasions they may feel, among other symptoms, headaches, backaches or pain in the base of the neck. A second instance in which they may experience

irradiación or *encostamiento* is, according to what some mediums told me, when they undergo possession during the sessions in their own temple, since it is common that they will shift back and forth between the different levels of possession and consciousness during the night. Two of my closest informants told me they felt that the grip the spiritual entity had on them diminished during the course of the session. They considered themselves to be only *encostados* or even *irradiados* when this happened. When, after having given consultations, songs were sung bidding the entities goodbye, they felt that the spirit “tightened its grip” on them and fully possessed them once more. Few mediums were as open about the topic as these two informants, but once I had this knowledge and used it matter of factly in conversations with other mediums they acknowledged that this was what happened. Giving credit to this assertion, I also saw leaders decide that it was time to end an Umbanda session because the “level of vibration of the entities” was getting low (meaning that most mediums were only *encostados* by that time). A similar phenomenon has been etically observed in Brazil by Pressel (1974) and Leacock and Leacock (1972).

A third instance in which a medium is said to be *encostado* is when his possession performance is not found to be convincing and is put in doubt, either by the leader of his own temple, some of his colleagues, or an outside observer. Then it is said that the medium did not reach *incorporación* (full possession) but was only *irradiado* or *encostado* (half-possessed). As analyzed elsewhere, accusations that a medium is faking his trance, is only experiencing halfway possession and not a complete one, or is possessed by an entity of lower spiritual development than the one he claims to be possessed by, are frequent among but also within Umbanda temples (Frigerio 1988a, 1988b, 1989). In fact, all the leaders I talked with recognized that, even in their temples, some mediums were consciously or unconsciously faking trance, many were only *encostados*, and that only a minority were really possessed. The validation of any possession experience, however, is generally only temporary, since it is open to reinterpretations which may be influenced by later possession performances, by events occurring outside the context of possession in everyday life, and also by power conflicts within the group (Frigerio 1988a, 1988b). Thus, for example, if a prediction made by medium X when possessed later turns out to be false, then to the eyes of the group that individual was either faking or only slightly *encostado*, even if at the moment when he made the prediction everybody had thought that he was possessed. The reality of any possession experience thus depends less on the individual’s subjective experience than on the group’s validation of the performance during possession (what I have elsewhere called the “social construction of possession,” Frigerio 1989).

Conclusions

The data presented in this paper has shown that:

1) Spirit possession involves consciousness much more frequently than has been thought to be the case. Unconscious possession is emically preferred because consciousness brings problems in terms of the presentation of the possessed self, and even creates doubts in the possessed medium himself as to the reality of the experience. The most common way to deal with the problem is through "information control", mediums deemphasizing the fact that they are conscious.

2) The emic validation of possession depends less on the experience itself than on the practical results obtained through possession, mostly accurate diagnosis, prediction and efficient healing. This validation, however, is not definite, but subject to reinterpretation in the light of other events such as: later possession performances, happenings occurring outside the context of possession in everyday life, and by power conflicts within the group (a subject dealt with more intensively in Frigerio 1988b).

3) By distinguishing different levels of possession, practitioners widen the scope of the phenomena. They perceive the energy of the entities affecting them in different ways and in contexts other than public rituals. In everyday life, more than producing observable physical modifications, *encostamiento* and *irradiación* affect the medium's emotions or their behavior in relation to some other individual. Such states would not be considered possession by an outside observer, yet viewed emically they do imply an altered state of consciousness.¹⁰

Possession has traditionally been viewed from an etic perspective, linking it to a state of amnesia. In this paper though, I have employed an emic perspective in addition to an etic one to yield more fruitful insights into different levels and interpretations of possession. Previous scholars have studied possession as an all or nothing phenomenon, a discrete category that allows the possessed individual no leeway: either he is possessed and unconscious or else not possessed at all. My findings have shown that there is quite a large grey area between these two extreme categories. This hazy area is frequently referred to by the practitioners themselves, but has been ignored by scholars.

Notes

1. These three terms have been borrowed from Portuguese (*incorporação*, *encostamento*, *irradiação*). Although conjugated as Spanish words, their meaning derives from that language.

2. For the Umbandistas in Argentina, the "spiritual world" or ("astral world") consists of various layers of spirits in different stages of spiritual development. At the top of the hierarchy is God, then come the Orixas, below them the "guides: or Umbanda (mainly Caboclos and Pretos Velhos) and underneath these come myriads of unidentified spirits who "work" in the service of the "guides". Last in this scale come the Exus and Pomba Giras. The "astral world" can also be conceived as a mass of energy (God), composed of several different energies, the Orixas or "vibratory forces of nature" which would reach our world through less developed or potent energies (the Umbanda "guides" and the spirits acting at their orders). These energies "vibrate" within the "wavelength" of each Orixa. The idea of the spirits as "energies" is widespread (in fact the emic terms for spirits are "spiritual entities," "entities," and "energies") and helps to explain the existence of the three levels of possession which the Umbandistas distinguish.

3. The term *irradiación* is also commonly used to denote the transitional stage occurring just before the medium undergoes possession. At this stage the medium feels that the "energy," "vibration," or "fluid" of the entity is arriving and taking control of, or circulating through, certain parts of his body. As used in most of this paper, though, the term will denote a state in which the individual is affected by the nearby presence of the entity, but does not necessarily imply that the will experience a deeper level of possession.

4. Even in such cases, however, unconscious possession seems to be more valued. One of my informants who claimed he was a "conscious medium" nevertheless, in certain instances, when he wanted to stress how strongly possessed he had been by a spirit expressed that he did not remember anything of what had happened when possessed.

5. Possessed mediums speak only in "Portuguese" (actually a mixture of that language and Spanish) and therefore need a translator (called *camboño*) in order for the client to understand what they are saying.

6. A similar concern among Brazilian Umbandistas is noted by Pressel (1974:196). Cavalcanti (1983:117) shows that the problem also exists for Brazilian Spiritists.

7. For example, when I briefly returned to Argentina in December of 1987, I called one of my informants. This cheered him up not only because he wanted to see me, but also because his spiritual entity had said that he would hear from me soon. His interpretation was that since this prediction had come true, it was sign that the entity was "well positioned" in him and therefore, other important things he had predicted would also turn out to be true.

8. Elsewhere (Frigerio 1989) I have shown the importance both in everyday life and during possession sessions of the

performance of the leader and the "inner circle" of mediums who are closest to him in the socialization to and maintenance of the belief system. The existence of a "frontstage" and a "backstage" are crucial to this performance (Goffman 1959).

9. Pressel (1974:195) notes that this technique is also the most frequently used one in São Paulo.

10. In fact, by a least one etic definition of possession they could be considered as such. Winkelman (1986), describing Bourguignon's ideas on the subject, says that for this author, "possession trance involves 'alterations of discontinuity in consciousness, awareness or personality or other aspects of functioning' which are accounted for by possession, defined as a belief that 'a person is changed in some way through the presence in him or on him of a spirit entity or power, other than his own personality, soul or self'" (Bourguignon 1976:8 in Winkelman 1986:192).

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PUBLICATIONS

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VARIETIES OF POSSESSION EXPERIENCE

Continued from page 2

than as disjunctive, incompatible categories. That is, during a particular possession event the initiate might experience only a transitional form, or s/he might experience each of the variants with greater or lesser intensity at different times, or have them overlap as one fades into the other. None the less, a full experience of transcendent possession seems to be a rather rare case, particularly in the absence of strong motivation and a prolonged and intense ritual context. But even with those qualifications, this classification should help describe more parsimoniously and understand different instances and manifestations of possession.

Transitional Possession.

The first variant has been named by *vodun* practitioners as *saoulé*, or a state of inebriation, and it corresponds to what Frigerio reports as the *irradiación* state of possession. This category constitutes the transition between ordinary consciousness and a different mode of experiencing. It can be observed more clearly at the beginning and end of possession, although it may also be the predominant mode among novice practitioners who might have difficulties stabilizing another type of possession experience, either by attentional deficits and/or by ignorance of the traditional "syntax" to organize and give meaning to the possession event. But even among more experienced practitioners possession, as any form of conscious manifestation, should be considered a process with occasional changes in depth, involvement, etc., rather than as a "fixed" state of consciousness.

The changes observed in transitional possession can be understood according to Tart's (1975) theory, which proposes that (bio)psychological structures are organized according to a general pattern, or discrete state of consciousness, and that the transition between two states implies a change in functioning characterized by a brief period of cognitive and biological disorganization until the new pattern is formed and stabilized. The concept of a temporary disorganization is congruent with the transitions, usually involving unusual somatic sensations and changes in body image, described while falling asleep (e.g. Foulkes and Vogel 1965), going under anesthesia (Bennett 1987) and initiating a hypnotic experience (Cardeña 1988a).

Transitional possession is also commonly described in somatic terms including numbness, dizziness, occasional pain, lightheadedness, precarious equilibrium, cognitive disorganization (e.g. confusion), a sense of loss of control over the body and mental occurrences, and a more long lasting sense of energy circulating through the body (thereby the experience of being "irradiated"). Cognitive disorganization may explain the partial amnesia for this

period that is occasionally reported. Precisely because of the loss of control experienced during these transitions, leaders and advanced initiates learn to make these transitions as brief and smooth as possible, while maintaining some form of organized cognition (Dunham 1989; Cardeña, in press).

In many traditions, the importance of somatic sensations is stressed by a very common technique to induce possession, namely to start whirling (or for the leader to start spinning the person), thereby initiating the dizziness and confusion characteristic of the transition. Evidently, drumming, occasional drinking, dancing, etc. also help to destabilize the ordinary mode of awareness. The end of the transitional period may be marked by the very common sense of a weight or stroke on the neck and/or shoulders,³ indicating to the practitioners that the entity is ready to "mount" the initiate and proceed to behave according to the entity's characteristics. The process of increasing reconfiguration of biopsychological structures into a defined pattern (i.e. the manifestation of the spirit, energy, etc.) would be similar to the *encostamiento* that Frigerio mentions. These transitional manifestations, sometimes considered by practitioners as 'partial possession' (Frigerio, this issue), may occur outside of the ritual context, probably by a process of state-dependent memory (cf. Bower 1981) in which internal (e.g. anxiety) or external (e.g. the drumming in a different temple) cues may come to be associated with - and trigger - transitional possession.⁴

A plausible reason why the belief in a possessing entity is more commonly associated with physical movement, vocalizations, and interactions with the social environment involves the fact that the initiate experiences a number of unusual somatic sensations and body image changes. In contrast with the magical flight where bodily information may be minimal after going through a transitional period, the experience of a transformed body, remains in the foreground of conscious awareness through the constant influx of proprioceptive and other sensory information. The initiate may then question whether this strangely experienced body belongs to, or manifests, something or someone else. This naturalistic explanation, however, does not deny that, at least in some cases, the hypothesis of an external possessing entity may be tenable (cf. Krippner 1987).

Very few observations have been made on the transition from possession to an 'ordinary' mode of experiencing. While in some cases the transition may be gradual, in others it may be dramatic and involve total physical collapse (also observed at times during the transition into possession). Particularly in abrupt shifts, the transition into ordinary awareness may more clearly manifest biological and cognitive disorganization. The actual length of an individual's possession might be determined as much by the ritual context as by changing biological rhythms associated

with changes in conscious experience (cf. Rossi 1986), phrased by Frigerio's (1988) informants as a sense of a diminution of the "vibration" of the entities. The occasional experience of the initiates of momentarily going into a stronger possession while shifting into ordinary awareness (e.g. Frigerio 1988) may indicate the experience of shifting states and is remarkably similar to the frequent reports by hypnotized individuals of momentarily going into a "deeper" state as they come out of hypnosis (cf. Field and Palmer 1969).

Alternate Identity Possession

This variant of possession consists of a clear, differentiated alternate identity, whether human or otherwise, that takes over the usual identity of the individual. Less commonly (although admittedly this may be a report bias produced by the cultural prescription against admitting self-awareness of possession) there may be co-occurrence of the usual identity along with the alternate one. The alternate identity, even if it is considered to be a manifestation of an aspect of the world and the individual, is regarded by the practitioners as patently different from the roles adopted in different social contexts, although it is wise to remember in this regard that, as with "depth", role involvement can vary in intensity (cf. Shor 1979). One of the functions of an - usually culturally prescribed - alternate identity is to stabilize transitional possession into a stable state of consciousness with precise limits as defined by the characteristics of the spirit or force and the ritual context. The group's care in providing the entity's paraphernalia and modifying their interactions with the possessed individual help define and maintain an alternate identity possession (cf. Tart 1975). The transformations in the usual sense of identity crystallize onto a differently defined, unstable identity.

The unusual behavior observed when the person becomes transformed into a spirit, an ancestor, etc. has been frequently described in theatrical terms and, shared curse, both actors and possessed initiates are sometimes referred to as "hysteric", a label with clear pathological shadings.⁵ It is illustrative, none the less, to observe that even the great Charcot, who viewed hypnotic ability as pathological, remarked that hysteria can be described more as a particular form of feeling and reaction than as a pathology. Of course, this does not imply that there might not be specific instances of psychological maladjustment among possession initiates or in possession instances outside of a ritual context, but the same could be said of any human activity.

Besides stating that a change of identity is just a form of role playing does not address the enormous ontological ambiguity of the "acting" experience. Particularly in the province of human experience, the distinction between acting "as if" and "being" becomes blurred frequently and, at times, an initial imposture may end up altering autonomic

arousal and experience such that it becomes a truthful representation (cf. Lanzetta, Cartwright-Smith, and Kleck 1976). Role involvement varies across participants and for the same individual across situations; while a participant may be performing an action, all the time questioning its veracity, another might be so fully involved that s/he does not get distracted enough to doubt. Most of the time it seems that neither of these extremes is maintained for a very long time, but instead there is some fluctuation such that the initiates themselves may have doubts about the "truthfulness" of their possession, or they may doubt that of others (cf. Frigerio 1988).

The experiential reality of a possession enactment depends not only on the deliberate motivation to engage in the action, on the particular involvement in the role, or on the effects of this on the physiology and experience of the individual, but on the individual's general capacity to dissociate, that is, to detach different aspects of the personality from one's experience. The initiate who has become, for instance, Ogun, the fierce warrior, will have a far more intense and reliable experience if s/he does not have to hold that self-definition side by side with his/her usual self-concept as a meek individual. The initiate may be so concentrated on the "possessing" identity and actions that his/her usual forms of behaving and, ultimately, self-definition become dissociated, i.e., they are not a part of the stream of behaviors and mental occurrences. While dissociation is frequently mentioned as psychological maladjustment, it should also be considered a capacity that may liberate the person from unbearable threat and pain or, equally important, from a fixed notion of identity that may be as fictional (or real, if you will) as anything that is enacted.

In addition to a narrow deployment of attention, dissociation frequently involves a change in memory processes, (for instance not remembering, or purposefully distracting oneself from remembering, one's usual identity) as shown by the common thread of amnesia that underlies the so-called dissociative processes (cf. Spiegel and Cardeña, in press) and which is frequently reported by possession initiates. In the case of alternate identity possession, dissociation from the usual identity may be present during the possession event and amnesia for what transpired during the possession event may occur afterwards. However, full commitment to the alternate identity may be far less than perfect and, as Frigerio (1988) points out, the loss of personal memory, or what he calls "consciousness", is usually over-represented to convince the initiates and the outsiders of the veracity of possession.

I will briefly address now two marginal issues that frequently appear in the literature. Alternate identity possession has received a number of, usually, functionalistic explanations converging in the notion that possession allows

disadvantaged individuals the expression of impulses and drives that cannot be enacted within the normal thread of society (cf. van der Waelde 1968; Bourguignon 1976). The downtrodden, dusty indigent can become a divinity and obtain the power and respect that s/he usually lacks (Lewis 1989). A more general and accurate statement of this analysis, and one which covers those initiates who have social power outside of the ceremony, considers the multiplicity of being inherent in every human. Our everyday experience and analysis (and some psychological systems such as those of Freud, Jung, Gazzaniga, Ornstein, Gurdjieff, etc. that propose separate and simultaneous psychological/neurobiological processing centers), suggest that we frequently hold simultaneously contradictory emotions, beliefs and wishes, and that we both seem to regard and disregard what we conceive to be the limits imposed by reality. From this broader perspective, alternate identity possession can be conceived as a form of expressing and re-owning a part of our selves that is usually neglected or purposefully vanquished. This explanation is not necessarily antagonistic to the possibility that at least some aspects of what is manifested may go beyond the personal psychological level of the individual (see below).

A final point involves the easy temptation to equate alternate identity possession with the "multiple personality syndrome" (MPD) of psychiatric nosology; a temptation succumbed to by some authors despite a number of inherent problems, not the least of which is the apparent facility with which this connection is frequently "established" (e.g. Kenny 1981). Other difficulties include: 1) the distinctions of some native psychologies between what they regard as a pathological multiple personality disorder (MPD) and religious possession (cf. Krippner 1987); 2) the clear evidence for early traumatic etiology in MPD but not among possession initiates;⁶ 3) the distinction between a voluntarily induced, controlled and contextually appropriate possession (what Walker [1972], regards as involving a "regression in the service of the ego") and the usual experience of uncontrolled and involuntary manifestations reported by people afflicted with MPD; and 4) the phenomenological distinctions between most MPD manifestations and some possession phenomena, particularly transcendent possession.

Transcendent Possession

The final type of possession experience is embarrassingly discussed, if at all, in academic literature, although it probably is the most sought after experience by the practitioner. Without invoking a theological system, this mode of experience can be studied in its own terms (cf. Bataille 1954/1988). As defined here, transcendent possession is a religious experience *par excellence* that provides an option to the experience of limits, constrictions, and discontinuity found in the usual awareness of a person's

body and self. Although alternate identity possession, on its own, provides the option of exchanging the usual limits of a fractured personality for a more powerful and expanded sense of identity, even a spirit or a divinity has a particular cultural and/or personal definition that places it within the boundaries of the finite, definable, and graspable. The option provided by transcendent possession is far more radical than “just” exchanging one identity for another and it is, I think, a far more powerful motivator for undergoing the physical and psychological strain of possession than engaging in some “role-playing” to express repressed wishes.

In transcendent possession, the totally immersed, or “surrendered”, individual, if active (and possession is primarily a path through body actions), does not “perform” an act, a song or a movement, but *becomes* him/herself the act, the song, the movement. There is no separation between subject and object or action, because there is no subject to contemplate and provide a fracturing dialogue. In the words of Eliot, “A man does not join himself with the Universe so long as he has anything else to join himself with” (Eliot 1961). If a person carries an internal monologue wondering whether the person is in this state, most certainly s/he is not, as Eliot would have it. Partly through the banishment of splitting internal dialogue processes and personal history the individual may also experience at times an enormous sense of energy (the “boiling energy” of the !Kung) and consciousness change that, not being constrained by space or time, can be experienced as immeasurable vastness and nothingness. This process also brings about the experience of continuity, both within and without, so difficult to even approximate with the analytical tool of language.

To facilitate the elimination of internal dialogue and memory, the ritual context provides constant and intense sensory stimulation (auditory, kinesthetic, visual, etc.) to overwhelm the individual’s discursive mode. Furthermore, continuous stimulation in the form of drumming, dancing, chanting, etc., provides a background of continuity that helps maintain the unbroken unity experienced. Intense and continuous rhythmic activity may foster a unified organismic response by synchronizing the individual’s own biological rhythms and experience with those of the environment. Instead of a fragmented sum of parts, the experience of the body becomes that of a coherent, single-intention unity. Instead of different ideas, memories and percepts breaking into each other, there is full absorption into an experience where inner and outer are indistinguishable. Other occurrences, either strongly physical (e.g. orgasm) or not (e.g. a creative act) may also produce a related experience of non-directed integration when the person is totally absorbed in them (cf. Cardeña 1989).

But whatever, as yet poorly understood, techniques may be employed to facilitate this experience, it is not a mechanical process that just requires a source of “acoustic driving”

somehow taking control of brain activity and experience, as so many unaffected witnesses to possession can attest. At the very least, it seems to require courage to surrender one’s identity and control, a strong intent (in most cases through prolonged physical activity) to maintain the experience, attentional continuity and a facilitating cultural framework (cf. Rouget 1985). During transcendent possession, unless punctured by an intermittent return to other modes, the person unselfconsciously acts and may not fully remember the events transpiring since, for at least part of the time, there is no subject to separate him/herself from the experience.

Transcendent possession primarily involves a bodily path. Common manifestations found in various cultures include in addition to the transitional phenomena already mentioned, being stricken on the back of the neck, unusual vocalizations and movements, shaking, apparent impunity from damage, occasional mouth frothing, unfocused or fixed gaze, eyes rolling upwards, and a few others.⁷ These responses are found essentially unchanged among many different groups presumably because of the common biological inheritance of a human nervous system predisposed to a certain pattern of responses, poorly understood at this time. But to maintain that the somatic manifestations are mediated by the nervous system is not to impute their ontological validity, the same argument that could be made about perception and its underlying sensory processes.

Because of the lack of deliberate control and intense psychological and physical strain, the possession expert may decide to not fully abandon him/herself to transcendent possession but to maintain intermittent contact with the social/physical context (cf. Cardeña, in press). On the other hand and despite all the preparations and conscious motivation, a full sense of transcendent possession (probably subsuming what Frigerio calls in this issue “*incorporación*”) is not under the control of the conscious self and seems to be rather infrequent. Most possession initiates may only experience brief and momentary instances of transcendent possession, and therefore remain in doubt about how truly “possessed” or “manifested” they have become (cf. Frigerio 1988). The lack of full involvement, and consequent ambiguity about the status of the individual’s possession, can be expected to be more prominent within the context of a discrete and structured setting (e.g. a healing ceremony) in which the initiate is expected to “perform” at a certain time and place, independently of his/her current biological and psychological levels of motivation and preparedness. The difficulty to induce a full transcendent experience at will is not dissimilar to what occurs among those seeking it through other means, for instance, meditation. As with other forms of transcendent experience (cf. Aberbach 1987), I have observed that the return of the possessed individual to the ordinary mode of awareness, to the ambiguity of everyday

existence and to the world of a discrete identity, time and limitations, may bring a deep sense of awe and melancholy. Even transcendent possession can only bring temporary relief from the burden of personal identity.

Conclusions

There are few human phenomena that carry the complexity and ambiguity of possession: it challenges the notion of a unified, immutable self; of a facile distinction between "acting" and reality; of who or what is the source of one's actions; even of humans as single, isolated entities. A thorough discussion of any of these points would require a far more extensive treatment than is possible here and would likely leave the reader, looking for an easy way out of this cloth of ambiguities, dissatisfied. None the less, four points should be stressed:

- 1) the experience of possession is so widespread because it is based on something all humans share, namely a nervous system, a body, and through it a self towards which we relate in an ambiguous and shifting fashion;
- 2) three main modes of experiencing possession, usually included under one heading, are proposed to account for the substantial variability in possession manifestations;
- 3) possession experience may be divided analytically in various fashions (e.g. with regards to control, memory, etc.), but it ultimately requires a description as a whole, organized mode of experiencing;
- 4) much more information is needed from within the culture and the individual's experience to even begin to address possession with respect and coherence.

When we approach possession phenomenology as a fundamental challenge to our convenient sense of a discrete, conscious, controlling self, rather than as an exotic, alien and scary delusion, we might begin to understand the old utterances of the Greek sibyls and the dancing feet of Massine.

Notes

1. This seems to be the case at least among certain Brazilian (Walker, 1989) and Haitian (Cardeña, in press) practitioners.
2. Plato describes four aspects of divine mania (madness): prophetic ecstasy, cathartic mania, poetic mania and erotic mania (cf. Pieper 1964). In the universe of Haitian *vodun* and in other traditions, it is not uncommon to see all four elements appear: some form of prophesy and/or clairvoyance, the notion that possession may be a way to be healed and to heal others, the creative enactment of different roles and the common obscenities and sexual innuendoes of the Guede spirits.

3. Although, as far as I know, nobody has dealt with the issue of why possession so commonly involves sensations in the neck and shoulders, it is likely that the cerebral spinal fluid may be involved (cf. Quincy and Alter 1987).

4. Interestingly, Frigerio (1988) quotes a leader from an Afro-Brazilian temple suggesting that the way to make sure that the person becomes truly possessed is to concentrate "and abandon oneself to the entity", in a similar fashion to highly hypnotizable individuals who spontaneously found that the best way to "deepen" or maintain a deep state was to use a free-floating form of concentration (Cardeña 1988b).

5. It is of related interest that involvement in Dramatic Arts correlates with the ability to experience hypnosis in a structured context (cf. Hilgard 1979).

6. In addition to the very high percentage of reported traumata during childhood across studies and researchers, Coons and Milstein (1986) were able to obtain independent verification of abuse for 85% of their MPD patients.

7. Reference to sources - other than those included in this work - which generally coincide with this description, can be found in Cardeña (1989).

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture

by Walter L. Williams. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), xi + 344 pages, \$21.95. Reviewed by Rodney Simard, California State University, San Bernardino.

Perhaps as a result of recent controversies and developments in the plastic arts as much as anything else, the whole notion of tradition has recently come into question in American Indian studies. The stance for the latter half of this century has been one of lamentation for the extinction of "traditional" Native American cultures, philosophies, practices, and artifacts, no matter whether the cry comes from history, sociology, anthropology, or the arts. However, two centuries of assimilationist political practice - at its best - should hardly make a diminution of ancient practice surprising.

Now, given several discernible cycles of mutation, assimilation, extinction, and reemergence in Indian painting, craft, sculpture, performance, and literature, scholars in several areas are beginning to consider the possibility of evolution as a viable force in a consideration of traditional culture; perhaps something organic, something compatible with the circularity of the sacred hoop, is at work in the various cultures that make up American Indian life today. Perhaps what has most recently been labelled as "dilution" is actually an invigoration, and tradition is actually a fluid motion, not fixed and immutable but capable of change and growth. Perhaps the cultural continuity we have assumed is just another manifestation of an Anglo-European cultural chauvinism?

Walter Williams, an ethnohistorian in the important Study of Women and Men in Society Program at the University of Southern California, is among the first to meet these new possibilities in his Pulitzer-nominated study of sexual variation in Indian cultures. Combining the practices of history and anthropology as research disciplines, while avoiding the limitations often attendant on each in isolation, Williams has gone into the field as well as the library for his reconsideration of the Native berdache, a figure most often explained as "hermaphrodite" (even in such sensitive studies as Evan S. Connells' 1984 *Son of the Morning Star*). Working as a gay man, aware of the recent surge of gender-based studies of sexuality, Williams offers an approach and an insight important not just to American Indian studies.

Surveying accounts and records of the berdache tradition in several cultures, Williams examined the social role of this difficult figure from within the tribal groups he discusses, rejecting the quasi-physiological treatments of the past while also resisting any temptation to find evidence of prototypical gay role, politically and socially active. What he finds, instead, a mediating figure, neither male nor female, and

not bound by the polarities those two sexual roles often demand. The berdache emerges as an alternative gender, neither more nor less, better or worse, but rather one that allows for characteristics of both the female and male in a social role accepted by various cultures within American Indian societies. This finding should come with little surprise, since many Native groups have always been accommodating of atypicality, finding place and function for the individual, irrespective of heredity, inclination, temperament, or ability.

More challenging are Williams' findings about the spiritual dimensions of berdachism. The very difference that creates the berdache also informs his position (Williams explores only the male role, recognizing that the female equivalent needs its own study); in Lakota religion, he states, "berdaches are seen as magical holders of unique ritual instructions. Since they are guided by a spirit, they are not bound by normal rules of conduct. This unusualness is an indication of sacredness" (p. 32). The ability to embrace both genders in a third offers a unique and valuable perspective and awareness. Respect is due this sensitivity because of its rarity - of manifestation and insight - and because the equanimity with which it is assimilated into the cultural group needs not fight with any perception of its being freakish or alien, and thus threatening. The berdache promises to enrich and advance, not subvert and diminish. As Williams observes, "the role the mediator is to hole the polarities together, to keep the world from disintegrating" (p. 21).

Williams claims dual purposes for his study; to preserve the truth of a significant cultural element, and to foster its continuity among the young of the cultures that may be experiencing homophobic pressure to suppress its value and centrality. His admirable study will, indeed, accomplish both while still pointing the way for valuable future study. As he says, "The interaction of continuity and change is at the base of the human story, and any theory that ignores one of those elements is faulty" (p. 275). American Indian studies, and many others involving human sexuality, have an important new pattern in *The Spirit and the Flesh*.

Animated Earth

by Daniel K. Statnekov. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1987), 126 pages, 8 full page plates & 3 halfstone figures, index, \$9.95 paper. Reviewed by Joseph K. Long, Plymouth State College of New Hampshire.

Those who attended the 1988 AASC Annual Meeting found the Tibetan cymbal playing and Peruvian (Chimu and Moche, mainly) water bottle whistling a treat if not an astonishment. When the first seven participants played the bottles, the response was electrifying. As one of those, I took an immediate interest, realizing that the whistles might well be the most powerful psychedelic and brain stimulant yet discovered. I had realized that there was some suggestion

that people believed in such an effect from music for millennia. With Andrew Neher's 1962 article on neurophysiology of drumming anthropologists came to realize that such effects were demonstrable and major. Manfred Clynes (in *The Touch of Emotions*, Prentice-Hall, 1977) expanded on the theoretical dimensions of the research. "OBE master" Robert Monroe (see *Wholemind* 1(7):4, June 1988) and various others (see *Brain/Mind Bulletin* 13(10):4-5, July 1988) continue the sound and music research. Following the music at the annual meeting, I told workshop leader Katherine Wersen that I had in the early 1979's corresponded with on Dan Stat, who was working with these same double chambered whistling bottles: "Yes," Katherine replied, "He made these."

After the meeting I wrote to Stat, finding that his address had changed, his name was now Statnekov, and his book had been published (Statnekov, personal comm., May 3, 1988). His experiences, travels, and research had progressed far beyond the point of my last communications with him. This brief popular book is based on far more research that is the average doctoral dissertation in anthropology. The book is a conglomeration of acoustical physics, anthropology, archeology, shamanism, and transcendental state research, interspersed with the personal events of journey and travel diaries from Pennsylvania (purchase of the first Chimu bottle at antique auction), the American Museum of Natural History (with Peruvianist Dr. Junius Bird), UCLA's Museum of Cultural History (Christopher Donnan), Franklin Institute (acoustical engineer Bill Hargens), Peru (Machu Picchu) of course, and, finally the Santa Monica Mold Shop (George Binkeley) in West L.A.

The immediate effect of playing the whistles is transcendental for some participants. The really interesting aspect which Statnekov discovered only after collecting more bottles is that the really powerful psychedelic effects are obtained only when more than one is played together by different musicians. The tones are rich in harmonic partials or "overtones," five or possibly more (p. 24), and predictably the more double bottle whistles played the more resonance some overtones, particularly in the lower register, gain and the more powerful the impact on brain tissue. Statnekov and other perceive the sound (like a swarm of bees) buzzing inside the head: "I could actually feel the sound" (p.33). At the same time, the inner ear subtracts some tones from one another, producing "auditory beats" in our perception. Hargens had earlier discovered that, unlike sounds produced by most musical instruments which are projected away, the bottle whistles are projected back to the musician playing the instrument (p. 24). So, the sounds seem bizarre both to Western and (probably) to Eastern ears. (In my own case, I experienced an apparently rare perception, that of ostensibly being able to see the auditory beats and resonances as the sound waves of my whistle interacted with

those of others; this may represent a second intrabrain effect of waves inside the skull impacting on the visual field controlled in the occipital lobe as well as the acoustic ones of the temporal lobe.)

In the process of research, Statnekov has discovered various types of indirect evidence (aside from the above facts, which are perhaps enough unto themselves) which compellingly suggest that these particular bottles - only a minority of the the double-chambered types have whistles - were specifically used for sacred rituals, possibly only by the leaders of some incipient shaman-priesthood which developed around 1000-1500 A.D., only to be prematurely destroyed by the Spanish. Joseph Campbell and Huston Smith have of course discussed the powerful impact of sound - "Aum" - and music on mythological and religious substance. ". . . perception in the peak-experiences can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish. It can come closer to being unmotivated, impersonal, desireless, detached, not needing or wishing" (Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 1970, Viking, p. 62). This kind of impact is evident in terms of Statnekov's own life changes following his original discovery. But the average changes following his original discovery. But the average anthropological researcher is not equipped to deal with such complex matters, involving transcendental experience, acoustics, etc.

As noted in the Prologue (p. 1), a British scholar presented a paper in New York City for the International Congress of Americanists in 1949 suggesting that the whistling bottle was merely a "happy accident" (and so this reich ethnographic finding stopped until Statnekov's appearance on the scene in 1972). (As a cynical aside, I would note that it might have provided the subject for a number of dissertations before that had it not been for the fact that the results of all this tend to suggest the "irrational," "occult," and "magical" to the average anthropologist or archeologist, who is almost invariably a very superstitious sort.)

Binkeley, in Santa Monica, eventually taught Statnekov to make bottles by casting, and, after trips around the U.S.A. to find proper clays, the author finally succeeded in replicating the bottles with precision, to the point of making the sounds produce the same in facsimile copies as in the originals. The balance of this book describes Castanedian - Shirley MacLainian experiences in testing the bottles with groups from Esalen and communes of the Southwest down to Peru itself (but no OBE flights, UFO's, or jeeps driving themselves).

This is a spell-binding book and Statnekov is to be congratulated for revealing enough to us to establish the enormous if unusual interest the whistles represent in terms of anthropological and other research. Let us hope he continues and that others also become involved.

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