



When Spirits Become Therapists: Ethnopsychology and Hypnotherapy in Brazil

Maurício S. Neubern¹

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Abstract

The present work seeks to demonstrate through a case study that hypnotherapy, under ethnopsychological inspiration, can combine spiritual manifestations in a person's therapeutic process. This work highlights, on the one hand, the influence of spiritual beings as part of a larger collective machinery that must be acknowledged in their own references as a working condition. This text proposes a way of understanding the meaning of these beings from the ecology of their machinery, in order to oppose a reductionist and colonialist perspective that translates them into distant categories from their universes, such as imagination, hallucination, brain damage, or defense mechanism. On the other hand, a rereading of hypnotherapy is proposed through its principles of acceptance and utilization, emphasizing the importance of modes of the relationship as therapeutic resources. Using some concepts from semiotics, focus is set on the construction of the relationship between the protagonists in the hypnotic relationship and on their condition as signs of collective universes. Next, there is emphasis on the construction of certain roles, such as prophet-witness, master-disciple, and doctor-patient, and the ways these can be fundamental to establishing a therapeutic contract with a person and accessing their world. The article is concluded by confirming that acceptance must encompass individual and collective knowledges and that the use of hypnotherapy, far from a mechanical and repetitive process, should contemplate the person in holistic terms.

Keywords Hypnotherapy · Ethnopsychology · Trance · Spirituality · Semiotics

✉ Maurício S. Neubern
mauricio.neubern@gmail.com

¹ Department of Clinical Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Brasília, ICC Sul, Brasília, Brazil, Campus Darcy Ribeiro, Brasília, DF 70910-900, Brazil

Many societies in Latin America such as Brazil can be considered societies of multiple universes; they contain no hegemony or a single way of knowing in people's daily lives (Nathan and Stengers 1999). Contrary to what occurs in Western Europe and North America¹ (that is, in single-universe societies), where which modern science assumes hegemony, in Brazil, distinct knowledges coexist without necessarily disagreeing with each other: getting COVID-19 might be seen through a biological cause (the coronavirus), but it is also understood as a test from God; the romantic attraction between two people warrants not only psychological explanations but spiritual ones, such as the reunion of souls that had been connected in previous incarnations, as well; being depressed is explained by low serotonin and by nefarious spiritual influences as well, like a magic spell; a young person who is admitted to college may be understood through virtue of knowledge acquired and through a blessing from their *orixá*² (Neubern 2018). Unlike single-universe societies, in which humanity is the only thinking power of the universe, in multiple-universe societies, humanity is in constant relationship with the invisible world and, in turn, inhabited by beings such as spirits, gods, demons, ancestors, angels, *orixás*, and djinns, with whom one must communicate and negotiate on important issues of social life (Nathan and Stengers 1999).

The consequences of this sort of sociocultural context can be problematic for psychotherapy in general—and hypnotherapy in particular—because therapists commonly reduce the ecology of processes that constitute the other's universe into categories, hence mischaracterizing their original meanings and eventually imposing highly disqualifying narratives that colonize their experiences (Godoy and Bairrão 2018; Nathan 2014). Imagination, hysteria, psychosis, sexual frustration, attention-seeking, defense mechanisms, parental conflict, hallucination, and delirium are just some labels used by therapists when patients report their spiritual experiences in therapy (Neubern and Nogueira 2019). That situation, beyond possibly leading the patient to omit their experiences in therapy, also risks worsening a patient's clinical state and breaking their bond with the therapist, as they often feel rejected, disrespected, or satirized, thereby aggravating their suffering.

Faced with this problem, ethnopsychology can be a highly suitable alternative, as it acknowledges the legitimacy of spiritual knowledges that infuse people's experiences. Even with its diversity of trends, ethnopsychology advocates that making sense out of spiritual experiences should be considered in the ecology and in the original collective systems and practices upon which they have set their roots (Bairrão 2017; Bouznah and Lewertowski 2013; Nathan 2014), instead of being restricted to categories appropriated by modern science's single universe, namely, the individual, the social, the language, and the brain. Thus, therapists should not attempt

¹ The distinction between societies of single and multiple universes cannot be so rigid, since in countries like Brazil, there are people and institutions (especially into universities) which can take the single universe as reference as well as in Western countries there are also people and institutions for whom the multiple universe are the reference (Nathan 2014).

² Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, the *orixás* are spirits sent by the supreme god to guide creation in general and humanity in particular. Many *orixás* came to the New World during the slave trade centuries.

to translate what happens to the other into their categories but rather to understand one's experience based on their individual and collective underlying references (Paloutzian and Park 2021). This posits a more balanced therapeutic relationship, in which the therapist recognizes the relevance of another knowledges and allows them to be expressed in terms of their own practices and worldviews—fundamental points to understand their peculiar meaning constructions (Neubern and Nogueira 2019).

However, these concepts do not often appear in hypnotherapy, despite the pioneering contribution of authors such as Erickson and Akstein, whose work bears close similarity to ethnopsychology (Neubern 2018). In general terms, it is possible to view present-day hypnotherapy as strongly based on technical usage of the various demands from contemporary societies, with no apparent relevance to the discussions proposed by ethnopsychology. Despite the technical and conceptual potential of their practices, hypnotherapists risk being in the same position: constructing colonized relationships distant from and disqualifying of spiritual experiences.

Thus, departing from a case study³ with abundant spiritual manifestations, this work seeks to demonstrate the ways hypnotherapy, under ethnopsychological inspiration, can assimilate these manifestations into a therapeutic process, based on two axes. Firstly, the therapeutic influence of spiritual beings is highlighted, referring both to acknowledging their legitimacy on collective knowledge based on their own references and the ways concrete integration of these resources in the therapeutic process can benefit the person in question. According to these knowledges (Nathan 2014), spiritual beings are important agents in the healing process—so, to recognize them as beings that integrate a broader machinery is a central condition for ethnopsychological practices. Secondly, hypnotherapy seeks to promote its reinterpretation from an ethnopsychological basis (Neubern 2018; Neubern and Nogueira 2019). This text proposes a rereading of Erickson's principles of acceptance and utilization (Erickson and Rossi 1979) through an ethnopsychological lens that emphasizes forms of relationships as a mode to access spiritual universes. Given that ethnopsychology does not contain a specific theoretical and conceptual basis, Peirce's semiotics (1998) was chosen as a possible path toward understanding the clinical application of these principles and the change processes that have occurred.

³ The research, from which this work derives, was submitted to the ethics committee of the university and all ethical conditions for working with human subjects were strictly complied with. So, the name and other information about her are fictitious, in order to maintain the secrecy about her identity. The patient also signed a term of research that follows the Brazilian law about research with human beings.

Method

Basic Principles

Semiotics and Hypnosis

The work proposed here was developed through the method of the qualitative case study (Neubern 2018), profoundly inspired by Peirce's semiotics (Peirce 1998). According to him, signs are at the root of semiotic understanding and consist of something that represents an object and produces an effect (interpretant) in the interlocutor's mind. They can be classified into three rough types according to the object they represent: icons that bear a relationship of quality and similarity, such as images, emoticons, and hieroglyphs; indices that have causal (for example, foot-steps in sand or a scar) or functional relationships, such as the temperature marked on a thermometer; and symbols that bear a relationship based on laws, habits, and conventions, such as the argument in a speech. In terms of phenomenology (Peirce 1998), in which knowledge focuses on apprehending the mind in its relationships with the world, signs can be linked to three basic dimensions. Firstness, more oriented toward qualities, potential, the present, and feelings, is logically related to icons, while secondness, in the realm of reactions, the singular, and of the extant, is tied to indexes. Finally, thirdness, the dimension of thought, laws, and conventions, is related to symbols. Given the various possible links between signs, including those rooted in practical situations, this classification begets a subclassification connected to the first: iconicity (Nöth 2015). Images that transmit the qualities of their objects are first-firstness signs, while diagrams, which highlight the relationships between the objects they represent, denote second-firstness signs, whereas metaphors, combining two distinct sorts of objects within the same sign, refer to third-firstness signs.

This perspective allows for a view of subjectivity in terms of two primary systems (Colapietro 2016): the ego and the self. The first refers to a dimension of identity, in which the subject recognizes themselves and is recognized socially primarily through signs connected to one's name and to other modes of belonging (ethnicity, body, gender, social class, official identification, and so on). It is a dimension of socially shared consensuses and conventions that enables the subject to position and guide themselves in their daily world. Even though it has collective roots (Morin 2015), the ego constitutes an identity system deeply bound to conscious conception of the first person. The self refers to a dimension that precedes the ego's emergence and elevates it; even while promoting the construction of individual identity, it is pervaded by collective influences. As with subjectivity, the self consists of various mostly unconscious systems. It can process, reflect, and make decisions prior to ego awareness, that is, at different levels of agency (Gallagher 2014), which are decisive in the subject's life.

The ego, as much as the self, in semiotic configurations⁴ refers to different systems of sociocultural objects (practices, transgenerational delegations, institutions, conversations, rituals, laws), eco-biological objects (of genetic, biological, or ecological origin), and individuals (connected to one's path in life or the subject's particular organizational modes). However, semiotic production is highly dynamic; even if there are decisive events as objects, diverse sociocultural and environment exchanges constitute important influences that alter the subjectivity's sign configurations. In that process, this complex system composed of ego and self is quite active, creating semiotic processes within relational agendas, with which it does not hold a mechanical or linear relationship. Reflectiveness, that is, the state in which a person can think, criticize, and control (Colapietro 1989; Petrilli 2017), suggests greater coordination between the ego and the self, as well as a broader integration between the deep processes of the inner world and the capacity to see it from the outside, so the subject becomes the object of analysis themselves. This condition is an important symbol for the view that the subject is not merely a product of the world, but a protagonist who also constructs it.

These perspectives enable a conception of hypnosis⁵ as a process formed by two large systems (Neubern and Nogueira 2019): trance, characterized by changes in ego-world relationships, and the communication that triggers it, which can be intentional (cultural technologies, such as therapeutic techniques or religious rituals) or spontaneous. Among the lived references that compose trance, there are space, time, cause, and matter, fostering the construction of relevant social consensus around notions (Clément 2011) such as good vs. evil, sacred vs. profane, masculine vs. feminine, human vs. animal, real vs. imaginary, and madness vs. sanity. In trance, a person's experience can, for example, redefine notions of space and time to inhabit a given social consensus. At the same time, they can see themselves in a scene from infancy, leading to important changes in the construction of meaning. In other situations, meaning also modifies itself through changes in ideas from the social consensus, as in the case of a Siberian people's shaman who, in trance, becomes the spirit-wife of the deer—the people's totem animal (Clément 2011). The power of semiotic generation of similar experiences is seen as a collective and spiritual worldview; not infrequently, it contrasts with hegemonic consensual worldviews from the social world in which the ego is embedded.

Ethnopsychology

With different theoretical threads, ethnopsychology consists of an approach to traditional knowledges that seeks to understand them based on their own world references and concepts (Bairrão 2017; Neubern 2018). Born as an alternative to anti-colonialist research and understanding, it states that there is no difference between

⁴ Signs have a highly dynamic influence amidst these configurations, as they are translated into other signs; that is, the phenomenon of semiosis occurs (Liszka 1996).

⁵ The author suggest the comparison of this conception of hypnosis with the socio-cognitive theories (Lynn et al. 2012).

those who know (such as modern scientists) and those who believe (for example, specialists in a religion), because each knowledge possesses its own criteria for legitimacy and truth, unreducible to another (Latour 1991). That separation happens because these knowledges are collective and are produced from great sociocultural machineries (Nathan 2014), i.e., collective systems encompassing worldviews, practices, objects, initiations, specialists, and devices that form specific beings connected to technical criteria from their respective machineries. Furthermore, while the electron is an entity produced/revealed by specific machinery⁶ (modern science), by specialists (scientists, physicists, and chemists), initiates (students), and *dispositifs* (the laboratory), a spirit is a being connected to a spiritual machine (in spiritism, for example), with specialists (mediums), and a specific *dispositif* (the *séance*). Trying to understand a being through distinct machinery from or even antagonistic to its object tends to spawn inconsistent or even paradoxical concepts, given the need to consider each being (as configurations of signs) in their own developmental niche (with their systems of objects).

Consequently, the construction of a subject's feelings and meanings about their spirituality must be conceived within the ecology of their spiritual and cultural universes, with their own machinery and knowledges (Neubern and Nogueira 2019). The distinctiveness of a spiritual vision, for example, evokes a complex interweave of individual and collective processes that must be qualified not only in terms of that person's subjective situation but in terms of their spiritual universe and collective constructions, as well. Otherwise, a subtle colonization process settles over the therapeutic relationship, as individual subjective constructions are coupled with other realities, defined by the therapeutic references of the therapist, unmooring them from original environs.

Isadora Ribeiro, Age 57, Professor

When Isadora arrived for her appointment, she presented with markers of a severe psychiatric crisis (Minkowski 1999). Her speech was broken into distinct, intersecting stories that disoriented her and caused her to easily lose any rational train of thought. She seemed tired, anxious, and dejected, exhibiting a significant lack of vitality. Contact with others and the world, in general, had always seemed hostile: a simple glance at her while out walking could be seen as aggression. When she could walk in public areas, she experienced losses of consciousness and frequently grew confused about time and space. Thoughts of death were increasingly frequent, reaching the point of wanting to take risks among ongoing traffic. In her first attempt to enter trance, she reported finding herself up to the waist in a pool of mud, which demanded an immediate therapeutic intervention to pull her out of that scene and

⁶ Machinery is a term developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) to explain a collective construction, with many articulated parts and an independent form of organization. Then, machinery, like a machine, has its own organization and functioning which are independent of human deliberateness. Spiritual knowledges have their own machineries, which are composed of practices, objects, beings, ideas, teachings, worldviews, rituals, devices (*dispositifs*) students, and specialists.

into another, with clear water and great peace in a beautiful landscape. She reported not feeling “well-dressed” in her own body, which seemed odd to her, with a feeling of not belonging to her family, language, or country. During the initial phase of therapy, there was an agreement in which, if there was no improvement, she would seek psychiatric help (to which she was strongly opposed). After her mother’s death and two years of therapy, she had significant bodily pain and was diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

The crisis that led her to seek help was triggered by her discovery that her husband was being adulterous, that being her second marriage. The legal battle that followed was grueling; due to a delay in discovering the affair, Isadora needed to be rescued by members of the Church she attended at the time, to prevent starvation. In her personal history, she reported being the adoptive daughter of a rich agricultural family from Northeastern Brazil and having received a high level of education. Nevertheless, her family life was violent, full of various forms of aggression, lies, and manipulation, including financial. Her deeply conservative family held her responsible for the end of her first marriage: divorce was unacceptable to them. They also accused her of wanting to prostitute herself—for only a woman bent on a path of sin would give up custody of her three children. Although she had managed to study, despite her emotional troubles, and had become a university professor, she abandoned her career due to the difficulties of her institution and because she planned to dedicate herself to her second marriage. In her family, her spiritual manifestations were seen as signs of madness or attempts to manipulate people. These episodes fostered the development of narratives about set for failure, prostitution, cluelessness, incompetence, and madness. The suffering that such narratives imposed on her was such that, even at the age of almost 50, she felt prevented from developing basic life topics such as maintaining a social network and her profession as a professor. The loss of his profession, motivated by intense depressive crises, was pointed out as one of her greatest sources of suffering.

Her treatment continued for around seven years: the first two consisted of individual hypnotherapy in a private office, while the remainder took place in her own home and was associated with a research group at the university and led by a therapist, the author of this article. In this second stage, there were some private meetings with the therapist and others with the research team, which consisted of students and professionals. In addition to some filmed records, the author also used a small field diary, through which he made notes and considerations that helped him reflect on the process. The team varied from year to year from group member turnover; some members needed to focus on other aspects of their education at the university. The spiritual manifestations occurred in trance, as a spirit used Isadora’s body to interact with the group, demonstrating paranormal abilities of various types—divination, medical diagnoses, telepathy—and a worldview whose logic was not always easily understood. These spirits, generally Chinese, referred to their long years in the Rosicrucian Fellowship, an esoteric group active in various countries. They claimed to belong to a spiritual fraternity called the White Brotherhood,⁷ known in Rosicrucian

⁷ According to Theosophy, a group of superior spirits destined to guide humanity.

groups and led by Master Chen, the spirit who most often manifested itself through Isadora.

After treatment, Isadora presented considerable improvement in her condition, eliminating, or reducing her psychiatric symptoms. She increased the size and quality of her social circle and built meaning in her life that evolved from an existential void into undertaking a spiritual mission of service to other people. Though her pain persisted, trance seemed to serve as an important regulator of these processes for her, conferring significant improvement to her quality of life.

Principles

Acceptance

Being Present and Hypnosis

The first thing Isadora said upon arriving for her appointment was:

Hello. My name is Isadora Ribeiro. I'm 57, a Professor, and I'm coming out of a terrible divorce. I want to tell you everything I'm going through, my whole story, but I only want to ask one thing: please, don't judge me!

The previous excerpt contains the most pertinent question for the hypnotherapist on ways to establish a therapeutic relationship. Moreover, while hypnotherapy has a considerable technical tradition (Zeig 2014), Isadora's introduction touches on a central issue to the therapeutic relationship: the necessary attitude with an interlocutor. As such, the main issue here is not seeing the other from the outside, as if it were necessary to see the person as an object to modify them through technique, that is, to reduce the other into typical categories in a relationship of control, like behavior patterns, cognition, and symptoms. Rather, the role of the therapist is to establish empathy with the other, to understand their world from the inside, as if the therapist could enter it—and, from that point, understand the other's way of being, their universe, references, stories, values, and feelings about important things in their life. To establish such a situation, it is critical for the therapist to adopt one of the central clinical principles of many psychotherapeutic schools (Binswanger 2008): to be present in the relationship with the other. Being permeated by firstness, experiencing the present encompasses possibility, particularly in complex cases such as Isadora's.

That attitude advances hypnotherapy in significant ways. It implies an immersion of the ego within the self, causing the ego to get involved in typical firstness experiences, as if it could bathe in the lake of possibility, where past traumas lose some of their impact and enable constructions yet to come (Seif 2019), with a deep sense of consideration for the other. The process can be considered trance, since the focus on living in the present tends to rescale many established references in one's relationship with the world, including constructions about their self, fate, and relationships (Neubern 2018).

Another consequence of that perspective is Erickson's acceptance principle (Erickson and Rossi 1979), which constitutes a powerful method of influence upon

that other, who is presented with a specific and new relational agenda. In acceptance, as understood here, a view is developed in which different semiotic expressions are gradually integrated into an understanding of the other's world, particularly in relation to one's way of being and constructing meaning. It is a way of applying the naturalist principle (Erickson and Rossi 1979), as it refers to the singularity of each person's way of being, including their resources and capabilities. It is an attitude of third-firstness, because the therapist does not set rationality aside; instead, they develop a reflection linked to feelings, something still quite diaphanous and fragile, connected to the freshness of the present moment and its events. Thus, the therapist's reflection departs not from formal, academic theories related to pure thirdness, but from developing thought that contemplates, chooses, and, little by little, assimilates what comes from the other, seeking to acknowledge it from the other's own world.

With Isadora, there was a concern that the therapist's interventions and speech might be highly sympathetic, avoiding as much as possible any word or gesture that might seem an invasion or attack upon her world, as her boundaries with the social plane were too fragile, and any aggression coming from the therapist could be disruptive. Confrontations, provocations, and paradoxes could not, therefore, be part of the initial process—only a language based on techniques and redefinition (Erickson 1992), such as the following statement by the therapist:

Isadora, please, I ask that you see if what I'm about to say makes any sense. Please, be sincere in your evaluation. You are telling me a *very hard and very difficult* story, with *very cruel* episodes... I don't know if you will be able to assess today, in the midst of this confusion, how much it has affected you ... but you know that it brought you much suffering, an enormous amount and that *a lot of people don't understand you*. I won't ask you what the path will be right now, what you learned, or what you decided to do ... but I want to ask you one thing: how did you endure it all and not go crazy? Or maybe, how have you gone through so much and are still live?

Note that this intervention, in terms of technique, does not add any novelty to Erickson's approach (1992). The first sentences, as she is asked to evaluate the therapist, were a way to use her acute critical sense and to insert the subject of judgment in favor of and not against what was common in her social circle. The next sentences, including the terms emphasized in italics, are truisms that seek to confirm her inner world, acknowledging her great suffering. When the therapist states that he will not ask these questions, he puts himself in a different position from previous therapists; even when he did ask the questions, he included important subliminal messages: there was something so powerful in her that it kept her great suffering from driving her to madness or death—here introduced as a subject, under a distinct perspective from her family's and other personal narratives, as if something in her had held these two tragic outcomes at bay.

Likewise, the relationship between ego and self, while pervaded by being in the present, refers to the therapist's integrity as well—an issue with vital clinical consequences. In other words, the experience of the present can provide the therapist with a more authentic way to put oneself in the relationship, summoning highly valuable

resources for that process and even casting the therapist as a sign of legitimacy and trust—without having done anything to make it explicitly so. There is, at this point, a considerable concentration of iconicity, as decisions and attitudes simply reveal themselves to the interlocutor without explication, often with strong therapeutic impact (Neubern 2016). When the therapist adopted the attitude of inviting her to proceed with therapy, even without paying, there were important changes in the therapeutic process, because Isadora lowered her defenses significantly and was able to advance in challenging areas of her experience that, until then, had seemed blocked.

Years later, she confessed to a member of the team that this attitude on the part of the therapist is what really made her trust him: because getting paid while caring for her psychological and emotional integrity had not been important to him. In fact, the therapist felt that any interruption in the process could have tragic effects on her. Beyond the complexity of the moment, they could have confirmed contempt or rejection in her eyes coming from a support figure yet again. It is worth highlighting that money was always a sign configured in her history, for lies, manipulations, and violence; here was someone who felt that money was superfluous when it came to offering her care.

The Meeting of Worlds

In an ethnopsychological perspective (Neubern 2018), it is important to stress that acceptance goes beyond individuals. It becomes a mediation between the worlds they represent as signs. Being available and present puts the protagonists in a dissociative state that transcends limits and references in relationships between ego and world, situating them in a field of experience traversed by collective machinery. In that field, frequently accessed through trance states and dreams, there is semiotic production that is at the same time individual and collective; it characterizes the attributed influences, in various cultures, to the spiritual world (Clément 2011; Corbin 2008). Remedies, prophecies, persecutions, spells, reconciliations, pronouncements, and teachings offered by spiritual beings or specialists are common in this field and play a central role in terms of ethnopsychological understanding. Just as the therapist, as a sign, is connected to their knowledge, theoretical affiliations, and beings of cultural belonging, so is their interlocutor to their own entire universe. As a result, the encounter is a meeting of worlds (Neubern 2016), so acceptance is not limited to two individuals in a therapeutic relationship, but it necessarily implies a relationship between their worlds through a process in which distinct machinery develops a horizontal relationship such that each knowledge is legitimized in its specificity.

When Master Chen began his manifestations to Isadora, the therapist soon saw he should seek to understand their different semiotic productions from outside the logic of his own world, as typically colonialist (Neubern 2018) traditional psychological knowledges might derail any possible connection. Erickson's naturalistic perspective (Erickson and Rossi 1979) should be considered in a radical way: it is important for such a world to manifest and present itself from its own references, so that the therapeutic process can take place. Through his availability, the therapist always

asked Master Chen or one of his subordinates to explain what was happening in context and, in particular, what their intentions were. This way, different signs referred to a large and complex universe (their object), from which it became possible to understand gradually the logic they possessed. Teachings, telepathic messages, predictions, and medical and spiritual diagnoses were thus forms of communication in relation to esoteric knowledge (the White Brotherhood), whose intention was to impact team members and transmit these knowledges to them. As in other traditions (Clément 2011; Morin 2015), the spiritual world requires humans and commonly uses their power to establish contact, with the aim of making itself present in the earthly world through these vehicles.

This way of interacting was decisive in conceiving an important ethnopsychological principle (Neubern 2018): it is not possible to speak about the other, only with them. The dialogue with Isadora or with the spirits soon led the therapist to realize he knew nothing about that world and that, therefore, his ignorance should inspire him to express himself through questions or allow them to propose some sort of activity themselves. This type of scenario promoted the establishment of an “us” between protagonists and their worlds (Neubern 2018), constructing a relational and affective space in which both felt themselves as legitimate and committed, and, above all, they belonged, so even human representatives became signs of that relationship.

This ethnopsychological version of the therapeutic contract is composed of two primary points. On the one hand, “we” refers to a state in which it is important that the therapist be questioned. For their part, the spirits and Isadora herself challenged the team members, at times revealing their contradictions, concepts, virtues, and limits in the face of spiritual questions. These were a sort of test for them, as seen in the following example of an intervention by Master Chen:

You, Ricardo, need to have your pancreas and liver checked. This malaise you feel comes from them. Another thing: you like to drink alcohol, and this isn't bad, but your health problems mean you should stop... the doctor will say something about it. As for your job offer, stay tuned. The other company will make a better offer and the current one will try to fool you with false promises. Accept the other company's offer, because you'll have a chance to grow there... at the current one, you won't.

In this example, the spirit intervenes after a request by Ricardo himself, a young psychologist associated with the team who had concerns about his health and work. The statement was accurate: the doctor scheduled surgery to remove some stones from his pancreas, not to mention signs of liver cirrhosis that were beginning to appear. As for his job, Ricardo chose to stay with his current employer, and, after a year, he felt tricked by unfulfilled promises and lack of prospects for professional growth. That demonstration of power, according to the masters, was indeed meant as a sort of test, not only so the team members would learn to reflect on the spiritual work, but more specifically for them to take stock of their own attitude. “Here, everyone must be naked,” said Master Chen, in a concrete allusion to the sincere need of group members to deal with the spiritual world. Young Ricardo, for example, in accepting the proposal to stay with his current employer only to regret it later,

became, for himself and the group, rather greedy, something that had already caused him trouble earlier in his life.

This level of exposition, carefully done, was fundamental for the creation of “we,” as it implied an openness that could let the masters accept them. Such an elevated acceptance seemed a two-way street, as opposed to the typical principle applied exclusively by therapists toward their clients (Bairrão 2017; Nathan 2014). It was, in a way, about promoting greater coherence between the ego and the self, unveiling the first of their defenses and artifices. At the same time, it was through this opening that affective bonds could be brought to fruition, fostering a stronger connection between those participating in the process (Roxburg et al. 2015). In ethnopsychological terms, it was a condition so the spiritual world would be able to reveal itself; as in various traditions (Corbin 2008; Otto 2017), purity of intent and coherence are requirements for people so they can interact and receive important revelations from the spiritual world (Raposa 2020). It is not an accident that such procedures used prior to important access to the spiritual world were proposed by the masters to the team members. These included procedures such as directed meditation, in which many reported seeing various figures, landscapes, beings, and events. Some team members reported feeling emotionally touched by these processes, adding to their personal and professional lives.

As such, the therapeutic context adds something highly valuable to the humanist notion of empathy itself (Binswanger 2008). During trance, the possibility of putting oneself in another’s place gains new contours, because the flexibility of references and ego-world limits favors a level of experience diverse from the relationship with the other in general and with the richness of their collective world in particular. Beyond capturing personal experiences, also discussed in the literature (Roustang 2015), the influence of spiritual beings or of specialists in spiritual machinery, with their powers and intentions, can significantly impact the protagonists in that relationship through processes ranging from sensations of strangeness or telepathy to strong emotional explosions, fainting, and ecstasy (Howes 2005; Martino 1999). It is in these situations that religious conversions usually occur: when the interference of the shaman, sheik, priest, spirit, or guru, as signs representing great machinery, reaches a considerable level of influence and mobilizes processes unknown to the interlocutors themselves. These can be, so to speak, brimming with feelings, speech, sensations, visions, and perceptions coming from the other world, up to a feeling of being transported in time and space (Corbin 2008). The interlocutors are not in a state of feeling “as if” they lived the other’s experiences, but feel themselves to be incorporated in that world, with a more vivid experience of the entirety of that universe.

On the other hand, “we” also refers to the possibility that therapists and team members may question and oppose the spiritual world. In the case under discussion here, they could pose various questions and critical reflections, even resisting challenges from the spiritual world, once the affective ground had already been formed. It was important that the questions were not produced mechanically, through scientific theories, but rather that it came primarily from team members’ perceptions of their experiences in that context. There was still one ethical concern: the therapist’s role in particular was to assure them the situation was safe, so that the relationship

did not result in violence toward anyone, as illustrated in the following excerpt, as the therapist confronts Master Chen:

It is not acceptable to me for you or any other spirit to interfere in Paula's engagement. You have already explained to her once, twice, that the engagement will be very bad if she wants to marry that boy. If she wishes to go ahead with it, it's her right, it's her responsibility, period. If not, they will say that this group is some kind of cult, where people are told who they can or cannot marry, so you are not allowed to do this again and, if you insist, the work will be suspended immediately.

This excerpt relates to a rare, but important, episode in the construction of this therapeutic space, as the therapist strongly opposed Master Chen's interference. It was an intervention based on an ethical principle: that people's autonomy and integrity must necessarily be preserved, and that Master Chen's actions should never cross certain lines. If, from the point of view of spiritual machinery (Nathan 2014), there would always be a risk of negative spiritual influences or of the medium being manipulated, from the therapeutic point of view, it was important to assure the safety of everyone involved, taking precautions against possible iatrogenic risks. The signs of such risks would never be acceptable in that relational context, under penalty of breaking the established therapeutic contract.

The therapist's warning was also an important element in constructing a sense of "we," as it preserved the professional and scientific role of the team members, who could never stop being psychologists (and thus, signs of science) in participating in such a device. "We," therefore, should not mean submission or nullification in relation to Isadora's spiritual machinery; "we" would only be able to survive if both knowledges and worlds were respected and constructed as important points of opposition against each other (Nathan 2014). The space of tension between these universes was a fundamental condition to build that contract, implying the need for negotiation between their representatives, since differences and divergences also compose part of that relational process.

Utilization and Performance

Performance implies the need to create relevant roles for a subject by referring, as signs, to needs, relationship modes, or even important figures in their universes (Neubern 2018). The therapists must connect with their own subjectivity, aiming to construct roles that allow involving, provoking, and binding themselves—in short, being present in their world as a sign of change. However, as Erickson (1992) proposes through indirect suggestions, one might simply act along with the subjects, as a way of inviting them to specific modes of relating and seeing subjectivity, without any explanation of the reasons or consequences of that role, always taken in a casual way. The main objective is not to lead them to any awareness or insight, as done in many other therapeutic approaches (Zeig 2014), but to promote new modes of acting and being in the world, which in turn imply reconfigurations of self and ego, as well as new reflective qualities.

In Isadora's case, it soon became apparent that the hypnotic relationship would not follow the usual process, as the therapist decided to apply techniques and a therapeutic plan. Master Chen and his cadre demanded that the team be prepared for a different therapeutic setting, in which the format of the sessions would be negotiated collectively. They frequently said, "We don't need therapy," and, in certain situations, "we aren't little lab rats." Moreover, they demanded that the team assumed certain roles so that they could reveal their world based on their references and employ performances typical of their machinery.

With Isadora always in trance, unknowing what was happening, the spirits proposed a relationship game through which they sought to introduce themselves individually and collectively. However, the construction of these roles should not be constituted as a game based on dissimulation; there needed to be something legitimate in the subjectivity of each interlocutor for insertion into the relational process. Hence, the therapist⁸ departed from his own feelings and emotions to forge roles what would make a place for him in the proposed relational arena in order to set important connections between spontaneity of feeling and deliberation of thinking, thus developing a relevant role for the therapeutic needs of the moment. In short, the principle of utilization was applied here through the adoption of roles that could meet the intentionality coming from Isadora's machinery, which was to establish communication with the team. Through these roles present in many spiritual traditions (Van der Leeuw 1963), it was possible to access her universe and let the spiritual beings themselves express their knowledge.

Prophet and Witness

Prophecies occupy a crucial place in many spiritual traditions. They require recognized witnesses so they can be duly conveyed to possible interlocutors (Corbin 2008; Otto 2017). While the prophet is a sign that transgresses the boundaries of human consensus to represent the spiritual world, the witness is someone who represents the human world and is tasked to receive messages, placing them into intelligible narratives and transmitting them to other people. If, in some traditions, the roles of prophet and witness coincide, in others, they are corporified in distinct figures, mainly because people who dive into the spiritual world via trance can easily lose contact with the references from the human world, as in cases of ecstasy or loss of consciousness (Clément 2011). In those cases, the witness becomes necessary because they are the ones who promote mediation, turning the spiritual voyage into something intelligible for the world of ordinary consciousness.

In one of the most striking meetings with Master Chen, the following revelation was made:

⁸ One can note that other team members maintained their spontaneity, while the therapist, someone more experienced, was able to construct this role, associating it with the therapeutic needs of Isadora and her world.

Master Chen: In the future, Brazil will go through turbulent times. Your president will not finish her term. Either because of illness or because she will be removed from power... Lula will be persecuted, very persecuted, and will not be president again... and the country will return to an authoritarian system supported by the military ...

Therapist: But how will these things happen? Why will it be allowed again? Will that system last for long? What about Lula? Why this persecution?

Master Chen: Your country will never grow as it is. It is always dragged down by other forces, internal and external, that won't let it grow. This needs to come out. And the storm will last as long as it takes for you to wake up... as for Lula, he will be sacrificed... how it will happen, we can't say. But it is part of the spiritual commitment, of his *karma*. If you can believe it, he was Tiradentes⁹ in another life.

These statements, expressed in a private meeting in 2012, were initially received by the therapist with surprise and suspicion. Brazil seemed to have reached economic and social heights unmatched in its history; Lula was a sort of national hero; and President Dilma Rousseff enjoyed broad popular approval, to say nothing of the fact that the military, despite its dictatorial past, rarely showed public interest in political issues. The information, thus, seemed implausible: at the time no recent events supported it. The association between Lula and Tiradentes made some sense, by virtue of his important contributions to Brazil, but, even so, while the former ended his term as the most popular president in history, the second was brutally persecuted and executed by the Portuguese Crown for joining the independence movement. These ideas suggested conspirations or even delusion on the part of the spirits. There was no way, in rational terms, to believe their declarations. However, around four years after that, the events came to pass and composed one of the saddest and most dramatic moments in the country's recent history (Souza 2019): between 2016 and 2018, Dilma Rousseff was removed from office in a dubious political process; Lula faced strong legal persecution, was imprisoned, and Brazil once again elected a far-right government, assisted by several military officials who were later installed in various administrative sectors.

It is possible to see this passage as a great diagram, mainly composed by signs of secondness. There is an important element here that speaks to time: the prophecy was a description of something (a large system of objects) that had yet to occur in the human world but had already appeared in the spirit world's time. The witness' surprise (the therapist's in this case) was valuable; in the temporality of his work, that vision seemed quite far from reality. Only as the years went by did it become pertinent, highlighting the power and different intentionalities sent as messages to potential interlocutors.

⁹ Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, aka Tiradentes, was one of the first Brazilian martyrs in the fight for independence from Portugal. In the eighteenth century, he participated in a movement called Inconfidência Mineira (Minas Gerais Conspiracy) and was drawn and quartered by Portuguese authorities, transforming him into a great symbol for Brazilian independence.

Master Chen's revelation seemed to raise yet a more relevant point in ethnopsychological terms: it was a testimony to the power that deserved credence, a power cable transcending human references of time and relevantly expressing itself on the collective destiny of a nation. When powers of that nature manifest, they often intend to captivate their interlocutors, who feel taken in and eventually consider the source seriously as they express themselves. The practice is customarily present in conversions linked to great spiritual leaders (James 1987), as well as those ensnared by more violent religious sects (Nathan and Swertvaegher 2003).

Here, intentionality in this revelatory process is considered a sort of antidote to a theme, one ever more present in research on trance, the spiritual world, and Isadora's subjectivity itself: distrust. One might recall that the therapist himself initially received Master Chen's prophecies with great skepticism, considering them minimally related to the country's social reality. This was also common in team members who doubted or even disparaged the masters' statements, seeing them as imaginary projections or even manipulations of the patient. Isadora, over her life, had always been the target of attacks and mistrust by those closest to her—to whom she was the bearer of a mental disorder, or simply a liar.

The degree of improbability or impossibility in these prophecies seemed to add even more weight to their value, because they were confirmed in every aspect. Moreover, the time between their expression with the therapist and the fruition of what had been foretold was a crucial factor, since the temporal gulf added to the impossibility of predicted events. In short, the masters established themselves as bearers of a great power, superior to human faculties and, in particular, something that strongly recommended they be taken seriously, despite various aspects that might suggest distrust or even deception.

It is curious that these prophecies were made privately to the therapist, with no pressure from the masters to convey them to other team members; the therapist kept them secret for many years, until after the events came to pass. Master Chen's prophecy focused primarily on the dimensions of time and space, fundamental in the organization of day-to-day references as well as in trance and the spiritual world (Corbin 2005). At this point, there was a decisive temporal question that marked differences between spiritual time and Isadora's. Even though she, at times, was anxious for the narrative of mistrust encircling her to change, the spirits granted her with a vision that would take many years to be fulfilled, as if it had nothing to do with the problems of their ward. Living in the daily, prosaic world, that longing seemed a painful process for her, not in the least because her contact with the spiritual world was also subjected to doubt and accusations of manipulation by others. Nevertheless, the spirits' attitude featured great patience, as they knew sooner or later these processes would happen and that the impact would be highly therapeutic for Isadora. At the same time, it would not be right to establish a polarization between these temporal experiences, because the process also involved Isadora's self—so they left some sort of record that only in due time she could become aware of or feel prepared for significant changes in her narratives about herself.

Over the years, the constant effort of acting as an intermediary between the human world and the spiritual one meant that the burden of mistrust had been set against faith. Even though her original family considered her unstable and crazy,

her relationship with the spiritual world enabled her to gain other people's trust and faith. Though her role as an intermediary was shrouded in mistrust, Isadora was a channel for various divinations in which the word of the masters could be confirmed, silencing skeptics and comforting others. By not accepting any sort of payment for providing this spiritual service, her credibility grew such that new social circles that formed around her offered other paths for affective bonds, quite distinct from the relationships in her family circle.

Doctor and Patient

Remedies, too, compose central phenomena in many spiritual traditions, as the Divine and its representatives can take on the role of doctor (Clément 2011; Csordas 1997; Raposa 2020). The counterpart to that role is the figure of the patient, who, typically beyond physical cure, can also become part of a new life, characterized by intense spiritual experience. Healing interventions often remit to the superior power of the spiritual, capable of surpassing human limits to deal with problems for which human doctors frequently have no solution. Furthermore, while a sign connected to the Divine represents the spiritual world, the patient often represents frail, sick, and contradictory humanities, so that a true cure must be to some extent a spiritual one: the patient profoundly changes their life, and the spiritual dimension rises in priority (Csordas 1997).

In an illustrative case of this topic, Master Chen expressed the following about Joel, a young psychologist on the team:

Look at Joel. He was very lost, although, in the eyes of the world, he seemed a promising and successful youth. In fact, he is very talented and has great potential... but what the eyes of the world didn't see was that he's no longer in touch with his inner world. And, as a consequence, he sought out drugs at times... or abusive relationships with girls... If we hadn't intervened, these things could have led him to ruin, and he would have sunk further into drugs. So his profession did not speak much to his heart... nor did his family, nor his religion ... a person like that ends up dying early because he strays a little each day and suddenly sickens and dies... but now, see how he is: his eyes are bright, he studies hard, he isn't thinking about drugs and never gets involved with those girls... now he can feel the spiritual world ... and so he's able to pursue his dream of marrying and having children with a good girl.

Joel, a thirty-year-old psychologist on the team, had participated in a series of private sessions with Master Chen and other spirits who used Isadora to help him free himself from the negative influences of various people, including his former lovers. He was the son of a middle-class family, handsome and professionally successful, and his social image was that of someone with no major problems. In addition to an energy connected to envy, there were also many spiritual attacks brought on by spells cast by some women to get revenge for ending their relationships.

Baths, incense, prayers, and rites of breaking,¹⁰ along with tarot, were some of the techniques used and with which Isadora and the masters were familiar. After treatment, Joel confessed to the therapist that he had felt very depressed for years, that he felt like giving up on life and his projects, although, in his social world, everything seemed fine. He did not think explicitly about committing suicide, but he understood it as a possible path for many depressed people. It is also worth noting that, after that treatment, Joel created strong affective bonds with Isadora and her masters, and he became quite dedicated to the activities proposed by them.

Master Chen was responsible for intervening on him because he had perceived a tableau of intense suffering that went unnoticed by most people in the psychologist's life, including his fellow team members. As a representative of the spiritual world, this master could see past appearances, while everyone saw Joel within standards of beauty and success, and he diagnosed the complex spiritual and psychic dilemmas he suffered. Such expertise ensured not only a keen and pertinent perception about his psychological state, but also an effective treatment that rescued him from a new perspective on life. In the psychologist's estimation, that intervention had great therapeutic value, because it better connected him with his religion (spiritism), which became more alive in his daily life. Master Chen thus became a spiritual doctor; Joel, the patient whose soul needed to be healed, avoided a terrible fate.

In semiotic terms, one can view the passage portraying spiritual intervention as a symbolic sign, mainly in its explanatory power on the core intricacies of the problem as well as its causes. It was the first to cover the references of causality and matter, critical for conceiving a cure in spiritual terms (Corbin 2005; Raposa 2020). In the eyes of the masters, that depressive state, overloaded by negative energy, might first affect the subtle bodies that precede the physical body, then materializing as an illness in the physical body. It would be through gathering of these markers, invisible to most humans but accessible to the spirits, that Master Chen had seen the debilitating potential of those processes, even though those close to the young man had not. The procedures would act in a concrete way upon these energies such that the mental action by the spirits and Joel himself would be fundamental to clear the harmful influences and for Joel to reach an improved state.

As for Isadora, the process was quite illustrative, as it bore elements running contrary to the narratives of madness and uselessness that had tormented her over the course of her life. Marital separations, estrangement from her children, and the impossibility of pursuing a profession were elements that confirmed these narratives, generally punctuated by adjectives such as “crazy,” “incompetent,” and “useless,” making her feel like a failure and that she might be doomed to an asylum, a whorehouse, or an early grave. However, through these processes, Isadora came to live in a contradiction, even though she fell short of standards of social performance, as an intermediary for the masters she became a precious type of aid for the health and integrity of many people.

¹⁰ These are rites in which, using candle wax, negative energies are anchored in an object that must immediately be destroyed by fire so its remains can be thrown into a river or other place of running water.

One might view her physical illness and her various conflicts, risks of psychic rupture, and episodes of suffering as having cast her in the role of a wounded therapist (Van der Leeuw 1963), as healing agents became capable of curing other people by recognizing their illness and the suffering in their bodies and minds themselves. This situation, common in other cultures, marks a type of double acceptance. When therapist recognizes their own suffering, they have empathy for others, making them worthy of the spiritual world's support when healing. Isadora became a sort of therapist to many people: through facing her injuries, she had become a fitting instrument for spirits, someone sensitive and welcoming to others. It was a significant change that even she doubted herself at the beginning of therapy.

Master and Disciples

Master and disciple consist, as it were, of a universal dyad in various spiritual traditions (Corbin 2008; Van der Leeuw 1963), because processes like conversion, healing, and change may lose their *raison d'être* when that figure—the disciple—does not wish to maintain a profoundly changed life under the tutelage of a master. As a rule, the master is a sign of the Divine which, in some way, captures the disciple, who represents humanity in such a way that the higher message reveals itself in the human world. The master provides the disciple with access to a relationship with the Divine, who can in turn inhabit and prepare them for their mission. Without that dyad, collective knowledge could be lost, as relationships with the power expressed by the Divine might be wasted on people who are incapable of sharing with others.

In another significant example taken from Isadora's therapeutic work, Master Chen made the following comment:

You can see many people today, in universities... even part of our group. They seek good causes, like feminism, they defend black people, they don't eat meat, defend the environment etc. ... lots of isms... however, they don't always accept or perceive that they seek out these movements due to great internal conflicts that these movements have no way of resolving. They take their issues and want these good causes to solve them... this can't work. So, they end up manipulated, and manipulators, even though they are working for good causes... because this work isn't one of deeper inner change... it's an ego thing.

This statement provoked strong reactions in the group: several people participated in progressive movements and humanitarian causes. Some questioned whether Master Chen favored conservative or dictatorial systems, to which he responded severely, "Do not put words in my mouth. Observe and analyze what I say, not what you interpret." His assertions, in this sense, were critical of emancipatory social movements because they were commonly exercised based on criteria that were external to the subjects' world and did not bring spiritual change. That, according to him, explained several situations narrated by the team members themselves about members of these movements who were deeply egotistical, manipulative, and even unscrupulous. The lack of coherence between an ideal embraced and their day-to-day attitude would

certainly be a target of the spiritual world, seeing it at times as alienation or as a character issue at others.

The scene described previously was part of the masters' pedagogy, especially because of its contentiousness. Controversial situations involving subjects who mattered to team members were critical instruments for them to expose themselves more spontaneously and thereby to sidestep defenses and seek social acceptance. Deeper work toward change would not be possible without humans as disciples, as they faced and cast off aspects of their own subjectivities. Those exercises constituted key ways forwards for the team members' decisions to stay or to leave. Once they had been exposed and were perhaps more aware of their ways of being, they could decide whether the maintenance of the group was relevant or not for them. However, it is notable that, in the vast majority of cases, leaving the group happened peacefully and amicably, because many members had established affective bonds with Isadora and her masters over the years.

As for the references, this intervention has significantly impacted a (highly symbolic) worldview through its specific meanings about spiritual reality. The spiritual worldview could often be seen as a contradiction or as insanity according to human rationality (Corbin 2008). It is common for these constructions to present open contradictions with earthly logic that were raised to a superior level of symbology in relation to other knowledges, which were sooner or later disqualified. In powerful narratives, given their divine origin, the spiritual worldview implies other worldly references, whether in time, in space, or in values, concepts, and principles themselves, pervaded by divine attributes such as agelessness. While human worldviews are located in a consensual day-to-day space–time, transitory and full of limitations, spiritual worldviews are set in an eternal present, more connected to the self, that transcends death and offers another place for humanity as a spiritual being connected to the Divine. The presence of the master with the disciple would introduce them to a spiritual worldview, framing it within references of thought, feeling, and action (Colapietro 1989). Moreover, it is notable that Master Chen made an effort to lead team members toward reflection from the plane of the self, contrasting it with limitations and contradictions from the ego. These controversies shone a light on the issues between those complex systems and offered team members possibilities for seeking connection and coherence between both.

On therapeutic aspects for Isadora, the master-disciple dyad offered a set of experiences and narratives that contrasted in various senses with familial constructs of incompetence and disorientation in her life. Family narratives based on failures brought her intense suffering that, for a long time, seemed insurmountable. However, trance seemed to assuage temporarily these aftereffects, so that highly therapeutic roles could come from her. Under the influence of the masters, she took the role of guide and caregiver for many people, offering them guidelines that empowered them to produce meanings of great relevance in their lives. If she was no longer a professor of academic affairs, as in the past, her new role could now help her guide people in matters of life and spirituality. From “disorientation,” oscillating between madness and character failures, the masters transformed her into a counselor for others, providing them with guidance in essential aspects of their lives.

Discussion

In the perspective used here, Isadora's significant therapeutic changes found their main axis in trance, because trance, despite being a performance phenomenon (Schechner 2013), permitted the spiritual world to make itself visible and accessible to the human one, represented by the team and by different people who came seeking aid alongside her. To the extent that her ego underwent changes in trance, her self was able to reveal itself in a multifaceted way, with a profusion of alternatives to the social world's constructions. Consequently, trance allowed Isadora to experience a sort of inversion in her references regarding the world (Neubern and Nogueira 2019). In other words, it was as if her inner world unfolded outwards and was able to establish significant exchanges with other interlocutors with a quality in relationship hitherto unknown in her life.

From a semiotic perspective (Colapietro 2016), it is important to stress that the presence of the masters as they expressed themselves through Isadora's body had important clinical consequences, starting with encouragement of what were, for her, highly therapeutic semiotic constructions (Raposa 2020). That was the case because her ego referred to a large system of objects in belonging to a violent and manipulative family as a semiotic configuration, but spiritual expressions constituted signs whose large system of objects was a spiritual machinery in all divine power and wisdom. This superposition of such distinct objects in the same person was a significant promoter of alternative interpreters; together with Isadora and her new audience, they participated actively in the construction of new narratives about her. Although old semiotic configurations had not disappeared and still caused her suffering, her production of meanings shifted them greatly, as these narratives became interwoven with new constructions produced by the spirits, for Isadora and her new social circles.

Trance thus became a potent performance mode for conveying complex semiotic systems with significant alternatives for change (Neubern and Nogueira 2019). As an expression of spirituality that connected directly Isadora and the masters to an esoteric machinery, trance could demonstrate a power that was capable of changing essential references of reality. In the prophecy about Brazil, Master Chen transcended the limits of space and time to defy expectations for the future at the time (Seif 2019). Simultaneously, the intervention with Joel created, in subjective dimensions of which nobody had been aware, key references of matter and cause, as the explanation about social movements spoke to the contrast between human logic and the divine. This type of reference inversion, bearing the seal of the divine, was fundamental for Isadora to begin receiving highly valued roles in the spiritual machinery, in conjunction with her social circle, as a prophet, doctor, and master, in stark contrast with her highly disqualifying roles originating from her family. Even though she was not even, in spiritual terms, a holder of powers, these deeds could only be undertaken and made concrete in the world thanks to her, resulting in great social recognition (Schmidt 2016).

Thanks to her *status* as a sign of the Divine, Isadora developed new social relationships, therefore undoing in various ways her view of the social world as

hostile. Curiously, this loan of her body and psyche to the spirits allowed for a significant reconfiguration of her borders with the world (Minkowski 1999), strengthening them even against intense attacks by others—even though these still caused suffering. Regardless, she no longer had the capacity to compromise her psychic integrity. More importantly, several people had developed strong affective bonds with her, characterized by potential for conflict, negotiation, tenderness, disagreements, and affinities that, a few years prior, would have been considered impossible by her and by those around her. In symbolic as much as in affective terms, trance seemed to foster important modifications in central aspects of her life (Schmidt 2016; Taves 2009), which significantly removed risks of psychic rupture that had haunted her for so many years.

Therefore, the present questions about amnesia during and after trance cannot be ignored, since these issues may arise naturally about how she could internalize vital elements to her clinical needs. As a result, some clarifications on the therapeutic impacts of trance are required here. Firstly, awareness, as promoted in other schools of psychotherapy, is not a fundamental process in hypnosis (Roustang 2015; Zeig 2014) because trance tends to promote semiotic reconfigurations in relevant themes for the subject at conscious and unconscious levels in parallel (Erickson 1992). This might explain why Isadora developed narratives of change in her conversations with the team and the therapist that, at least on the surface, were scarcely related to what happened in trance, of which she recollected little (Taves 2009).

Secondly, new forms of connection between ego and self seemed to characterize a ritualized exercise of therapeutic trance in some cultures, including people who present risks such as possessions and spiritual persecutions (Clément 2011). In one of her most significant statements, Isadora claimed this work had helped her to connect better, with greater intensity, and with fewer risks, to the spirit world via trance. In time, the therapist figure itself became expendable, allowing the masters to inhabit her body and mind to attend to others. It is generally held that, to achieve that improvement, the subject must undergo significant changes in reflectiveness, as well as deep processes of subjective organization; in other words, processes significantly integrated with each other (Colapietro 2016; Petrilli 2017). Add to this that, for Isadora, vivid spiritual trance episodes promoted a reconfiguration of the deep processes in her subjectivity, including those connected to the risk of psychic rupture, which caused sharp improvements in the quality of her reflective constructions. In short, what might be considered the height of human subjectivity—its reflectiveness—is intimately interwoven with what is deepest in one's being (Morin 2015).

In this process, the role of feeling is of utmost relevance, notably due to its importance in the subject's semiotic configurations. In reference to the former, feelings participate in an experiential dimension that precedes the construction of complex systems, as other signs in multiple combinations are also configured. Thus, once they are accessed (Neubern 2016), they can foster important modifications upon those systems whose semiotic production quality is changed markedly. With Isadora, this manifold and deep relationship with the Divine via trance, which implied new roles, bonds, narratives, and social transits, appeared to have affected a dimension characterized by an intense, identitarian, and incapacitating suffering that traversed her subjective organization and suggested possible

psychotic ruptures. While putting herself in the role of intermediary between the spiritual and human worlds, core elements of her subjective organization were reconfigured and produced new qualities of agency and reflectiveness.

The third topic, finally, is the state of belonging as constructed from the relationship with the spiritual world (Neubern 2018; Taves 2009). Up to a certain point in her life, Isadora had been someone who occupied a marginal place: doomed to failure, disreputable, and even mad—each of these fates had been confirmed by some event in her life. Through contact with the spirits, Isadora became someone else, that is, someone who occupied an existential place quite distinct from what she had thus far done. She became a person who had a spiritual mission in this great machinery: she should mediate spirits and men, as well as spiritual knowledges and human science. This new place formed a whole worldview, with specific narratives that fostered crucial alternatives for constructing meanings about her history, relationships, and future. Living more clearly with the spirits, acknowledging them, interacting with them, negotiating with them, arguing with them, and appeasing them caused a sense of legitimate belonging to that universe, the sense that her life would not be in vain: she had a role amid humanity and the spiritual world.

Since Isadora's self is a complex system of signs, the idea of belonging deserves to be highlighted. It is true that their withdrawal from their academic career constitutes an index of a broader ethnopsychological problem, since Academy in Brazil (Neubern 2018) and other countries (Guyimesi 2017) are not usually receptive to the expression of the spirituality of its members. The Academy, commonly, is representative of the logic of single universes, while many people in Brazil remain connected to multiple universes. Thus, there are many situations in which the maintenance of relationships with the spiritual Ethos by these people leads them to be marginalized in the Academy. Not infrequently students and professors report their conflicts between professional and spiritual demands, highlighting mechanisms of oppression present in different daily situations of universities that sometimes seem to suggest abandonment or silence regarding their own beliefs. Such a context is certainly linked to Isadora's depressions, since it could easily repeat to her the same accusations of madness and manipulation made by her family. Thus, if the Academy was one of his main Ethos, whom she said she loved deeply, the suffering linked to the rupture with it could be considered as the loss of one of his main existential roots.

However, through complex processes of semiosis, this niche of belonging seems to have been reactivated in some way by its new spiritual role. Initially, the contact with the university staff, especially with the students, made her recall memories and learnings in such a way she was willing to help them with some academic matters. However, more than that, her spiritual role allowed her to resume important aspects of her former role as a Professor: her spiritual studies were confronted, from time to time, with academic knowledge; she served as a vehicle for the manifestation of the masters, that is, those who teach a higher science, and she also assumed a role of guiding many people who sought her help, now not for university affairs, but for the very questions of life. In short, the experiences and learnings interrupted, in part, by academic intolerance itself, were taken up by the new spiritual role that integrated them into a broader proposal for their existence.

Final Considerations

Seeing spiritual beings as configurations of signs referring to a great collective machinery, which composes their systems of objects and represents an important alternative in the study of spiritual subjects, was effective in Isadora's case. In principle, this machinery allows for a decolonial perspective, notably by understanding the production of senses and meanings within a native semiotic ecology. It is a radicalization of the principle of acceptance (Erickson and Rossi 1979) because acceptance does not involve simply the individual, but also the machinery that precedes them, with beings, knowledges, and practices. Isadora's positive therapeutic results happened largely because of this way of conceiving acceptance, which involved a holistic experience that might be marginalized in other contexts, but that offered a wide range of therapeutic resources in her case. So, acceptance, in encompassing a single field of constructions of meaning, must be widened to include these universes and their specific machinery; otherwise, there is the risk of becoming a fallacy for its subjects (Neubern 2018).

Similarly, the principle of utilization (Erickson and Rossi 1979) also embraced that universe, apprehending it within its logic. However, it is important to stress that, in adapting it to the ethnopsychological lens, it underwent undeniable modifications, starting with the permission for the masters and Isadora themselves to coordinate most of the sessions, as they specified their formats, performances, and agendas for discussion. That was an important way to promote a horizontal therapeutic relationship. Instead of a mechanical, individualist procedure, the process implied a holistic performance (Schechner 2013) with signs that involved various actors from that universe. The simple agreement between the therapist, Isadora, and the masters to promote similar conduct by the masters was a critical element, as it implied considerable protagonism for the spiritual beings whose powers and wisdom significantly impacted Isadora's trajectory.

Obviously, it is important to understand that this patient's case was unique and that it is perhaps difficult to say whether another clinical situation might happen similarly. The specifics of setting and therapeutic contract were mostly established due to a series of needs that had to be met in the name of Isadora's integrity: her physical limitations imposed by fibromyalgia, her needs for new social circles due to the precariousness of her affective bonds, and the severity of her case. In mental terms, there were indicators for the negotiation and construction of aforementioned setting and contract. On the other hand, these principles from hypnosis, revisited through ethnopsychology, were fundamental to meet demands connected to people's spiritual experiences, notably in multiversal societies such as Brazil. This clinical process, therefore, requires conception as a mode of research that is capable of dialoguing with each person's uniqueness and actively placing them in their own context of hypnotherapeutic construction, as the person, as much as that universe's beings and specialists, act as protagonists.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval The author declares that the research, from which the present work derives, was submitted to the ethical committee of UnB. All conditions for working with human subjects were strictly adhered to.

Competing Interests The author declares no competing interests.

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