

## CONTACT BETWEEN WORLDS: DRAWINGS PRODUCED DURING AN ECUMENICAL RITUAL WITH MEDICINAL PLANTS IN THE ARCA OF THE BLUE MOUNTAIN

DOI  
10.11606/issn.2525-3123.  
gis.2022.185801

ORCID  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9570-9597>

DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,  
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

**FREDERICO ROMANOFF DO VALE<sup>1</sup>**

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil,  
20051-070 – ppgsa@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

The article makes a synthetic ethnographic description, seeking to explain the principles of the Arca da Montanha Azul group and the production of drawings carried out during an ecumenical ritual with medicinal plants, an innovative practice when compared to other similar houses. Therefore, the article contextualizes the space according to its social and political aspect, explains the ritual process, the initiation process, about the concept of healing, and brings some excerpts from interviews carried out with house practitioners who talk about their relationship with the drawings. The text ends with an argument about the agentive character present in the drawings obtained during the ceremonies.

**KEYWORDS**  
ayahuasca;  
art; religion;  
anthropology;  
agency.

1. This research was funded by the Brazilian Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES). Case number: 88882.331445/2019-01.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is the result of research that I have been developing for a little over two years with a trans-religious house in Rio de Janeiro. Normally, the *Círculo Holístico Arca da Montanha Azul (CHAMA)* holds weekly ceremonies with the use of so-called indigenous medicines, notably ayahuasca and snuff. This study focuses on the presentation of an ethnographic synthesis of the field, some drawings that are produced during the ceremonies and through them we seek to unveil the native ontology that characterizes the practitioners of this house<sup>2</sup>.

The structure of the article was divided into some topics to facilitate the presentation of the material under study: we contextualized the space according to its social and political aspect, we went through an explanation of the ritual process, the initiation process and about the concept of healing, which will become show central to understand the production of this space. Finally, we enter more deeply into the analysis of the drawings produced during the ritual and conclude the article by presenting an argument featuring one of the possible readings regarding the role of drawings during the ceremonies.

This work intends to present an innovative contribution in relation to current literature regarding the production of drawings/artistic expression within the universe of ayahuasca practices. The place where this study is carried out can be considered a pioneer in the insertion of this technique of artistic production: the drawings are made during the ritual, under the effect of ayahuasca, considered a medicinal plant and which produces the effect of changing perception<sup>3</sup>.

Literature on the subject registers the widespread and, for many groups, long-standing use of this drink (produced by mixing the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, popularly known as “jagube”, with the leaf of the *Psychotria viridis* shrub, popularly known as “chacrona”) by the indigenous populations of the Amazon region on the border between Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. As attested by the specialized literature, ayahuasca plays an important role in the shamanism and healing rituals of the Arawak, Tukano and Pano peoples of the region (Labate (2008), Lagrou (2007), Langdon (1992), Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971)), alongside other psychotropic plants such as tobacco. Indigenous and non-indigenous populations who use

2. For more information about the house and other details about the ayahuasca universe in Brazil, see SOUZA, 2006; DA MOTTA, 2017; ROMANOFF, 2021.

3. Also known as Hoasca, nixi pae (by the Huni Kuin), Yagé (Colombia), Kamarampi (Piro), Caapi, Natema, Pindé, Kahi, Mihi, Dápa, Vine of the spirits, Santo Daime, Vegetal, Hoasca. It is worth commenting here on the category we work with when describing Ayahuasca. Generally speaking, researchers of the phenomenon in an urban context prefer to work with the term “entheogen”, which, analyzed etymologically, means “God within itself”. This category is consistent with the native conception of the nature of the beverage-induced experience and is the concept advocated by urban practitioners of ritualized ayahuasca consumption.

ayahuasca consider it a master plant capable of revealing hidden things and “teaching great mysteries” (Luna, 1999).

An analysis of the drawings is carried out based on the native discourse, while another perspective is highlighted that takes the idea of “agency” (Gell 1998/2020) of art objects as the central point to understand the representations. arts raised here. Therefore, we will introduce the ritual and social context in which these are produced.

The Arca da Montanha Azul can be considered one of the houses that make up the neo-ayahuasca field<sup>4</sup> in Brazil, constituting a trans-religious space that creates subjectivities and new worlds. The house seeks to integrate different sacred traditions. Thus, we find in this environment elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Spiritism, Candomblé and Umbanda, with emphasis on the latter religion. The proximity of the approach between the house and Umbanda is due to the influence of Barquinha<sup>5</sup>, a religious tradition that is closely linked to the tradition of worshipping the *Orixás* and the *caboclos*.

The ceremonies are conducted by psychologist Philippe Bandeira de Mello<sup>6</sup> who guides participants through scientific knowledge (mainly Jungian-inspired psychology, as well as the works of psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (1990) and others) and knowledge of sacred texts and traditions. In addition to this center, there are many others throughout the country that constitute what the anthropologist Bia Labate (2004) calls “neo-ayahuasqueira religions” or “neo-ayahuasqueiro field” in Brazil. Another popular name is urban ayahuasca shamanism.

## CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE SPACE IN ITS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECT


### ARCA AS A TERRITORY

The active group of initiates in the Arca today is currently mostly from people who met and/or participated in the 2013 demonstrations in Rio de

4. Proposed by Bia Labate (2004), the term “neo-ayahuasca field” seeks to account for a set that involves different forms of ritualized consumption of Ayahuasca in urban centers, notably in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

5. In addition to this religious tradition, Santo Daime and União do Vegetal - UDV also make use of ayahuasca in their ceremonies cf. Labate, 2008.

6. “Jungian and Transpersonal Therapist (graduated in Psychology); Former Technical Director and Supervisor of Casa das Palmeiras, psychiatric clinic founded by Dr. Nise da Silveira, with a book co-authored with her; Teacher; Clinical Supervisor; Transdisciplinary Researcher in Science of Religion and Esoterism; Training in Past Life Therapies with Roger Woolger; Author of the book “The New Dawn of an Ancient Morning - Surprising Differences between Sacred Plants and Drugs - The Mysterious Properties of Entheogens”; He was the founder and advisor of Barquinha in Rio de Janeiro; Founder and Guider of the Arca da Montanha Azul (Multi-religious and Scientific Space for Research, Dialogue and Coexistence between different Religions and Sacred Traditions, ceremonially using Ayahuasca and other ancestral technologies), Initiate and Priest by the OMR – Mystic Order of Regeneration (Initiation School)”. According to text used in dissemination of lectures and courses.



Janeiro. This year, a large contingent of the population, mainly young people, but also members of other age groups, led large protests throughout Brazil.

Within the context of the 2013 demonstrations, a space in Rio de Janeiro was in evidence that year and beyond: the Maracanã village. This movement claimed the establishment of an indigenous space in a region close to the Maracanã stadium and, in addition, it spoke about indigenous rights in Brazil, pointing out, for example, that many words commonly used by Brazilians had indigenous origins. This is an example to draw attention to the original right of these populations over the territory that is now called Brazil.

A significant part of the initiates involved with the 2013 movements and with the Maracanã village migrated to the Arca space. A significant example is that of the current companion of the house's spiritual coordinator, Philippe, who plays an important role in organizing the house's tasks and with the entire Archean community. Simone Cunha once told us of a period of intense political pressure in which she was living together with other comrades in the Maracanã village and that after that moment, perhaps with a dispersion caused by the police, they were living in disorientation and very shaken. It was then that they left as a group for an ayahuasca ceremony that would take place that night in the Arca da Montanha Azul and which, according to Simone's account, would have been a very good work and would have defined the conduct of that group from then on. After this moment, at the next initiation opportunity, many of them participated in the process and today they are initiated into the Arca, taking the homework in terms of the spiritual content and the practical part that involves managing a place of prayer.

This point is consistent with recognizing the Arca as a territory, in terms of what Deleuze and Guatarri (1972) propose, which will function as political resistance through the emotional and material solidarity established there. I was able to observe this from the exchange practices that take place in the field, as well as from the speeches in which I was able to participate, where the tone of political organization prevailed, most of the times proposing an alternative to the social, political, and economic organization model that we live.

### **PRACTICING AUDIENCE**

It can be hypothesized that there is a median that identifies the greater presence of individuals belonging to the middle classes of the population and with a high level of education. The very location of the house in Laranjeiras, in the south of Rio de Janeiro, already indicates a considerable presence of people living in the vicinity. If we analyze the indices



of wealth distribution and quality of life, we will see that this region, when compared to other locations in the city and in Brazil, presents a high level in both indexes.

Most of the practitioners during the time I was in the field are young people, aged between 20 and 30 years. There are older practitioners, like Philippe himself and other older initiates, however they are an exception when compared to the “dominant group” of young people. Most of these young people seem to have a connection with the university and/or the world of music and therapies.

There are many practitioners who are initiated into other religious traditions and come to the Arca to share their knowledge. During the “Hour of the Word”, a ritual moment that will be described later, these initiates share with us that they have learned in their original traditions. They are people from Rio de Janeiro and others from traditions originating in Acre, where the ritualized consumption of tea among the people of the city began and still representatives of different indigenous traditions such as those of the Huni Kuin and Shawãdawa people.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE RITUAL**

The work on the Arca is generally made up of three large blocks. In the first part, the concentration work takes place, through meditation and singing techniques, putting visitors in tune with each other and with the house’s *egregore*<sup>7</sup>. In this first block are sung the Psalms that are part of the tradition of Barquinha, a large part of them has an influence of Christian origin and are directed to the great references of this tradition (Jesus, Our Lady and the Holy Spirit). There is an image that is often raised by the spiritual coordinator of the Arca that at the beginning of the work we are all preparing to take a spiritual “takeoff”, like a plane that leaves for other destinations, practitioners all also take off in search of other dimensions. That’s why the initiates are also part of the crew, which will aid the passengers. There is also the “indoctrination of holy souls” where suffering spirits are referred for spiritual treatment. Towards the end of this first part of the work, Ayahuasca (or “divine wine” as it is also called in this place) begins to be served, initially for musicians and first-time visitors.

The second part consists of a ballet (a mediumistic ballet, a practice also inherited from Barquinha) that makes continuous references to gods and entities present in Vedic texts and in African-based religions; it is the most active part of the work, where practitioners sing and dance. This ballet

7. *Egregore* is the word used to express the spiritual force created from the sum of collective energies, the result of the congregation of two or more people. The concept is explained with reference to the biblical phrase: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them” (The Bible, 1753/2008).

takes place in all Arca's works. Philippe believes that this practice has a high therapeutic potential because there people can recognize themselves through the body, find ways to express themselves, and it is also a key moment of connection with the entities that come to the *terreiro* to work. It is at this moment that the inferior energies are transmuted into good energies, as one of the chants says, "and whatever evil is here, I throw it to the bottom of the sea". As such, a lot of cleansing takes place at this time.

In the external part of the hall where the cleaning buckets are located<sup>8</sup>, the practitioners who are in this process are concentrated, some stay longer until they lie down on the floor and others only perform cleaning and return to the hall to dance.



**IMAGE 1**  
Image of the ballet  
with details of the  
house decoration  
- Photo by Ale  
Migueis

From the beginning of the work a warning is given that it is important that we stay inside the hall to strengthen the current and keep the energy of the work "up there" high. This warning is made especially for the first part of concentration, but it is also valid for the rest of the work. There is a conscious effort by the coordinator of the house and by the crew to keep people dancing, moving, because that is what will guarantee a work with a higher energy.

In the third part, sacred texts referring to the different traditions that are worked in the house are read and often the texts are in dialogue with the festive date on which they are read. This reading opens a dialogue about

<sup>8</sup>. Cleansing is a term commonly used within the ayahuasca world to refer to the process of vomiting or diarrhea that ayahuasca can induce. Within the Peruvian indigenous universe, for example, this process is called "purging" and is considered part of spiritual work.

the topic being discussed. In addition to these sacred texts, there are also texts on theology and human sciences (with emphasis on psychology).

The fourth and last part ends the work with a little more ballet in gratitude for the graces achieved. This moment joins the sunrise (all work is done during the night) symbolizing the rebirth of each one present in that space, both of incarnated individuals and of the Arca community (Da Motta 2017).

### **THE INITIATIC PROCESS**

The analysis of the initiation process becomes interesting to understand the steps through which a visitor becomes part of the crew. In Candomblé, one of the religious traditions present in the Arca, there are three stages of this process: 1 - when you suppress your previous identity; 2 - it is between two ways of placing oneself in the world, as an egoic indefiniteness; 3 - the birth of a new Self based on the religious tradition that follows<sup>9</sup>. The process at Arca can be understood from these three steps that are encouraged by the coordinator of the house. Unlike other traditions, the beginner does not need to be confined to the environment for certain days or go on a diet as in some indigenous ethnic groups, what is said is about the suppression of strictly rational thinking during ceremonies, making room for intuition, for the voice of your inner master.

The initiation process also includes the uniforming process<sup>10</sup> divided into steps that can be compared to the dating, betrothal, and marriage process. Dating is characterized by the “pre-shirt”, the shirt that beginners receive when they take their first vows of commitment to the house and to the spiritual path. The full shirt, which indicates a deepening of the practitioner along the path, would correspond to the engagement. And the full shirt with distinction of some symbols, indicating those who have been in the house for a longer time and who have fully fulfilled their initiation vows, corresponds to marriage.

The initiation processes always take place during the month of July of each year, which is the month of foundation of the house. You must wait for this period to advance through the steps listed above. Thus, after two

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9. According to the oral communication carried out by Bruno Balthazar, initiated in Candomblé and Arca da Montanha Azul. This process can be further analyzed in the light of the work of Victor Turner, who was a British anthropologist recognized for his studies in ritual and performance. Highlighting his interpretation of the initiation process carried out among the members of the Ndembu society. cf. Turner ([1967] 2005). The work of this author, as well as that of Max Gluckman (1911-1975), his advisor, are a fertile field for the interpretation and analysis of themes that talk about religion, ritual and performance that could be further worked on in other moments of the research;

10. It is the way that is conventionally called the moment when practitioners of different ayahuasca religions in Brazil officially become part of the brotherhood. Practitioners wear a uniform that works as a uniform identifying that practitioner to the religious group in which they started.

years of service, for example, the initiate can apply for uniform with the full shirt corresponding to the engagement.

During the initiation process, practitioners commit themselves to the egregore of the house through a commitment to a few vows, such texts include a commitment to the spiritual master, the brotherhood, and the traditions of the house. The first of them is related to the tradition of the Essenes<sup>11</sup>, compiled together with the book *Essene Gospel of Peace* (1981). The Sevenfold Vow is one of the annexes that make up the book, it discusses the Tree of Life, the importance of communion with the angels of the earthly mother and heavenly father and gives other instructions. There are also vows related to the Buddhist path, where some members of the more advanced brotherhood within the tradition commit, for example, not to leave the earth even if they reach enlightenment<sup>12</sup> until all existing beings also reach it.

In addition to the initiation process within the Arca's working methodology, there are other initiations that enable practitioners to act as therapists or "healers" in the future. Among them, the initiations in snuff, pipe and Reiki stand out<sup>13</sup>.

## THE CONCEPT OF CURE

To understand the Arca space and the ayahuasca universe, it is necessary to keep in mind the concept of "cure". The literature on the subject is quite vast and is not intended to be the focus of this article. However, to elucidate what kind of cure we are talking about, it is worth mentioning some ways to characterize the concept. What is cured? How is it cured? To what extent is healing different from that operated through traditional medicine or established therapeutic methods?

The expression "spiritual healing" is generally used in space and the adjective that accompanies the concept informs about the paths to be taken in view of the issues raised above. In the Arca space, illnesses are generally linked to aspects of the psyche (depression, anxiety) and to help

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11. A people who lived in the Middle East between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and with whom Jesus possibly had some relationship, as reported by Philippe Bandeira.

12. Buddhist concept that refers to the "highest spiritual attainment" where the individual frees himself from all suffering and mental afflictions. Cf.: <<https://olharbudista.com/2019/05/09/o-que-e-o-despertar-ou-iluminacao/>> Date of publication: 09/05/2019. Accessed on 05/14/2021.

13. "The Reiki Natural Healing Method is a healing technique based on channeling energies that harmonize the recipient's chakras. REI stands for "Universal Energy" and KI is "Personal Energy". The technique was rediscovered and disseminated by the Japanese monk Mikao Usui in the early 20th century after a 21-day meditative retreat on Mount Kurama. Usui was known throughout Japan for healing countless people and teaching his very simple technique to many others, among them about 20 have reached the degree of master. Around the 1940s, the technique arrived in the West and since then it has been widespread". According to written communication offered by Robson Madredeus initiated in different spiritual traditions including Reiki.

in the treatment of drug addicts. The house coordinator usually says that the anxiety we feel is an anxiety to know God, in whatever form he takes. Many of the people who participate in the ritual today arrived at the Arca due to a depressive process. Philippe himself went through a similar process that he now calls the “dark night of the soul”<sup>14</sup> (a two-year period in which he sang, prayed but felt nothing, lacked the spiritual connection).



**IMAGE 2**  
“Puja ” ritual for Narasimha held at Arca - photo by Ale Migueis

According to Phillippe, using the work of psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (1990), such processes can be understood as forms of “spiritual emergence”, where the individual undergoes profound changes in their subjectivity, reaching other levels of consciousness, understanding of themselves and of the world around you. Communing with holy medicine<sup>16</sup> will have some effect. Often, especially in early experiences, these effects can be positive such as beautiful mirages, appreciation of heightened senses, a feeling of ecstasy and connection with the divine. However, the spiritual path that for many ayahuasca began with the first glass of ayahuasca is full of obstacles that are inherent to this path itself, ups and downs of the spiritual life that manifest themselves in different ways. Thinking about these mishaps, Cristina Grof, companion, and co-author of part of the work of psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, will indicate in the book A

14. With reference to the process described by São João da Cruz in the book *A Noite Escura da Alma* (1960).

15. In this ritual, a Hindu deity is worshipped. The spiritual master of the house, the one who would have been responsible for entrusting Philippe with the mission of creating the Arca, Narasimha, is an entity of Hinduism and is worshiped through Pujas.

16. One of the ways practitioners refer to ayahuasca.



Tempestuosa Busca do Ser (1990) practices for everyday life that can help alleviate heavier processes that may arise during that search. For example, the practice of meditation is strongly recommended in different traditions and even by science. However, in some cases, meditation can speed up the process of discovering traumas and wounds in the unconscious, which can aggravate the person's condition if they are already going through a difficult process. In this sense, Christina Grof recommends the interruption of practices that may accelerate this exploration of the unconscious, even those linked to the spiritual world. Within this process, despite the spiritual development being an individual experience, the category of brotherhood<sup>17</sup> is very necessary, given the need to share some stages of what is lived for the integration of contents. Therapeutic activities such as artistic expression sessions, psychotherapy sessions, experiences and other forms of expression are strongly recommended by the authors.

#### **THE DRAWING TABLE**

According to reports from the field and from my own experience during the ceremonies, the drawing table functions as a living altar. It has sacred characteristics in relation to the space it occupies and the spiritual and intellectual tradition in which it is inserted.

It is an integral part of the entire ritual process, at the different stages of the process, it is available for visitors and initiates to express themselves. It is located at the entrance to the house on the left, opposite the main altar and has the figure of the Hindu god Jagannatha made in tiles by one of the house's initiates.

Philippe considers the drawings produced during the rituals in the Arca da Montanha Azul as scientific documents that attest to the psychological treatment carried out through the works. Furthermore, it also considers them as artistic objects. "Super conscious art" is the term the house's spiritual coordinator uses to characterize the type of art that is performed during the ceremonies. In his words: "*it is called "super conscious art" because it is neither conscious nor unconscious, it is above the conscious, facilitating the connection with the sacred.*"<sup>18</sup>.

#### **SPEECH BY INTERLOCUTORS IN THE FIELD ABOUT THE DRAWINGS**

To better illustrate the relationship between the practitioners and the drawing board, I selected some of the practitioners quite frequently in the works and who produce with a certain regularity to answer some questions. I constructed a series of nine questions that were equally applied to practicing-artists. Below, I transcribe some excerpts from these interviews,

17. It is formed mainly by the initiates of the house and also by frequent visitors. The "brotherhood" establishes strong emotional bonds that are essential for the healing process and spiritual experience..

18. According to Philippe's interview.

as well as pointing out common elements of the speeches presented and/or interesting elements for us to think about the theme proposed here<sup>19</sup>.

I begin this point of the article through an interview with the artist Calebe, born in Goiânia and a regular at the house for three years. Caleb always drew even before he came to the house; he is an illustrator, so drawing practice is a constant in his life.

When asked about the possible relationship between the drawings and the entities that are worshiped in that space, Caleb says: “Drawing is a form of contact with these archetypes and works as a means of tuning and channeling the energies related to them. When drawing something with dedication and love, I feel like I’m preparing my body and mind to receive that energy. Sometimes I decide on my own to draw some entity because I want to bring more of what it represents to my personal life. nothing begins to feel the need to draw some specific entity, either because I don’t know I need it or someone close to me is”.


In the excerpt above, two elements can be seen that are interesting to highlight: drawing as a means of connection with spiritual forces and the relational characteristic of the act of drawing under the conditions described in the field. The construction of the drawings in this environment points to processes that can be experienced beyond an intra-psychic cure - as described in the theories of Jung and Nise da Silveira - then there is the possibility of healing from an external source - the entity - that it demands the practitioner to bring it to life or through interaction with other practitioners present there.

The second excerpt of the interview was conducted with Mayra Muniz, 33, born in Nova Friburgo and a designer. For her, at some moments during her artistic production at Arca, mediumship is present through the *eres*, very agitated children’s spiritual beings, as she explains, and then the drawing works as a pacifier of this agitation: “[...] the approach to the drawing board comes to soothe some restlessness and dissipate confusion that usually accompany some of my mediumistic processes, especially when I am spiritually accompanied by *eres*. The *eres* (enchanted beings from the spirit world that correspond to the child’s energy) who work with me are very agitated, messy and have a very fast mental and physical activity, a temperament quite different from mine. So, now I’m radiated by them, I’m having a hard time balancing it all. In this sense, the drawing board helps me a lot”.

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19. Respondents agreed to be interviewed for this work, as well as having their names mentioned.





The third excerpt of an interview that I would like to highlight was conducted with university professor Marcelo Asth, born in Nova Friburgo and who has been attending the house for six years. Marcelo was already in communion with ayahuasca even before he met the Arca, but he felt that he had not yet found his spiritual family. It turns out that in the year 2014 your partner starts to visit the Arca; Marcelo then began to consecrate himself with medicine in that space. The practice of drawing was also presented as a constant in his life since childhood; with the affairs of adult life, he was putting this practice aside a little, but he never stopped it completely. At Arca he understands that he had a “connection with drawing in a way I’ve never had before [...]”, for him, by consecrating with the drink, we enter a state of expansion of consciousness that favors the opening of several smaller layers of the mind that in everyday life we don’t have access to, so we are left with “a mind a little freer also to create and test things that we don’t know yet [...]”.

He characterizes his drawings prior to his practice at Arca as very plastered, while at Arca he was breaking patterns and making room for a freer production “testing other formats, adapting, getting to know... [...]”. Marcelo also talks about the difference that exists between the mediumistic process of dancing with the whole body and the transition that takes place to the practice of drawing, since for him this practice demands more concentration; despite this he sees “many similarities in these two ways of working”. Similarity also highlighted by Mayra’s speech.

In this last excerpt of highlighted interviews Mariana Prado Barros, 34 years old, born in Sorocaba/SP, Plastic Artist, and educator, talks about her close relationship with the drawing board and about the sacred characteristic of the space: “[...] and the drawing table which is one of the places that I feel is a really big altar, since I got to the Arca I have always prayed for the spirit of art”. She draws attention to the process of drawing during the ceremony “[...] it’s very special for you to be in the power of medicine that brings you this pile of information from other dimensions and to be able to express that, the grandeur of it, right, the value of this space there, as much as the ailments itself, this vomiting there, the encounter with the pain, and also all this light, being able to be manifesting everything we see in strength, these angels, these saints, with colors and with the art that expresses itself from this path [...]”.



**IMAGE 3**  
Drawing table  
- Photo by Ale Migueis

### **DRAWINGS PRODUCED DURING THE RITUAL AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORK OF DR<sup>a</sup> NISE DA SILVEIRA**

Through field research, I could see that for an expressive part of Arca's visitors, the drawings indicate the presence of spiritual entities that work together with ceremonies in healing and *miração* processes, thus configuring themselves as objects bearing agency (Gell 1998 /2020) and making present the otherness that marks the relationship between different worlds (Lagrou 2009). After their production, the drawings are displayed next to the place where they came to life (a worktable that dates to the studies and practices undertaken by Dr. Nise da Silveira (Silveira 2017)) where they continue to act as sacred objects, bearers of spiritual messages. These drawing-entities eventually go to external exhibitions<sup>20</sup>, in addition to functioning as a document proving the therapeutic character of the works that are developed in the Arca<sup>21</sup>, in line with the tradition of Jungian psychology.

The drawing table dates to a therapeutic tradition inaugurated in Brazil by the psychiatrist Nise da Silveira. It was she who, through dialogues with the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, introduced different forms of treatment for the patients she used to call "clients", both at the Engenho de Dentro Psychiatric Hospital and, later, at the House of Palms.

The drawing board with the image of Dr. Nise da Silveira - Photo by Ale Migueis

20. In 2014 there is an exhibition at the State University of Rio de Janeiro - UERJ and in the beginning of 2020 another exhibition was being scheduled that had to be canceled due to the pandemic.

21. According to a report by the psychologist and spiritual coordinator of Arca Philippe Bandeira de Melo.



**IMAGE 4**  
The drawing board with the image of Dr. Nise da Silveira - Photo by Ale Migueis

Although there is a fundamental difference between the inmates of the Hospital do Engenho de Dentro and the clients of Casa das Palmeiras in relation to the practitioners of Arca da Montanha Azul, considering that the former are in deep states of immersion in the unconscious, often presenting, as Dr. Nise, failure of the Ego to manage the contents of the unconscious, there is something similar between them. Arca practitioners are relatively healthy individuals who undergo a “controlled” ritual practice where the unconscious content is in evidence but follows a process of interpretation within the “controlled” context where it emerges. Even highlighting these differences, as Philippe argues, who for many years acted as Dr. Nise’s right-hand man at Casa das Palmeiras, the serial study of the images produced in the Arca can reveal healing processes such as those described by Nise and the presence of archetypes of the unconscious collective as stated by Carl Gustav Jung that will give the coordinates for an effective psychic treatment.

### **THE DRAWINGS AGENCY DURING THE RITUAL**

In the context of the ritual performed in the Arca da Montanha Azul, the images, once produced, seem to come to life and participate as entities during the ritual process. They are placed on the table and exert influence on the practitioners (carnal or not) who are involved in the ballet. Furthermore, as we draw, they will also exert influence, with the quality and intensity of energy varying according to what is being played at that moment.

It is interesting to mention that the drawing board holds up to four practitioners drawing at a time, which allows for a kind of “joint work”, even if the drawings are being done individually. Every gesture, body movement,

look or an eventual speech will influence the creation process; in this way, in addition to the people who are effectively involved in the creation process, there are those who are dancing and pass by the drawing board and with their energy can modify what is being undertaken there.

Drawings produced under the emanation of a specific entity will often have similar motifs and representations. For example, on February 2nd when the day of Iemanjá is celebrated, images related to this entity will appear. The images also act, in a way, to witness the cures that took place during that day, through an individual perspective of each creator, but which converge to the same theme, given the repetition of motifs or representations, as Lagrou says about it. from Taussig's text, "drawing has for Taussig the function of witness" (2018, 148). More than a text or a photograph, for Taussig drawing in the field and scratching is a testimony that what he saw happened. The anthropologist witnesses what he observes in the field and writes it down on paper. Similarly, practitioners of the Arca da Montanha Azul witness their healing process, and also their visions, which they observe under the influence of the drink, through their creations, commonly influenced by a super-conscious perspective (as the house coordinator puts it) or even transpersonal (concept built and defended by the Czech psychiatrist Stanislav Grof).

In his analysis of the Huni Kuin drawing, Lagrou writes: "If the dead and the living have different perspectives on almost everything, the same does not happen with drawing, drawing is the path that connects and attracts them" (Lagrou 2018, 131). It seems to me that something similar happens in the drawing production space during the ritual on the Arca.

### **CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE FEATURED IMAGES IN THIS WORK**

As the reader can observe, the registration of most images presented here is not the same authorship as the author of the text. The house's practice is to delegate the work of photographic recording to one of the initiated practitioners, in the case of recording the images with people creating drawings on the table and in the images of the ceremony itself, the recording was overseen by Ale Migueis who kindly provided the images so that they could be linked to this work. There is a general orientation, given at the beginning of each ceremony, which prohibits the registration of images, except for the initiated practitioner, to preserve the image rights of those involved in the ceremonies.

Regarding the registration of the drawings, it was performed most of the time by the practitioner-authors themselves, after the ceremonies and later shared on their social networks and made available so that they could be part of this work. In the case of the drawings produced by the practitioner Eliane, they were registered by me after the ceremony.



## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research presented in this article proposes to act as yet another contribution to the field of symmetric anthropology (Viveiros de Castro 2002) that raises the theme of frank dialogue between different forms of knowledge production, interpretation and construction of worlds. The aim here is to understand the spaces of ayahuasca practices as knowledge production spaces. These practices can be placed in dialogue with scientific knowledge in order to build links and alliances in terms of what Stengers (1989) proposes.


Anthropologist Alfred Gell built an innovative proposal to understand art through anthropology. Moving away from the proposals defended by Jung, the author emphasizes the character of agency attributed to art: “Instead of emphasizing symbolic communication, I focus on the ideas of agency, intention, causality, result and transformation. I see art as a system of action whose purpose is to change the world, not to codify symbolic propositions about it.” (Gell 1998/2020, 31).

An important concept for Gell’s anthropology of art, which together with the ideas of “Index”, “Artist” and “Recipient” form its theoretical framework, is the idea of “Prototype”, which in Arca can perhaps be understood as: “[...] an entity (such as a king, a magician, a divine being, etc.) endowed with the ability to intend to seek a specific appearance for itself.” (Ibid. 74). It seems then that these entities, as prototypes, exercise agency over the practitioners so that their indexes are represented along with the artistic creations produced during the ceremonies.

In some chapters of the book “Art and Agency” (1998/2020) Gell resorts to the idea of “darshan”, which roughly refers to the vital energy transmitted by the deity to its worshiper, very present in Hinduism and which, I believe, can keep correspondences with the way in which practitioners of the Arca relate to the images and vice versa:

*Darshan* thus proves to be a two-way street. God’s gaze toward the worshiper bestows his blessing upon him; conversely, the worshiper reaches out to touch the god. The result is union with the god, a fusion of consciousness, according to the devotional interpretation. This brings us to the question of reciprocity and intersubjectivity in the relationship between image (index) and the recipient. Based on the thesis developed in these chapters, we can state that it is possible to have an intersubjectivity between people and indices, in particular indices that, like images of the gods, have a human form. (ibid., 184).

This intersubjectivity that Gell tells us about is also present in the native discourse through the ideas of “transpersonal” relationship, recurrent in the discourse of the spiritual coordinator of the house. For Philippe, a good way to understand human beings is to look at them through the



idea of transpersonality that involves the relationship with other human beings and entities in the invisible world. The practicing authors, through the dialogue in the field, demonstrate affiliation to these ideas since they understand that the drawings are produced through the relationship between the creative subject, other participants at home and non-human agents of the spiritual world.

Looking at these indexes that are represented through the drawings causes us, as I could observe in the field, something like what is described here:

Seeing is an object-directed projection of vision. Vision touches the object and takes its shape. Touch is the maximum relationship through which the visible submits itself to be understood. It is when the eye touches the object that the vitality that pulses in it is transmitted [...]. (Kramsrish 1976 apud Gel 1998/2020, 183).

It is often in this relationship through the gaze that the images participate in the ceremony, either through worship specifically aimed at them or through an informal gesture, when in the middle of the ballet the practitioners have contact for a moment with the displayed image and thus themselves subject to being influenced by them.

For Gell, works of art present themselves as “families, lineages, tribes, entire populations, as well as people.” (Gell 1998/2020, 233). This work presents a fragment of these lineages, of this family, to highlight the aspects related to the agency of the prototypes through their indexes represented in the drawings. Thus, we understand that the native ontology considers the prototypes as agents capable of influencing the ceremonies, leaving their marks on the practitioners’ bodies and minds, as well as on the images produced.

**ANNEX - DRAWINGS PRODUCED DURING THE RITUAL**

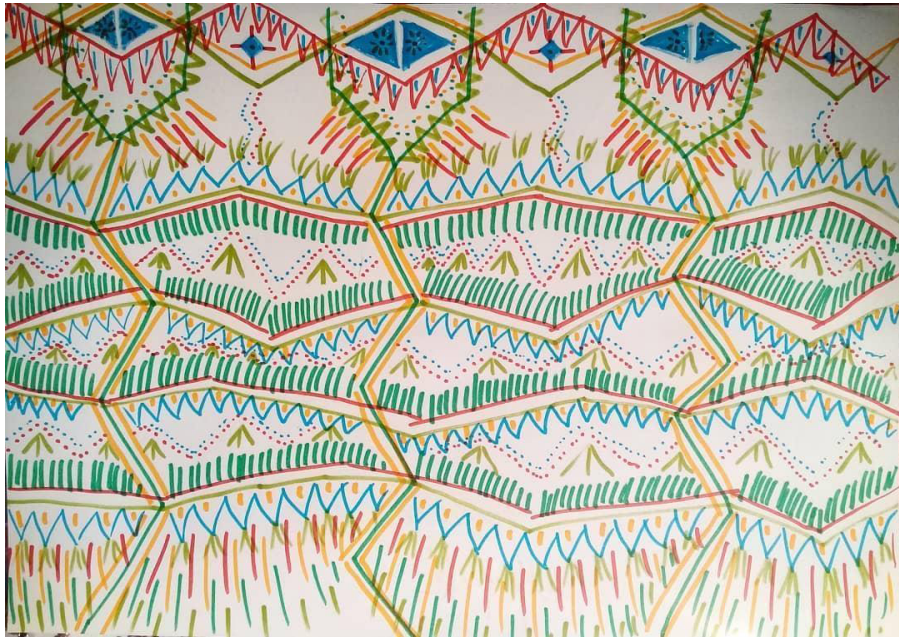


**IMAGE 5**  
The royalty of the  
Orixás - Marcelo  
Asth (initiated).  
Author registration.





**IMAGE 6**  
Image of  
Narasimha -  
Marcelo Asth  
(initiated). Author  
registration.



**IMAGE 7**  
Organelas -  
Marcelo Asth  
(initiated). Author  
registration.

Untitled - Elaine Abreu (visitor). My record.



**IMAGE 8**  
Untitled - Elaine  
Abreu (visitor). My  
record

Untitled - Elaine Abreu (visitor). My record.





**IMAGE 9**  
Untitled - Elaine  
Abreu (visitor). My  
record



**TRANSLATION**  
Mariana Casals

**IMAGE 10**  
Untitled - Calebe  
Alves (visitor).  
Author registration.



**IMAGE 11**  
Untitled - Calebe  
Alves (visitor).  
Author registration.

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**Frederico Romanoff do Vale** has a master's degree in Sociology (with a concentration in Anthropology) from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ, 2022). He also studied Social Sciences at UFRJ. He is currently studying for a degree in Social Sciences at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). He is part of the Center for Arts, Image and Ethnological Research - NAIPE, at UFRJ. E-mail: [fredericoromanoff@ufrj.br](mailto:fredericoromanoff@ufrj.br)

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Submitted: 05/15/2021  
Resubmitted: 09/06/2021  
Accepted: 09/08/2021