

MAKING SPIRITS

Materiality and Transcendence in
Contemporary Religions

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CHAPTER 10

Making Matter Matter

The Santo Daime Ritual of *Feitio*

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There is a story in the rich oral history of Santo Daime about a man who strove to make an extra-strong dose of the sacramental tea known as 'daime'. After boasting to fellow members of the potency of his daime, the day finally came when the sacramental tea was to be ritually consumed. Upon drinking the daime, however, the man's ritual co-participants felt nothing, nothing at all. Despite his best efforts to produce a super-strength brew, and irrespective of its psychoactive constituents, the daime proved wholly ineffectual. The moral of the tale is twofold. On the one hand, this typical 'pride before a fall' tale highlights the boastful arrogance of the man as an impediment to the spiritual force of the daime he had made. In so doing, the story points up the centrality of humility and virtue to the successful manufacture (*feitio*) of daime – and, by extension, to life in general. On the other hand, the story signals a broader metaphysical truth: daime is more than the sum total of its organic ingredients; it is irreducible to its material parts. As such, it was neither physical weakness nor technical error which let the man down – his failings were moral, not practical. The spiritual force of the daime was impeded by a spiritual fault, not a material one.

The Santo Daime religion centres upon the ritual consumption of the psychoactive beverage known generically as 'ayahuasca' but called 'daime' by adepts (*daimistas*) who view it as a religious sacrament (Gregorim 1991). Regarded as an entheogenic plant teacher, the spirit of daime materialises

through the combination of two native Amazonian plants – the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaf of the bush *Psychotria viridis*. The combination of these two plants occurs at the ritual of the *feitio*. Drawing on sustained practical engagement with Santo Daime, this chapter focuses on the *feitio* ritual and explores the processes involved in the materialisation of the spirit of daime through the combination of its constituent parts. In addition to detailing the practical dynamics at play, this chapter engages the beliefs and values of *daimistas*, not least with respect, first, to the belief that one's psychological and physical disposition during the *feitio* has a direct impact upon the character of the daime produced; and second, to the conviction that ritual participation produces a qualitatively new kind of self. The most fundamental of *daimista* practices, the *feitio* involves the reciprocal transformation of plant and person in such a way that the spiritual efficacy of each is implicated in their material embroilment and ritual co-production.

What follows opens with a brief historical overview of the emergence, national spread and subsequent internationalisation of Santo Daime. The intention of this section is to highlight the various spiritual-moral strands which have been woven together to form Santo Daime's highly variegated religious repertoire. The main section of the chapter treats the ritual of *feitio* through which the sacramental tea of daime is produced. Building upon preceding discussions and drawing on first-hand experience of a number of *feitios*, this section engages the practical processes and symbolic dynamics at play by situating them within the overarching cosmovision of the Santo Daime religion.¹ The chapter concludes by further exploring the act of ritual co-production at the heart of the *feitio*, and its mutual implication of ceremonial object (i.e. daime), ritual subject and communal context.

Santo Daime: religiosity and ritual

Santo Daime is the oldest of Brazil's ayahuasca religions and the most internationally widespread. The word 'ayahuasca' derives from the Quechua language and means 'soul vine' or 'vine of the dead' (Luna 1986). When applied to the ayahuasca religions of Brazil (i.e. Barquinha, Santo Daime and the Union of the Vegetable), the generic term 'ayahuasca' denotes the combination of vine and shrub leaves mentioned above (Dawson 2007 67–98). Ayahuasca is a psychoactive substance traditionally consumed by indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon which passed to non-indigenous peoples through its use among mixed-race communities and rubber-tappers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Known emically as 'daime', ayahuasca is regarded by *daimistas* as an 'entheogen'

whose properties facilitate the interaction of humankind with supernatural agents or forces (Polari 1999). Lauded by the hymns of Santo Daime, ayahuasca is celebrated as a 'teacher' and 'Holy Light' whose consumption engenders 'truth', 'love', 'wisdom', 'understanding', 'force', 'power', 'cure' and 'cleansing'.²

The religious repertoire of Santo Daime is an amalgam of popular Catholic, indigenous, esoteric, Spiritist, Afro-Brazilian and New Age beliefs and practices. Of a highly variegated and transformative nature, the *daimista* repertoire is a living palimpsest whose originary components are overlaid, but never wholly erased, by subsequent additions and developments. Santo Daime was founded among the mixed-race, semi-rural peasantry of the Brazilian Amazonian state of Acre by Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892–1971). Known commonly as 'Master Irineu', Irineu Serra is held by many to be the reincarnation of the spirit of Jesus. Based at the community of Alto Santo, Santo Daime emerged as a recognisably distinct religious movement in the early part of the mid-twentieth century.³ Throughout the first phase of its existence under Master Irineu, the beliefs and practices of north-west 'caboclo' culture (notably, popular Catholicism and Afro-Amazonian religiosity) shaped the formative religious repertoire of the nascent *daimista* community.⁴ Influenced principally by the Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought, these foundational components were progressively overlaid with an esoteric worldview whose religio-moral preoccupations reflected the typically modern aspirations of its formative European traditions of Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism and Theosophy (see Moura da Silva 2006: 225–40). More displaced than erased, the foundational cosmovision populated by saints and spirits was incrementally subsumed within an overlay of rational-ethical concerns for the 'higher self' and its evolutionary nurture.

Subsequent to Irineu Serra's death an offshoot organisation known as Cefluris (Eclectic Centre of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra) was founded by Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920–90).⁵ Known as 'Padrinho Sebastião', Mota de Melo was a disciple of Master Irineu who was unsuccessful in securing the leadership of Alto Santo after its founder's death. Padrinho Sebastião is believed by Cefluris members to be the reincarnation of the spirit of John the Baptist. Cefluris is today headquartered at Céu do Mapiá in the state of Amazonas. On the back of the organisational expansion of Cefluris, Santo Daime reached Brazil's major conurbations (e.g. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) in the early 1980s, before spreading abroad. Embroiled in the formation of Cefluris and reflecting the mediumistic inclinations of its founder, spirit-orientated activities

were reactivated as important components of the *daimista* repertoire. Rather than the formative influences of popular Catholicism and afro-Amazonian religiosities, the primary driver was now that of Kardecist Spiritism (MacRae 1992). Towards the end of Padrinho Sebastião's life, however, the prominence of Spiritism was incrementally complemented by elements appropriated from the Afro-Brazilian religion of Umbanda (Groisman 1999).

Cefluris is led today by Alfredo Gregório de Melo (son of Padrinho Sebastião) and Alex Polari, who are regarded by some as the respective reincarnations of the biblical kings Solomon and David. Thanks mainly to Cefluris, Santo Daime has a presence throughout the American continent, in many of Europe's capitals, in the most urban-industrialised regions of Australasia, in parts of the Middle East and in South Africa. Consolidated under the leadership of Padrinhos Alfredo and Alex, Umbandist influences enjoy an established repertorial prominence (Dawson, forthcoming). They are, though, being increasingly complemented through the ongoing appropriation of discourse and practice from a range of traditional (e.g. Candomblé) repertoires and alternative (e.g. new-age) worldviews (Arruda et al 2006). Reflecting its progressively international character, and relative to the particular domestic scene, established Brazilian components increasingly sit alongside discursive and practical ingredients culled from the native cosmovisions, alternative paradigms and prevailing traditions of national contexts across a growing portion of the globe. Lauded by Santo Daime's extensive range of hymns, the Catholic saints and nature spirits of its earliest period today sit alongside the later arrivals of Kardecist notaries and Umbandist entities who, in turn, continue to find new ritual companions in the spiritual beings and supernatural agencies native to Australasia, Europe and North America.

Visible within individual rites and manifest through its diversifying ceremonial portfolio, the palimpsestic and fast evolving character of the Santo Daime repertoire makes for a variegated ritual terrain. Attempting to encapsulate the deep-seated variegation of its discourse and practice, I have elsewhere adapted Besnier's use of Bakhtin to describe the ritual repertoire of Santo Daime Cefluris as 'hyper-heteroglossic' in character (2011: 149). Within the same piece I trace the growing appearance of non-traditional forms of spirit-orientated activity which I ground in the now dominant influence of urban-professional classes, whose demographic profile and existential preoccupations are markedly different from Santo Daime's formative generations. By way of illustration I cite both the ongoing transformation of Santo Daime's traditional ritual practices and

the addition of new ceremonial forms to the movement's established repertoire. The growing prevalence of 'interactive possession' within traditional ritual contexts is the key transformation tracked by this earlier piece, while the appearance of new rites (e.g. Mesa Branca and São Miguel) within the ceremonial calendar and employment of extra-calendrical practices (e.g. *giras*) combine to evidence ongoing changes to the *daimista* repertoire (ibid: 143–61).

Although a miscellany of established and ad hoc ceremonies are practised by contemporary *daimistas*, the mainstay of Santo Daime's religious repertoire is almost universally recognised as consisting of the four traditional rituals of the 'Dance', 'Mass', 'Concentration' and *feitio* (Cemin 2004: 347–82). Whether in respect of their scheduling, of their internal character or in comparison with each other, these rituals again reflect the palimpsestic nature of the *daimista* worldview. From the practices employed, through the material objects mobilised, to the respective articulation of beliefs, each of these rituals evidences the variegated formation of the Santo Daime repertoire. Such variegation is further reinforced as different communities across the movement employ, mobilise and articulate Santo Daime's repertorial components in ways which reflect local dynamics as much as – sometimes more than – they adhere to established conventions and traditions. For example, in a community heavily influenced by Afro-Brazilian (e.g. Candomblé and Umbanda) traditions, symbols and practices appropriated from these ritual repertoires impact upon the practical and interpretative experiences of *daimistas* whose engagement with Santo Daime is mediated by or interspersed with them. In the same vein, *daimista* communities of a traditional esoteric (e.g. Theosophy) or New Age bent likewise refract the established motifs and inherited rituals of Santo Daime in ways which engender variations in both objective corporate practice and subjective religious experience.

In respect of the increasingly popular appearance of the practice and experience of spirit possession (*incorporação*) across Santo Daime communities, for example, some *daimistas* employ Afro-Brazilian tropes to describe possession as an event involving suppression of the conscious self and an inability to remember anything from the point of actual possession to the moment of 'despatch'. Others, however, adopt a typically Spiritist line to describe themselves as remaining conscious throughout the possession episode. Here, some regard their subjective presence as integral to directing the possessing spirit; whereas others talk of the self as an interested but passive third-party looking on to what the spirit is doing through their body. Evincing traditional esoteric influences, some *daimistas* articulate possession

as an ecstatic process of 'astral flight' comprising both the dislocation of the self from its physical moorings and the taking of disembodied trips across the globe or visits to different historical periods. Indigenous shamanistic and popular folk motifs of soul-flight are likewise employed to describe disincarnate journeys to assorted spiritual realms populated by supernatural agents of both a human and non-human kind. Others, however, eschew both enstatic and ecstatic conceptualisations of spirit-orientated activity. Instead, New Age notions of expanded consciousness or broadened spiritual vision are employed to articulate interaction with the world of spirits. At the same time, some *daimistas* use psycho-spiritual tropes to describe the 'spirits' with whom they interact as psychical counterparts of multifaceted aspects of the material self (see Dawson 2011: 143–61).

Prior to treating the *feitio*, and by way of furnishing a broader repertorial context within which this ritual might be situated, a few brief comments on the Dance, Mass and Concentration may prove fruitful. Inherited from its popular Catholic legacy, Santo Daime's liturgical calendar maps closely onto the festival periods and feast days of Brazil's Luso-Christian heritage (Goulart 2004b: 277–301). Celebrated at other points of the year (e.g. anniversaries), the Dance (*bailado*) rituals, at which Santo Daime sings its most important hymnals (*hinários*), are scheduled relative to the traditional Catholic calendar. As Labate and Pacheco observe, not only the scheduling but significant portions of the festive content and liturgical structure of the *bailado* owe much to the popular Catholic paradigm from which they were appropriated (2004: 303–44). Although very much a modified version thereof, the *daimista* ritual of the Mass (*missa*) likewise exhibits explicit derivation from its popular Catholic counterpart. Such derivation, however, is embellished by narrative and practical components borrowed from esoteric and Spiritist repertoires. Unlike the *bailado* and *missa*, the ritual of Concentration (*concentração*) owes little to the popular Catholic heritage of its creators. Instead, both the scheduling and intellectual preoccupations of the Concentration reflect the patterns and processes of the esoteric paradigm. As if further to underscore its contrasting provenance, the Concentration has little by way of festive ethos and is, unlike the Dance, undertaken in a seated position conducive to the esoteric disciplines of introspection and self-scrutiny. Although prayers are said and hymns may be sung in parts of the ritual, the majority of the Concentration is spent in silent meditation which, as if to reinforce its introspective intent, is undertaken with the lights turned down.

While tied to different calendrical schedules, each of these rituals usually commences after sunset and is generally executed indoors. Unlike

the Concentration and Mass, the Dance is performed standing up, with little if any recourse to seating. With a single break in the middle, the *bailado* may last anything up to 14 hours. The *missa* is the shortest ritual of these three, but may still take three or four hours to perform. Although I have attended Concentrations which have lasted little over three hours, I have also known this ritual to extend to five or six. Regimented according to sex, age, seniority and (sometimes) height, participants in each of these rituals face inward towards a central table nearest to which the most senior members are located.⁶ Although actual paraphernalia differs from group to group and ritual to ritual, the central table is usually laid with a wooden two-spurred cross (*cruzeiro*) draped by a rosary, statuettes of Mary and Jesus, and photographs of Master Irineu and – relative to the group – other authority figures (e.g. Padrinho Sebastião and Padrinhos Alfredo and Alex). Candles, flowers, water and incense sticks are also among the most common items to adorn the central table. In addition, some communities may add statuettes of Catholic saints and a Bible, while others might have representations of Afro-Brazilian entities or native spirits along with crystals, oriental icons and miscellaneous revered scriptures.

While each of these rituals has its own particular rationale, they share the common concern to generate a positive spiritual current which binds participants vertically to the supernatural plane and horizontally with each other. Once generated, the spiritual current is then harnessed for the benefit of both ritual participants (material and spiritual) and those at a distance for whom this astral energy is likewise mobilised. Nuanced relative to the ritual in question, the generation of the spiritual current at all times requires the generic correlation of collective effort and individual focus. In so doing, the collective generation of the spiritual current is made reliant upon the sustained and focused contribution of individual ritual actors, while the individual participant is understood to be woven within a web of corporate obligation which both delimits autonomous action and corrects, if not censures, individual behaviour relative to the wider dynamics of communal ceremonial practice. Again reflective of its palimpsestic character, *daimista* ritual practice comprises a form of communal individualism which combines corporate responsibility and individualistic focus in a manner which seemingly does injury to neither.

Employed by older generations of *daimistas*, the designation of rituals as 'trials' (*provas*) reflects their often arduous and demanding nature. The now commoner term 'work' (*trabalho*) holds similar connotations. On the one hand, the psychoactive effects and physiological impact of daime engender a range of challenges and discomforts for the individual which

require vigilance and, at times, careful management. Corporal control in an altered state of consciousness is a skill in itself. On the other hand, and in combination with these factors, the physical demands of often prolonged ritual participation which is predicated on sustained co-ordination with collective ritual dynamics makes for a doubly demanding experience. The *daimista* ritual space is no place for the faint-hearted. In addition to notions of trial and work, ritual practice is discursively framed by the virtues of discipline and steadfastness (*firmeza*). In combination, discipline and steadfastness enable participants to remain in their place (*ficar em seu lugar*) and so meet the collective responsibilities of ceremonial participation while reaping the subjective rewards of individual focus and application.

Making matter matter

The feitio

Although the official beginnings of Santo Daime are often traced to an early form of Concentration held in 1930, the already well-established use of ayahuasca by this date makes the *feitio* the oldest *daimista* ritual (Couto 2004: 385–411). The fact that this ritual involves the production of Santo Daime's sacramental tea also makes it the most important. Although the most important of *daimista* rituals, the *feitio* has not been immune to innovations wrought by successive generations or different branches of the movement. While the basic format of conjoining vine and leaf has remained relatively unaltered across *daimista* groups, a variety of practice is employed in respect of, for example, scheduling, tools, corporal regimes, participatory restrictions and sexual divisions of space and labour. Once tied to the lunar cycle, the *feitio* is now practised by many groups relative to stock levels and variations in demand. Although manual labour remains the only means by which some communities will practise this ritual, for others (and for various reasons) mechanical aids are regarded as a now common component of the process. In the same vein, some groups restrict participation to full members, or practise strict dietary and sexual regimes around the time of *feitio*, while others do not. At the same time, while certain communities operate inflexible restrictions in respect of sexual divisions of labour and space, others are more pragmatic in the manner of their application.

The importance of the *feitio* to the Santo Daime community goes beyond the literal production of its sacramental tea. The fact that many Santo Daime churches rely upon others for the provision of their sacrament gives the *feitio* a strategic importance. In addition to bestowing a certain status upon those communities with sufficient resources to stage it, the

feitio plays an important part in the establishment of alliances, along with their inherent hierarchies and dependencies. When the Cefluris movement first spread beyond its traditional home of the Amazon region, for example, the reliance of newly established groups on Amazonian supplies of daime played a key role in underwriting the spiritual and organisational authority of the mother community in Mapiá. Over time, however, the transplanting of vine and leaf to other parts of Brazil has undermined traditional dependencies, which in turn is eroding established hierarchies, along with their implications for organisational identity and cohesion.

In its current phase, the international spread of Santo Daime has replicated the ongoing strategic importance of the *feitio*. On the one hand, hostile environmental conditions serve to limit the number of places in which vine and leaf can be successfully cultivated outside of South America. To my knowledge, and despite numerous attempts, vine and leaf have only been successfully transplanted to two other regions of the globe.⁷ Despite their successful cultivation, however, the relative scarcity and immaturity of these plants continues to limit their ability to provision domestic ayahuasca production. On the other hand, the precarious legal status or clandestine character of ayahuasca consumption outside of Brazil places severe restrictions on the ability to cultivate and process its constituent parts. The primary active agent of ayahuasca is n,n-dimethyltryptamine (DMT) which has been classified as a Schedule 1 substance by a number of international conventions (Tupper 2008: 297–303, 2009: 117–36). Even in those jurisdictions where the ritual consumption of ayahuasca is protected by law, such juridical protections do not extend to the actual manufacture and distribution of ayahuasca (Labate 2005: 397–457). Consequently, the overwhelming majority of Santo Daime communities around the world continue to rely on supplies of daime furnished by *feitios* undertaken in Brazil.⁸ And, in parallel with the earliest years of the movement's spread beyond the Amazon, such reliance is managed through strategic alliances and accompanied by organisational dependencies which continue to underwrite established institutional hierarchies.

In addition to being the oldest and most important ritual of the Santo Daime repertoire, the *feitio* is the longest and, at points, the most arduous. In terms of duration, and unlike the other rituals mentioned above, the *feitio* has little by way of a definitive format, with consecutive phases forming a lineal progression from beginning to end. In effect, the *feitio* lasts as long as its organisers wish, with the length of the ritual usually determined by the amount of daime the *feitiores* wish to produce or, conversely, the amount of time it takes to process the materials harvested. While I have been involved

in *feitios* lasting no more than two days, I have also known them to last anything up to and beyond two weeks. At the same time, I have participated in *feitios* which have run according to schedule and, as noted below, in rituals which have not. Irrespective of the labour involved or the inconvenience caused, the general rule of thumb is that, once harvested, all the materials must be used.

While the constituent components of ayahuasca and the concrete processes of its manufacture differ among native Amazonian tribes, they remain more or less constant across Brazil's three ayahuasca religions and throughout the Santo Daime movement as a whole. Once harvested, the vine is cleaned of debris and then macerated. The vine does not come into contact with water until, in its macerated state, it is combined with the leaf. Leaves are picked whole from the shrub and then cleaned by hand. Once clean, the leaves are washed and then, still whole, combined with the macerated vine as consecutive layers in a pan. Water is added, the layered pan is placed on a fire and the mixture is boiled until the liquid content reduces to the desired amount. The reduced liquid is then set aside and subsequently added, along with other such reductions, to a fresh batch of vine and leaf for further boiling and reduction. The combination and re-boiling of reductions may continue for a number of cycles, the precise amount which is determined by the strength of daime sought. At the same time, the boiled mash of vine and leaf may be re-cooked with a new infusion of fresh water (a later innovation) or, as is more traditional, disposed of after a single cooking cycle.

In combination with stocking and managing a wood-fuelled fire and an often rudimentary oven system, as well as ensuring that sufficient stocks of vine and leaf are ready for use and that pans are cleaned and appropriately prepared between cooking cycles, the re-use of cooked mash and re-boiling of reductions make for a highly complex process. Such complexity naturally increases relative to the number and sizes of pan being used. While I have participated in a *feitio* involving no more than two ten-litre pans, I have worked in a ritual using nine pans each holding well in excess of 50 litres. Furthermore, once the process of cooking has gone through its first cycle, different pans may require different amounts of heat and differing lengths of time on the fire. At all times, then, *feitores* must be aware of what stage of the cooking cycle they have reached and what kind of reduction they are working with. The intense and sustained concentration necessary to the successful management of this process is applied within an often bustling environment in which axes are wielded to chop wood, knives are used to clean the vine, red-hot pans are moved between different points

of the oven, boiling liquid is decanted or transferred between pans, and steaming mash is prepared for reuse or disposed of.

The division of manual labour and the use of ritual space within the *feitio* is a material mirroring of the sacred plants' metaphysical properties. To remodel a term of Pierre Bourdieu (1992: 139), ritual space can here be understood as a 'structured structure' whose frame and contents are determined relative to an overarching supernatural reference. Following traditional gendered distinctions, the vine is held to comprise typically masculine characteristics such as strength and power.⁹ Composed of 'masculine force', the vine is an organic embodiment of the 'Eternal Father' (*Pai eterno*). In contrast, the leaf comprises gentleness and subtlety. By virtue of its physical embodiment of the 'Divine Mother' (*Mãe divina*), the leaf is believed to be infused with 'feminine light'. As an organic manifestation of female cosmic energies, the leaf is harvested and given its first (usually dry) cleaning by women. Once picked clean of debris, the leaves are then taken to the *casa de feitio* (lit. '*feitio* house') where they are combined and boiled with the vine. In keeping with its masculine force, the vine is harvested and cleaned only by men. The cleaning and subsequent maceration of the vine usually occurs at the *casa de feitio* which is, except in very particular circumstances, a male-only space. Although the physical demands of daime production are sometimes cited as a rationale for the masculinisation of the *casa de feitio*, as with other *daimista* rites the belief that the ceremonial mixing of sexual energies should be minimised plays a key role in this gendered division of ritual space. At the same time, the female management of domestic space and collective production of meals during the *feitio* is held to provide something of a ritual balance to the male-only space of the *casa de feitio*.¹⁰ The fusion of cosmic energies effected by the eventual combination of vine and leaf is thereby paralleled by the productive mutuality of the gendered, but complementary, labours of the *casa de feitio* and communal canteen.

The sexual division of labour and ritual space is more, though, than a passive mirroring of universal metaphysical referents. In addition to being a 'structured structure', the ritual of *feitio* may also be understood – again appropriating Bourdieu – as a 'structuring structure'. As noted above, the spiritual efficacy of daime is held to be influenced by the subjective demeanour of those involved in its production. By restricting the harvesting and cleaning of the leaf to women, the *feitio* ritual allows for the concentrated interplay of feminine energies. In effect, the female-only processing of the leaf engenders a recursive dynamic in which the feminine energies of both parties are intensified and refined through their prolonged ritual interaction. Likewise, the male-only processing of the vine generates

a mutually reinforcing dynamic within which the masculine forces of each are strengthened and purified. While vine and leaf are primed for the ritual consummation of their union, man and woman are disposed to benefit optimally from the fruits of this union. For both men and women, focused and, at times, prolonged interaction with the organic constituents of daime comprises an act of ritual co-production through which the material and transcendent dimensions of each undergo an all-embracing transformation.

The ritual format of the *feitio* engenders a distinctive mode of generating and maintaining the spiritual current essential to the efficacy of all *daimista* rites. While hymns may be sung in parts of the ritual, the overall atmosphere of quiet, sustained contemplation entails the spiritual current being generated and maintained not through song but through concentrated subjective intent and individual application, orchestrated through collective routine and corporate practice. At the same time, the timings and processes involved, the degree of interactive cooperation and the extent of physical labour required magnify the collective consequences of otherwise individual failings. As with the *daimista* ritual repertoire in general, but less obvious to the untrained eye, the particular processes of the *feitio* are regulated by a hierarchical dynamic which apportions roles relative to status and experience – with the former not always determined by the latter. That there are no ritual bystanders in *daimista* ceremonial practice is a fact writ large by the rite of *feitio*. An archetypal rite of passage, the *feitio* is regarded by *daimistas* as a spiritual ‘trial’ *par excellence*. In combination with these dynamics, the extent of the discipline and steadfastness involved makes the *feitio* a ritual microcosm of the religious life of Santo Daime as a whole; it is an apprenticeship within an apprenticeship.

The *feitio* is a paradigmatic ritual in that it exemplifies all that the narrative and practice of Santo Daime revere as integral to its spiritual efficacy. On the one hand, Santo Daime’s spiritual efficacy may be understood as, in part, constituted by the ritual efficacy of its collective ceremonial practice. Such is the case because ritual space (as ‘structuring structure’) provides an arena in which corporate ceremonial practice generates the collective spiritual current whose force and focus magnifies individual exertion through its catalyzing and dynamic affect. As a consequence, collective ceremonial practice furnishes a return on subjective ritual action which is far greater than that ordinarily available to an individual working in ritual isolation. As noted above, the different rituals of the Santo Daime repertoire each have their own ceremonial rationale which determines both the mode of spiritual current to be generated and the particular manner of its manufacture. This, in turn, dictates the kinds of ritual efficacy available for subjective

appropriation. Directly indebted to its origins in popular Catholic festivals, for example, the Dance ritual generates a festive and celebratory spiritual current whose character is both subjectively joyful and uplifting. Given its typically ‘light’ nature, however, the spiritual force generated by the Dance cannot be expected to support the more demanding processes of self-scrutiny, purification and intercessory healing which rely upon the kinds of current engendered by the ‘heavier’ rituals of, for example, Concentration, Mass and Cure. In addition to the manufacture of daime, and as a mixture of Amazonian caboclo and esoteric elements, the spiritual efficacy of the *feitio* is held to reside chiefly in the opportunity it provides for individual purification which is achieved as much through physical as mental exertion.

The ritual efficacy of collective ceremonial practice is complemented by the religio-moral efficacy experienced by the individual subject. Indeed, such is the mutually implicating relationship between these two facets of Santo Daime’s spiritual efficacy that neither is possible without the other. On the one hand, the collective generation of the spiritual current which is central to ritual efficacy is reliant upon the ceremonial exertion of individual participants. On the other, the ritual benefits (e.g. purification, healing, edification) experienced by individual participants are only available thanks to the spiritual current manufactured, harnessed and focussed by the corporate ceremonial context. In addition to the benefits of collective ritual action, the subjective experience of religio-moral efficacy relies also upon individual application in all walks of life. Grounded both in the popular Amazonian religio-cultural complex and the religious moralism of Spiritism, the concept of ‘vigilance’ informs *daimistas* of the need to be constantly alert to the ethical pitfalls and spiritual dangers of everyday life. In such a way are strong parallels drawn between the disciplines and exertions employed within the formal ritual arena and those to be used within the everyday course of daily living. As with corporate ceremonial practice, the benefits accrued in everyday life rest ultimately upon the continued alertness and disciplined application of individual religio-moral action.

As with the ritual efficacy of collective ceremonial practice, the religio-moral benefits accrued by individual action are underwritten by a mechanistic causal dynamic which is jointly derived from popular religious and esoteric milieus. Articulated today through the esoteric concept of ‘reciprocity’ (e.g. law of return), the spiritual efficacy of *daimista* practice is underpinned by a direct (i.e. mechanistic) correlation between the amount of effort expended and the extent of the reward returned (in this life or the next).¹¹ In respect of its subjective benefits, the most common expressions of Santo Daime’s spiritual efficacy relate to individual experiences

of healing. In almost every *daimista* community I've been to I have been told accounts of healing which stretch from leg sores that wouldn't close, through addictions to drink and drugs, to cancers which conventional medicine had diagnosed as terminal. In many cases, healing occurred soon after the individual had commenced participation in Santo Daime. At the same time, many of these accounts included episodes of relapse brought on by breaks in ritual attendance ('moving away from the daime') or failures of vigilance and the ensuing erosion of everyday religio-moral regimes.¹² Owing to its unique combination of sacramental production and psychophysical exertion, the ritual of *feitio* is regarded as highly efficacious in respect of the spiritual, moral and material benefits which ensue from ceremonial participation.

Ritual co-production

- P: I was there yesterday and I saw them kicking the vine [*jagube*] to move it into a pile, stepping on it also. It's sacred, a sacred thing. You just don't do that. There should always be respect. I learnt to collect the vine from people taught by Padrinho Sebastião. I learnt that you don't tread on the vine, you treat it with respect. It's a sacred thing! You don't throw it either, you respect it. If you want to put it somewhere, you walk over to that spot and you place it there. Yes, I was taught that there are times when you might have to tread on it. If there's a mass of vine fallen down on a [forest] path and you have to clear it, then you have to walk on it as you cut a path through and clear it out of the way. But even then, it's still a sacred thing; you must treat it with respect. I remember a man from Acre, a shaman; he was Kaxinawá [an Amazonian tribe]. He said that during the *feitio*, when they're making ayahuasca, his people tread on the vine, throw it around, laugh and joke, and things like that. He told me that he learnt respect when he did *feitio* the *daimista* way. Now, he does things differently. Of course, there's nothing wrong with showing happiness when doing *feitio*. Happiness [*alegria*] is a very powerful force and can add to the power of the daime. But, happiness must be tempered with respect. You must respect the vine. Did you see how they were kicking the vine and walking all over it?
- J: Yes, they were in a hurry as it was getting dark.
- P: I was going to say something but decided against it. Did you see what I did, though? Did you see me tip-toe through the vine; like this [exaggerated tip-toeing]?
- J: Yes, I did.

- P: Well, I did that to show how it should be done. I did it so it would register in his [i.e. M's] head and he would learn and know for next time. Now, I'm not saying that this is the reason for the accident [to M's hand]. But it's all part and parcel of a lack of respect; a carelessness which has you cutting in a slapdash way [exaggerated slashing and stomping]. That's not the way it should be done. Respect in all things. It's a sacred thing [*coisa sagrada*].¹³

Occasioned by a machete wound to M's hand incurred while harvesting the vine (i.e. *Banisteriopsis caapi*), known emically as *jagube* or *cipó*, this narrative encapsulates two complementary truths. First, and as with the leaf (i.e. *Psychotria viridis*) – known emically as *rainha*, *folha* or *chacrona* – *daimistas* regard the vine as a 'sacred thing'. To the Amazonian peoples from whom the psychoactive properties of ayahuasca were first learnt, both leaf and vine are believed to be plant spirits whose primary function – at least from a human perspective – is pedagogical. Known also as 'power plants' by virtue of their psychoactive effects, the knowledge of the 'plant teachers' is accessed through their processing and subsequent ingestion (Luna 1986). By consuming the plant one is both implicated in its power and instructed in its teachings.

Within the contemporary *daimista* movement, talk of daime as literally containing or embodying a plant spirit is generally restricted to the more traditional communities located in or near the Amazonian region. Certainly, *daimistas* around the world continue to use the terms 'plant spirit' and 'plant teacher'. When asked to explain what they mean by these terms, however, the responses given indicate their metaphorical employment as tropes whose usage is grounded more in a nostalgic reference to Amazonian origins than it is in a metaphysical reference to given ontological realities. In actuality, most *daimistas* conceive of daime in a way which owes more to esoteric and New Age holistic paradigms than to traditional Amazonian worldviews. As such, daime is regarded as a substance in which the sacred, universal and all-embracing cosmic life-force is found in an especially (but not exclusively) concentrated form. In so being, daime is understood as a privileged medium whose concentration of cosmic spiritual energy allows it to serve as a 'catalyst' which both facilitates and enhances human interaction with the universal life-force variously interpreted as the 'sacred', 'supernatural', 'divine' and 'holy'. The *santo* of Santo Daime can thereby be understood in a dual, but complementary, sense which alludes both to subjective religio-moral dynamics traditionally rendered by the term 'holiness' and to an objective metaphysical dimension traditionally

named as 'the holy'. Irrespective of the symbols or nomenclature employed, however, the underlying dynamics remain the same: the power experienced and instruction gained through their ingestion are what the combination of these plants bestows. The force and knowledge engendered by daime are gifts and, as such, can be withheld as well as granted.

Second, the sacredness of which P speaks throughout the above extract applies not only to the organic constituents of daime but also to the manner of their processing and eventual consumption. As he says, 'Respect in all things'. Embroiled within the reflexively nurtured ritualism of the *feitio*, the sacredness of daime is reflected in the ordered sacrality of its manufacture. Whether harvesting, cleaning and processing, or cooking and bottling, the manufacture of daime demands of those involved a particular demeanour which commences, as an esteemed *feitor* once told me, 'with having the mind and heart in the right place'. The objective force of the daime and its constituent parts is thereby complemented by the subjective disposition of those responsible for its manufacture. As noted above, this subjective disposition has implications for the spiritual potency of the daime produced and, by extension, the ritual experiences of those who subsequently consume it. A direct correlate of daime's objective power, the subjective condition of its makers is considered a constituent force in its spiritual efficacy.

In some *daimista* communities the production of daime is regarded as a work of alchemic science in which the four elements of earth, water, air and fire are fused to magical effect. In others in which I have worked, the process of manufacture is understood to combine the celestial powers of sun, moon and stars. Either way, the creation of daime is just that, a creation. Through their combination and boiling, the vine and leaf – along with their inherent powers – are transmuted into something which is exponentially more than the sum total of its parts and the productive processes to which they have been subjected. Daime is, in effect, an emergent property whose spiritual efficacy is nevertheless implicated by the material nature of its constitutive elements and the physical character of its manufacture. As noted above, the transmutation of vine and leaf is paralleled by the transformation of those involved in the production of daime. The metaphysical transmutation of the sacrament and the religio-moral transformation of the self are mutually implicated through the act of ritual co-production.

As with other parts of the *daimista* repertoire, notions of subjective transformation through participation in the *feitio* are allied with understandings of ritual as a 'trial' (*prova*) which both tests one's mettle and, through the

act of testing, purifies those involved. Likewise in keeping with standard repertorial practice, daime is consumed at regular intervals throughout the entire *feitio*.¹⁴ While temperament and demeanour are valorised as contributing to the spiritual efficacy of daime, they are also regarded as subject to trial and testing – which, by implication, means that they may also be found wanting. At one time necessary to the constitutive processes of producing daime, the real value of subjective disposition remains at all times contingent on its ability to meet the demands of ritual participation. In keeping with the meritocratic ethos of the *daimista* repertoire in general, participation in the ritual of *feitio* is a privileged opportunity in which the benefits of success are constantly measured against the costs of failure and the consequent loss of spiritual efficacy and the subjective transformation it enables.

Undertaken with the Cefluris branch of Santo Daime, the first *feitio* I was involved in took place in 2005 with a community whose daime serviced a number of churches in the border regions of the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The *feitio* commenced with a six-hour ritual comprising an extended Concentration the latter part of which included the singing of a local *hinário* (hymnal). Performed in the church and ending shortly after 2.00am, the ritual allowed for less than four hours' sleep before the commencement of harvesting at first light. It is the tradition of this particular daime community that, once lit, the fires of the oven (*fornalha*) should burn continuously throughout the entire *feitio*. In addition to maximising production, this requirement considerably increases the demands upon those working at the *casa de feitio*. In so doing, this requirement also maximises opportunity for personal transformation made possible by the additional challenges involved.

Originally planned as a three-day *feitio*, the ritual was extended by a day and a half due to the accidental harvesting of too many leaves. As all leaf or vine should be used subsequent to harvesting, it proved necessary to collect more vine to complement the leaf and chop more wood to feed the, now extended, firing of the oven. Due to the unplanned nature of the ritual's extension, a good number of those involved in the *feitio* had to leave on the third evening to be home in time to meet prior engagements or prepare for the impending working week. This exodus left a diminished group whose reduced size and circumstances soon leant themselves to the self-designation of 'righteous remnant'. Although the demands of the *feitio* had increased considerably relative to the size of the group now present, so too had the opportunity for ritual trial and all that it entails by way of personal transformation and spiritual merit.

Up until this time the *casa de feitio* had been manned by a small cadre whose almost constant attendance was complemented by alternate shifts, who snatched light meals and some small sleep when not on duty. Among those in attendance virtually around the clock was the community leader (*Padrinho*) who, by way of illustrating the need for perpetual vigilance in all things, informed me that: 'Jesus slept for only half an hour at night and even then he did so sitting up, never lying down.' The much reduced nature of the group negated the possibility of alternate shifts, and thereby required that all those still present stay at the *casa de feitio* for the remainder of the ritual. Having had little sleep over the past two nights, for me and my fellow shift workers the third day of the *feitio* commenced at 6.00am on Sunday and finished at 3.00pm on Monday.¹⁵

As Sunday evening passed into early Monday morning, and the cold mountain air seemed to gnaw at every extremity, talk among those present turned to Jesus's experiences shortly before and after his arrest. With the Jerusalem authorities closing in on him and his followers, Jesus found himself abandoned and alone as his inner circle of disciples fled in fear of their lives, slept when they had been asked to remain alert and, when approached, ultimately denied association with him. Recapitulating traditional *daimista* notions of trial, steadfastness and discipline, we, like Jesus's disciples, were now charged with loyalty and vigilance. Were we, like his first earthly followers, to fail this test, abandon the 'cosmic Christ' (*Christo cósmico*) and thereby fall short in our duties both to the daime and our own 'higher self' (*eu superior*)? Though implicit, the moral lesson of this comparison was clear. While we, as individuals, were being tested, the consequences of our actions were collective.

As at other points of the *feitio*, the *Padrinho* and other prominent members of the community moved among us, their fellow workers, sharing stories of prior *feitios* and of their experiences with the daime. They also complemented the technical aspects of daime production with reminders of the need for an attitude of meditative reflection, prayerfulness, patience and love. If the daime is to embody the 'spirit of God', we, its makers, must do likewise. The spiritual transformation engendered through the meeting of our responsibilities was a moral correlate of the metaphysical transmutation of base matter into the holy sacrament of daime. And just as this transmutation involves an act of ritual co-production through which daime and *feitio* are mutually constituted, so too are the trials and responsibilities of the individual self met and discharged through the aid and support of collective effort and corporate will.

Conclusion

As noted above, the Santo Daime worldview employs a metaphysical holism which treats every aspect of material existence as infused by an all-embracing, universal life-force whose transformative energies may be harnessed through the mutually complementary dynamics of collective ritual practice and individual religio-moral action. An important outworking of Santo Daime's holistic worldview is the experiential fusion of the realms traditionally designated the 'material' and the 'spiritual' – spheres commonly regarded by secular modernity as otherwise discrete. No longer regarded as categorically distinct, each sphere is held to be internally related to the other such that what belongs to the material pertains to the spiritual and what pertains to the spiritual belongs to the material. In effect, Santo Daime's collapsing of the material and the spiritual constitutes an act of re-enchantment through which the 'things of this world' are appropriated as an expression of and, thereby, a means to an overarching (as well as underlying and inherent) metaphysical reality. As the material realm is sacralised so the spiritual arena is materialised. As a consequence, the spiritual sphere is immanentised by its grounding in material processes while the material realm is valorised as a means to spiritual realisation.

Founded upon the unproblematical transposition of material and spiritual dynamics, the mutually implicating processes of ritual co-production which lie at the heart of the *feitio* may be described as a *duality without dualism*. The complementarity of agency involved in the *feitio* thereby transcends simplistic binary distinctions such as those between material and spiritual, subject and object, self and other. In the first instance, and as with the *daimista* repertoire in general, ritual participation in the *feitio* is more about transformation than transcendence. Paralleled by the transmutation of leaf and vine into the holy sacrament of daime, the spiritual transformation of self comprises the religio-moral refashioning of individual materiality. Certainly, the religious transformation sought involves elements of transcendence through which lower (*inferior*) aspects of the self – including its base animality – are superseded through the disciplined application of a hybrid spiritual-physical regime. To this extent, the higher self emerges like a butterfly from its chrysalis, leaving behind the detritus of a former and altogether baser existence. The overall dynamic, however, is one in which spiritual transformation is achieved through the ritual transfiguration of the entire psychophysical unit, understood generically as mind, body and soul. Religious vitality is achieved through and not despite the body. Manifested through notions of bodily management rather than physical suppression, the aforementioned themes of trial, discipline and

steadfastness inform the *feitio's* ritual inscription of a corporeal regime orientated more to the transformation of matter than its straightforward transcendence.

Again in keeping with the overarching repertorial paradigm within which it sits, the *feitio* negates simplistic subject-object distinctions. Here, the processes of ritual co-production embroil the objective power of the daime with the subjective dynamics of individual demeanour. While impacting upon the spiritual efficacy of the daime it creates, individual subjectivity is, in turn, transformed through its participation in the meta-physical transmutation of vine and leaf. At the same time, the consumption of daime throughout the *feitio* blurs discrimination between ritual subject and ceremonial object. Dynamised by the spiritual force of daime, ritual practitioners are infused by an objective metaphysical power through which psychophysical energies are transfigured into something more than they normally are. The alchemic fusion of leaf and vine enacted by ritual practitioners is a process achieved under the very influence of the daime itself. Mediated by human labour, daime's reproduction of itself comprises a self-originary act of auto-poiesis.

The ritual co-production of human subject and sacramental object which sits at the heart of the *feitio* is, like all *daimista* rituals, mediated by the corporate dynamics of communal practice. Fed by the daime and reinforced through individual endeavour, a collective spiritual current both pervades and makes possible all that the *feitio* achieves by way of material transmutation and religio-moral transformation. Me and you, self and other, are distinctions which make little sense against the collectivist backdrop of *daimista* ritual practice. Realised in and through the power of the daime, the mutually implicating dynamics of collective achievement and individual application are writ large by the extended complexity and collaborative demands of the *feitio*. Daime, self and community: each ritually co-produced; each mutually implicated; each – combined with the others – more than the sum total of its material parts.

Notes

- 1 Fieldwork with Santo Daime commenced in 2005, and has since been funded by the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust. Fieldwork has included participant observation with and visits to communities in Brazil, Europe and the United States.
- 2 Whereas *daimistas* believe the consumption of ayahuasca helps to generate the 'power' (*força*) of their rituals, the singing of hymns is the principal means by which this 'astral force' is engaged, appropriated and channelled to form the 'spiritual current' essential to ceremonial efficacy.

- 3 Master Irineu is credited with inventing the term 'Santo Daime' which is understood as a petitionary phrase most commonly translated as 'give me holiness'.
- 4 A useful overview of caboclo culture is provided by Parker (1985), while the different elements of the caboclo religio-moral worldview are treated by Furuya (1994), Galvão (1955) and Maués and Villacorta (2004).
- 5 The vast majority of my experience of Santo Daime pertains to the organisational context of Cefluris. Although a range of similarities exist between the various branches of Santo Daime, there are also notable differences – not least between the founding community of *Alto Santo* and the extended movement of Cefluris (see Goulart 2004a). While overlaps occur, what follows relates principally to Cefluris.
- 6 The millenarian worldview informing this regimentation is treated in Dawson (2008).
- 7 As far as I am aware, such transplantation has been undertaken clandestinely, thereby bypassing national restrictions and global conventions governing the international transportation of wild flora and particular plant species.
- 8 Despite repeated and ongoing attempts by representatives of Santo Daime and the Union of the Vegetable, international agreements have yet to be established in respect of regulating the transportation of ayahuasca from Brazil (as a legitimate export) to other countries (as a licit import). Consequently, the majority of ayahuasca 'imported' from Brazil is done so clandestinely. As I write there is a pending prosecution of a Santo Daime leader in the UK for 'dealing in' and 'living off the proceeds of' a Class A substance.
- 9 Clearly, there is a range of traditional patriarchal dynamics in force within Santo Daime's gendered division of ritual labour and space. While these traditional divisions are being increasingly tested and reworked as a result of the movement's progressive domination by the urban middle classes, it is not my intention here to offer a normative critique of the gendered processes at play and the unequal power relations implicated within them.
- 10 The gendered division of ritual space is further reflected in the contrasts between the hymns sung by those preparing the leaves and those processing the vine.
- 11 Santo Daime's belief in reincarnation allows for the deferral of rewards earned in this life to be enjoyed by the subject in future incarnations. In the same vein, the benefits of 'cosmic merit' (karma) accrued in past incarnations are held to be accessible in this life.
- 12 Instances in which healing does not occur or its cure proves ultimately to be temporary are typically accounted for by one or a number of elements which form part of Santo Daime's overarching 'theodicy' (see Weber, 1991: 270–6). Here, 'bad karma' inherited from past lives may be regarded both as the real cause of illness and of too great an amount to be worked off in this life alone. In addition, the 'will of the daime' might be cited to indicate that a greater plan precludes individual healing in this life. Individual moral failings and religious weaknesses are also seen as a common source of an individual's failure to participate fully in the fruits of Santo Daime's spiritual efficacy.
- 13 Fieldnote extract, 17 July 2008.

- 14 Given the physical demands and prolonged nature of the *feitio*, the daime served is often weaker (i.e. of a 'lower grade') and at intervals greater than the servings despatched during rituals such as the Dance and Concentration.
- 15 Fieldnotes (written up on the evening of 3 May 2005) record that during this time I had a 'light meal of pasta at 2.00pm' on Sunday and 'snatched a 20- or 30-minute nap sat on logs close to the furnace entrance' at some point during early Monday morning.

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