

# The Diaspora of Brazilian Religions

*Edited by*

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# THE NICHE GLOBALIZATION OF PROJECTIOLOGY: COSMOLOGY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF A BRAZILIAN PARASCIENCE

Anthony D'Andrea

## INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

In 1986, psychic and physician Waldo Vieira self-published a nine-hundred-page treaty titled *Projectiology: Overview of Out-of-Body Experiences* (in Portuguese) proposing a “science for the study of the phenomenon of consciousness and energies beyond the boundaries of the physical body” (Vieira 1986). Following regular weekly lectures in Rio de Janeiro’s upscale neighborhood of Ipanema, Vieira and close associates founded the *International Institute of Projectiology* in 1989. A few years later Conscientiology is introduced with an equally sized treatise *700 Experiments of Conscientiology*, defined as “the study of consciousness by means of a holistic, *holosomatic*, multidimensional, *bioenergetic*, projective, self-conscious and *cosmoethic* approach” (Vieira 1994: 11). The organization is accordingly renamed as *International Institute of Projectiology and Conscientiology* (IIPC, in Portuguese). Vieira inflates the status of Projectiology from a “sub-discipline of parapsychology” (1986: 13, 25) to the “practical application of Conscientiology” (1994: 64), while both disciplines become depicted as ‘neo-sciences of consciousness’.

Over the following twenty-five years, IIPC grew into a network of regional branches and spin-off associations operating across Brazil and several countries. In 2002, Vieira and a few hundred Projectiologists moved to the new campus-like *Center of Higher Studies of Conscientiology* (CEAEC in Portuguese) located in the continental hinterland of Iguassu Falls and kick-started a radical restructuring of IIPC. In this process, all international affairs were transferred to the newly created *International Academy of Consciousness* (IAC, originally in English), a small and nimble non-profit organization run by a team of mobile teachers crisscrossing Portugal, UK and the US. According to an internal report (IIPC 2004), over 100 teachers, 500 volunteers and 12,000 students are annually involved with Projectiology and Conscientiology. They are mostly white, college-educated, urban middle-class Brazilians interested in developing their psychic, spiritual and personal abilities.

These figures are very modest when compared to other parasciences, such as Transcendental Meditation, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Scientology or Osho Meditation, what begs the question of why and how such a difference in scale could take place. Upon the case of Projectiology, this chapter therefore develops a research framework that can be usefully employed in the analysis of other new religious, spiritual and parascientific groups undergoing internationalization.

As its more basic task, this chapter summarizes the organization, cosmology and ethos of Projectiology, focusing the analysis on the main conditions, barriers and mechanisms shaping its international expansion to this point. The working premise set forth in this study argues that IIPC's organizational dynamic is determined by cosmological representations and behavioral dispositions that Projectiologists hold towards spirituality and society at large. For the careful testing of this premise, primary data sources used in the study include: internal literature, ethnographic fieldwork in former IIPC headquarters in Rio de Janeiro (from 1986 to 1991) and branches in Barcelona and Madrid (summer 1998), content and ethnographic analysis of online resources (IIPC websites, social media updates and videos, email-based discussion lists), in addition to unstructured interactions with Projectiology teachers, volunteers, sympathizers and so-called 'dissidents' carried out over the years until present day 2012.

For the sake of economic writing, any reference to 'Projectiology' also includes Conscientiology, unless otherwise noted. A 'Projectiologist' refers to anyone who studies and practices either or both parasciences, is influenced by its ideas at a significant level, and is or has been involved with the organization as a student, teacher or volunteer. The 'IIPC network' refers to a range of organizations including IIPC, CEAEC, IAC and spin-off associations. In particular, IIPC and CEAEC are main references of activities in Brazil, whereas IAC relates to international operations. This study does not address other organizations that may incorporate Projectiology teachings but are not formally related to the IIPC network.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section reviews key issues intersecting globalization and new religious movement studies in order to outline a conceptual framework that guides the examination of Projectiology's internationalization patterns. In the second section we investigate how its cosmology and ethos directly affect the organizational culture, strategies and practices of the IIPC network, which, in turn, shape the nature of its internationalization. The third section illustrates this point, by focusing on how this internationalization is directly affected by

Projectiology locality-making representations, its leadership views about the role of Projectiology in society, and the intrinsic difficulties of culturally translating Projectiology in foreign cultures.

In this chapter, I argue that the expansion of Projectiology is defined by a mix of structural and agency factors. Projectiology expresses and amplifies new and old developments in Brazilian religious culture and society: a direct inheritor of the national belief in spiritual communication, yet emphasizing a rationalistic view historically upheld by the nation's modernizing elites, Projectiology also embodies an instrumental culture of self-development that has more recently taken hold in urban middle classes. In addition to these historical, social and cultural foundations, the internationalization of IIPC is affected by idiosyncratic preferences that its leadership, impinging on its pedagogical and organizational possibilities. It could be remarked that such idiosyncrasies coherently reflect those wider religious technocratic traditions, thus reaffirming the structural side of the coin. However, the popularity achieved by several parascientific groups around the world suggests that individual choices, while continuously made through an ongoing negotiation with external circumstances, may, in fact, affect the growth dynamic of an institution in novel and unpredictable ways.

The chapter then concludes with a final review of key findings, and ponders over alternative institutional scenarios as topics suggested for possible future research. An embryonic trend towards highly flexible organizational arrangements seems to constitute a viable direction for Projectiology initiatives, one in which new digital and mobile technologies are integrated with local presence in selected urban centers and connected with amenable campus-like resorts. Upon this spatial arrangement, translation – not just as speech but as cultural semiosis – will probably remain a critical factor in defining the balance between identity and expansion in Projectiology. More widely, observations and lessons derived from this ethnographic study can be helpful in the examination of other alternative groups seeking to grow in transnational settings.

#### OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE, PARASCIENCE AND NICHE GLOBALIZATION

In its most dramatic version, the 'out-of-body experience' (OBE) is sometimes termed 'near-death experience' (NDE) by the medical community, when resuscitated patients provide extraordinary reports of seeing

themselves outside the physical body and in otherworldly dimensions. Some physicians have suggested that NDEs can more ordinarily occur during ordinary sleep (Harvey 2007; Mauro 1992; Gabbard and Twemlow 1981). In classical anthropology, the ability to leave the body is the distinctive feature of the shaman (Mauss 1904). According to Projectiology founder Waldo Vieira, OBE is a universal human function (part of its '*parapsychology*') for reports can be found across all cultures: in the Bible (Revelation 1:10–11, 4:2, Ezekiel 3:14, II Corinthians 12:2), Plato's *Republic*, Balzac's *Louis Lambert*, etc. Over the years, Vieira compiled a sizeable library on the topic, including thousands of popular and scientific references in various languages. In this context, Projectiology repackages concurrent discourses about the temporary split between body and spirit into a systematic discipline that claims the objectivity, universality and instrumentality of these experiences with important repercussions over one's existence.

The goal of Projectiologists is not only to study OBEs but to induce them voluntarily. They deem 'projectability' (the ability to leave the body) to be a highly efficacious instrument of self-discovery and access to the spiritual world. By dutifully practicing 'bio-energetic' exercises (body-centric visualization and cognitive practices), they seek to increase their psychic (extra-sensorial) perception as well as the quantity, quality and duration of OBEs. In reality however, most Projectiologists report only a few vivid OBEs (in statements, such as "I had a really conscious projection only once"), besides minor perceptual experiences (e.g., "I saw energies" or "I felt energies flowing through my body"). Very few practitioners can claim the status of a full-blown psychic, comprising regular OBEs, interactions with spirits, and other psychic skills, such as seeing one's past or the future, diagnosing people's spiritual companions, etc. In fact, the most prominent case in Projectiology is Waldo Vieira himself, consensually recognized as the most advanced projector in this community as well as by large segments of spiritualists, Kardecists and parapsychologists. Vieira is deemed to possess highly developed animist and medium capabilities, dating back to his childhood and medium writer with Chico Xavier in Brazil's highly popular Spiritist Movement, until his departure in the late 1960s.

Resonating with Vieira's valuation of a highly autonomous self-centric spirituality, Projectiologists' utopia is a hypothetical situation of full-time awareness. In this state, the practitioner remains conscious all of the time, with no memory lapses across wake and sleep states. The notion emblazes Vieira's original organization *Centro da Consciência Contínua*, a

tiny personally-funded office located in Ipanema, replaced by larger IIP in 1988. Yet, Projectiologists admit that such state of 'continuous consciousness' is virtually impossible to be attained due to biological, psychological and spiritual constraints. Because of such intrinsic limitations, this topic appears to have been largely sidelined from Projectiological concerns and discussions. Still, it must be seen as the underlying theme that sustains their efforts to maximize individual performance toward optimal self-development, meaning: rational, ethical and psychic *evolution at high speed*. However, when pushed to the extreme, such an approach hinges on a virtual Taylorization of existence, insofar as all spheres of life collapse under an ironclad discipline imposed on one's thoughts, desires and behavior. The stereotype of a model Projectiologist is that of a diligent spiritual worker, dutifully measuring and improving one's own spiritual, personal and altruistic performance at all times. Correspondingly, this community frowns upon mundane forms of entertainment and philanthropy due to their largely emotional, irreflective nature, and instead they value 'spiritual assistance' to special individuals committed to overcoming one's spiritual emergencies, which is a rude awakening of one's psychological and psychic capabilities (Grof and Grof 1990). According to Vieira, awakening episodes are often symptomatic of larger spiritual plans unbeknownst to the individual, and must be dealt with in a straightforward and incorruptible manner.

In a review of scholarly studies, Projectiology hybridizes scientific, religious and spiritual themes derived from deep dialogic exchanges across séance Spiritism (particularly its 'scientific' derivations), psychological therapy culture, and New Age individualism (D'Andrea 1997, 2000). Symbolically structured upon the category 'projectability', Projectiology is populated by mostly white, college-educated, middle-class individuals who seek to make sense of secular individualization trends penetrating a national religious culture marked by the generalized belief in spiritual interaction and hierarchy (Velho 1994; Warren 1968). Other scholarly studies have similarly described Projectiology as a case of 'New Age indigenization' crystallized in a "new organization that merges New Age themes with Brazilian versions of psychological development" (Heelas and Amaral 1994: 180; see also Stoll 2002; Magnani 1999). Anthropologist David Hess has described Waldo Vieira as a 'Spiritist intellectual' who broke ranks with Kardec-based Spiritism in order to develop independent research, and "compiled an impressive bibliography expressing the Spiritist belief that these [out-of-body] experiences are not merely subjective, but rather that the spirit actually leaves the body" (Hess 1987: 97).



Main historical developments that have engendered Projectiology include:

- a) the privileged marginalization of medical and scientific celebrities within a predominantly sentimental, faith-based Spiritist movement throughout the twentieth century (Stoll 2004; Giumbelli 1995; Damazio 1994);
- b) the rise of a middle-class psychology ('psy') culture, characterized by an often narcissistic or solipsistic focus on the 'self', following the decline of orthodox psychoanalysis in the early 1980s (Russo 1993); and
- c) the boom of New Age spiritualities in the context of plural redemocratization of the Brazilian public culture in 1980s onwards (Soares 1989).

Projectiology, in sum, embodies processes of negotiation, struggle and hybridization across key religious and professional traditions that were imported and indigenized in Brazil, and more recently re-exported internationally. Projectiology thus provides an excellent case study illustrating religious diasporic processes as the core matter being examined in this book collection.

The concept of parascience can be usefully employed to understand Projectiology and other similarly structured groups. It refers to any fringe system simultaneously rejected by the religious and scientific establishments (Champion 1993; Hess 1993; Boy and Michelat 1986; Chevalier 1986). Popular examples include astrology, tarot, ufology, 'deep' parapsychology, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology etc. "Closely linked to occultism for its logic and worldview, a parascience differs by claiming a status of science, and by seeking legitimacy by means of science. It tends to blur the institutional boundaries of scientific practice, thus constituting an ambiguous region between science and knowledge" (Chevalier 1986: 205). Gaining popularity since the 1970s, they are expressions and agents of a 'new religious consciousness' which, arising from the 1960s counterculture (Bellah 1979), signifies the retooling of ancient traditions according to individualistic, reflexivist and experimentalist drives that have become central in high modernity, reflecting the notion of 'post-traditional' (Giddens 1991; Luckmann 1991; Bellah 1985).

In a world marked by increasing transnational flows of peoples, goods and ideas, it is worth noting how new forms of spirituality and parascience interrelate with globalization trends (Urry 2003; Beyer 1994). Though often

positioned as reactionary forces, traditional religions actually are the repository of long processes of diffusion, exchange and resignification of practices, symbols and beliefs imported from alien cultures and periods. Paradoxically, even when they oppose secular effects of globalization, fundamentalist practitioners often adopt new media technologies that help promote conservative agendas (Appadurai 1996; Urban 1996; Beyer 1994).

The key difference between ancient and contemporary exchange forms resides in the speed, intensity and scope of such cross-cultural flows, eventually leading to a leap or rupture in identity formation (Hannerz 1996; Giddens 1991). The resulting situation is contingent, depending on structural and circumstantial arrangement of forces, processes and agencies taking place locally. Conceptualized as 'glocalization' (Robertson 1995), the interplay between global forces and local agencies may unravel in two opposite directions (Hannerz 1996): it may take the shape of an ongoing process of negotiation whereby external influences intermingle more or less harmoniously with local traditions, and with some mutually (even if unequally) beneficial consequences (*scenario of maturation*). Conversely, local traditions can be swept away under the sheer pressure of commoditization forces stemming from powerful alien structures that radically penetrate and alter the local fabric of social and cultural life, usually with disruptive, if not traumatizing effects (*scenario of saturation*).

In considering these two scenarios to new spiritual and parascientific systems, it can be suggested that the dissemination of these groups refers less to a model of mass-market homogenization imposed by foreign political economies, and more to a model characterized by localized exchanges taking place according to the needs of interacting agencies and by which local social-cultural formations can incorporate foreign elements more or less in their own terms of negotiation and translation. In the latter scenario (maturation), as an alien spiritual system enters a different social environment, its meanings, practices and strategies may begin to differ from the contents and intentions originally devised at the headquarters. Frontier missionaries are, therefore, continuously probing the practical, ethical and axiological boundaries of the teachings that they deliver in foreign lands, expressing an ongoing effort to calibrate expansion with authenticity. In this light, as a basic observation and hypothesis of studies on religious diasporas, contemporary forms of transnational dissemination rarely correspond to the mass conversion of local audiences, but instead denote usually highly specialized, modular and pragmatic forms of religious appropriation

that can be here appropriately termed 'niche globalization'. The remainder of the chapter examines the internationalization of Projectiology as an illustrative case of niche globalization.

#### SECULAR SPIRITUALITY: ORGANIZATION, COSMOLOGY AND ETHOS OF PROJECTIOLOGY

As stated by a cofounder, the *International Institute of Projectiology and Conscientiology* (IIPC) is "an independent, private, nonprofit organization founded by individuals who decided to formalize their experiences and discoveries in the *parapsychic* (sic) field" (Alegretti 1995: 21). The same spirit inspires the *Center of Higher Studies of Conscientiology* (CEAEC), main hub of a complex organizational network comprising the IIPC and its branches, spin-off associations and directive councils, in addition to the *International Academy of Consciousness* (IAC) and its overseas branches.

The expressive multiplication of branded groups, terminology and technical jargon in a relatively small-scale parascience deserves careful consideration. It is, in part, consequence of administrative decisions over IIPC's operations and group dynamics. Since the late 1990s, its growth was based on logistical efforts leading to increasing financial difficulties. Internal grievances among its highly dedicated volunteers were not always harmoniously managed. In 2001, IIPC directive board decided to take advantage of a new piece of state legislation streamlining the status of non-profit organizations, and a radical restructuring ensued to solve financial and political problems. While adopting the administrative model of autonomous cost units, IIPC's main functions (teaching, research, press, practice, youth and operations, often doubled in Projectiology and Conscientiology programs) became semi-independent and financially responsible 'associations' (legal term). These units were integrated in a decentralized system coordinated by regulatory boards ('collegiates') in charge of arbitrating over proposals, competencies and guidelines.

Within the restructuring, the newly created *International Academy of Consciousness* (IAC) took over international activities, duties and offices formerly run by IIPC. The latter was refocused on teaching activities within Brazil, whereas IAC (currently headquartered in a suburban compound in Portugal) coordinates offices in New York, Miami, London, Lisbon and Madrid and also run eventual seminars in other international cities. Registered as a US-based non-profit organization, the IAC enjoys a high

degree of administrative autonomy, and coordinates the work of a small cohort of Projectiologists jet-setting across the northern hemisphere.

But the multiplication of subgroups and terminology antecedes the 2001 organizational restructuring, and can be understood as expressing deeper processes of identity formation. Projectiologists overvalue a 'scientific' ethos of strict rationality and professional demure which is projected onto internal and external audiences. This emphasis signals their strong opposition to religious explanations which dominate the Brazilian supernatural imaginary. Drawing from Weber's characterization of modernity, the instrumental rationality of Projectiology promotes the disenchantment of spirituality, by which learnable techniques can help explain, manipulate and control the spiritual reality.

However, Projectiologists propose rationality in ways that undermine their efforts toward scientific legitimacy. While it must be recognized that the intangible nature of psychic phenomena represents an intrinsic challenge to scientific protocols of measurability, objectivity and replicability, an additional problem resides in Waldo Vieira's staunch critique of 'conventional science'. Eventual collaborations with the academic establishment have been largely unfruitful, and younger Projectiologists pursuing scientific careers are being inadvertently alienated (several IIPC 'dissidents' have left the group and earned post-graduate degrees). Apparently, the majority of Projectiologists accept Vieira's anecdotal approach, as he stands as the sole empirical and ideological authority in that parascience. Efforts to foster a research culture in the IIPC have thus resulted in a pastiche of science, insofar as Projectiology remains unable to extricate itself from the religious and scientific traditions it claims to overcome. All in all, the tension between science and religion is a central feature of a parascience by definition.

As an analytical window, press interviews by IIPC teachers follow a recurrent narrative structure that sheds interesting light into the parascience. Always wearing white or muted colors, they convey a professional image marked by calm, persuasive argumentation, coolness, and systematic explanations. In a pivotal interview to nationwide 'Jo Soares' TV talk show in 1991, Waldo Vieira declared that "the main objective of the organization is to increase the proportion of the population with psychic awareness" (Vieira 1991). He estimates that 1% of human beings are aware of their out-of-body experiences. Projectiologists also explain that OBEs are a 'physiological function', for everyone leaves the body even if unconsciously. In a step further, they suggest that OBEs can be voluntarily induced by means of 'techniques' (similar to meditation, relaxation and

visualization exercises). At a normative level, Vieira and his colleagues add that to experience the 'multidimensional reality' with 'rationality' and '*cosmoethic*' is highly beneficial to one's 'consciousness evolution'. By becoming cognizant of spiritual realities, the person '*speeds up their evolution*' towards higher levels of self-awareness, emotional balance and psychic control. At this point, as it can be recurrently seen, the interviewee scales down any further elaborations in order to not convey proselytism or enter polemical grounds. As explained in advanced classes (but rarely on mainstream media), the process of self-development takes place over the course of innumerable lifetime cycles (*reincarnation*) gradually but inexorably moving towards a state of full awareness. This is a permanent Buddha-like state which Vieira has termed 'serenity'. He claims that only a handful of human beings (alive or in spirit) have achieved this state. These '*serenões*' or '*homo sapiens serenisimus*', as Vieira calls them, monitor and influence world issues with their extraordinary psychic powers, altruistically yet anonymously. As he is regularly inquired, Vieira remarks that, although serenity is his favorite research topic, he is not a *serenão* and that only rarely he comes across such magnificent entities during his OBEs. Most people stand anywhere within the range of '*pré-serenismo*', or humanly states.

As a remedy to the obviously fantastic nature of such statements, Projectiologists evoke rationality and empiricism as guiding remedies. In every lecture, the Socratic motto is repeated: "Do not believe in anything, have your own experiences." As they emphasize, the spiritual world must be experienced (by means of OBE 'projective' skills) and ultimately confirmed at a personal level. Such claims resonate with the widely popular valuation of 'experience' over 'orthodoxy' which became a basic trait of contemporary religious practice in the wake of the 1960s cultural upheaval (Luckmann 1991; Bellah 1979, 1985). Projectiologists place great emphasis on exercising one's psychic and psychological skills as means to produce OBEs. Nevertheless, most Projectiologists present limited psychic and intellectual skills comparatively to Vieira's authoritative charisma. The resulting picture is that of a subcultural community that is paradoxically rationalist yet totally dependent on its leader's authority. Its ethos is thus significantly influenced by a view of spirituality that seeks to empower the individual through a rigorous instrumental rationality, but at levels that promote a suspicious, even cynical take towards outside society, its emotional sociabilities, and mundane pleasures.

While informing the life conduct of Projectiologists, these cosmological guidelines are also ingrained in the daily administrative life of the IIPC

network at multiple levels: from modes of interpersonal interaction and organizational culture, to strategic planning and decision making. Offices are orderly and functional with a predominance of classic décor and white clothing, evoking a neutral, sterile and thaumaturgical ambience, as visitors may report relaxing sensations of wellbeing. At the entry hall of a typical office, the institutional logo (a yellow body sliding diagonally from a vertical body in black) is displayed by a board featuring schedule of events, announcements and taglines promoting Projectiology's core notions of 'awareness', 'reason', 'evolution', 'self-improvement', etc.

Work in the IIPC network is carried out by a contingent of volunteers. They are predominantly white, middle-class, college-educated or college students, individuals who often report psychic experiences ranging from one-time involuntary OBEs, up to dramatic life upheavals or 'spiritual emergencies' (Grof and Grof 1990). Volunteers must follow a few administrative directives, such as spending at least one full day in the organization each week. No one is remunerated monetarily, with the exception of a few full-time receptionists and two teachers (one in Brazil, the other in Europe). Legal, accountancy and IT services are provided pro bono by a variety of sympathizers across an informal network overflowing the institution. As its leadership states, the bond between the individual and the organization must be 'conscious and not material' or otherwise risk tarnishing the 'energetic-spiritual balance' highly cherished by the group. Their motivation in dedicating free time to the IIPC is propelled by their hope to accelerate their personal and spiritual capabilities: to 'evolve faster' as a recurring trope in their discourses and intentions. As time passes by, they may report to be developing some sensitive skills or experiences. Overall, they believe that such psychic experiences may help illuminate some invisible aspect of their life trajectory in grand terms, disclosing unknown, deeper meanings in their existence. Moreover, they wish to be assisted by advanced spirits that assist the IIPC network 'energetically' from the spiritual side. In their search for such invisible clues and connections, some Projectiologists manifest a compulsive orientation toward referring every action, thought or interaction to a superior causality (located in the spiritual world). This attitude exemplifies a type of cognitive behavior termed 'primitive thought' in anthropology, a holistic thought-pattern rooted in magic causality, frequently as a response to anxieties derived from unpredictable environments in nature or society (Levi-Strauss 1962).

When 'primitive thought' is replicated at a group level, much of what happens in the IIPC network is believed to be predicated in a dual physical-spiritual hierarchy. This idea is regularly evoked to validate organizational

decisions, to answer questions of causality, and even to diffuse dissent. Volunteers seen as possessing superior psychic skills will inadvertently draw higher ground in the organizational dynamic. As a way to mitigate tensions and improve group dynamic, meetings involving volunteers have played an important role in the daily life of the organization. Beyond administrative issues, these meetings contribute to socialization and conformity processes. In this light, any fractional proclivity in the IIPC is merely performative, as Vieira's leadership, claims and thinking are never questioned. Schematically, the IIPC displays a societal and a communal function: while providing formal teaching services to external audiences (*societas*), it also cultivates its own identity to internal audiences (*comunitas*) by means of consensus, conformity and even outbound dissent.

In this section, we examined how cosmological beliefs engender a certain ethos that affects daily life in the IIPC network. The limits of science to address intangible experiences are compounded by Projectiologists' own psychic limitations as well as by Vieira's excessively iconoclastic attitude. Despite the rhetoric on rationalism and experience, they rely on Vieira as the main source of spiritual information and moral guidance. Having assessed main mechanisms, patterns and effects involved in its internal dynamic, the point then is to examine how this parascientific cosmology informs organizational growth strategies in foreign contexts where the tenets of Brazilian Spiritism are unrecognized.

#### FROM IPANEMA TO CHINA: SPACES, CHANNELS, AND BARRIERS TO PROJECTIOLOGY

Place and architecture play an important role in the life of religions, expressing their spatial projection under cosmological representations that grant meaning to the communities they represent. Associations between space and spirituality are particularly important to parasciences and other spiritual groups, because they reinforce the social status, values and aspirations of practitioners, while also engendering singular valuations and even perceptions of space and time. In our case study, these representations over space inform how Projectiologists shape the physical spaces they inhabit, and account for the trajectory of individuals, groups and even nations.

Projectiologists claim that one's personality and psychic pursuits can be influenced by the physical and spiritual properties of the surrounding environment, its history and ecology that impregnate the site with a

specific 'energetic imprint' which is conducive to certain experiences and behavioral patterns. Beautiful natural settings scarcely populated by peaceful creatures are deemed beneficial for spiritual pursuits, whereas regions and peoples marred in histories of violence correspondingly affect its future inhabitants negatively. Projectiologists remark that such energetic patterns may change over time, according to the presence of new forces and circumstances at play. Inadvertently, when taken too literally, such assumptions may contribute to a sectarian disposition on the part of the believer. Although generally averse to mass gatherings and promiscuous sociability, Projectiology leader Waldo Vieira has historically valued the city as a catalyst of self-development due to its density of human interactions and experiences enabling one to 'evolve faster' – a recurrent trope throughout this chapter. As he regularly admonished during his lectures in Rio: "It is easy to meditate alone in the mountain. Try to do that in a city. That's the real forefront of evolution, where you can really test and expand your existential abilities way faster." He reminisced about his upbringing in a rural area in the state of Minas Gerais, loathing it as materially and culturally backward. In contrast, he enthused about the cosmopolitan diversity of experiences enabled in a big city, particularly as he resided in Ipanema (uptown neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro), where he practiced as a cosmetologist physician until early retirement in the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, the big city also imposed some negative challenges to the spiritual aspirations of Projectiologists. Originally IIPC was headquartered in noble neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, but the perceived decline in the quality of life in that city (with problems of criminality, corruption, stress, urban violence, etc.) gradually led the group to reconsider moving to a different region. The opportunity arose when an affluent sympathizer donated a 22,500 square-meter land plot in Iguassu Falls to the organization. A tourist region in the Brazil-Argentina-Paraguay tri-national border, Iguassu is renowned for its beautiful natural landscapes. Though somewhat tarnished by cross-border smuggling issues, its problems were indeed quite modest when compared to Rio's felt 'urban chaos'. In 2002, Vieira and several Projectiologists moved to the recently opened *Center of Higher Studies of Conscientiology* (CEAEC), and since then a community of over 500 people from around the country grew in the area that was officially renamed Cognópolis. According to inside estimates, around the year 2010, there were about 60 psychologists, 40 physicians, 30 engineers, 15 lawyers, 15 administrators, and 15 biologists living in Cognópolis, indicating relatively high levels of education among Projectiologists, seen by



the group as an expression of its intellectual skills applied to spiritual questions.

Since the mid 1990s, IIPC (and later the IAC) has been opening branches throughout Brazil and other countries (Argentina, USA, Portugal, Spain, England, Italy, Angola, etc.). These typically are small and modestly maintained offices, opened by dedicated volunteers who have often relocated due to a combination of family, professional and spiritual decisions. Advertised via direct mail, word-of-mouth and limited publicity, IIPC offices offer workshops, classes and books generating enough income to cover operational costs. Week-long or weekend classes may typically hold from 10 to 20 students, special lectures may attract any number between 20 and 200 people, and international events may gather several hundred Projectiologists. The small scale of its operations and audience sizes does not seem to bother Projectiologists. Quite the contrary, it is seen as an indication that high quality is being met.

Beyond this basic profiling, it is important to understand how the transmission of this parascience actually takes place in foreign lands. Interactions between Projectiologists and local students provide an interesting window into the topic. As evinced in ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Spain and USA, local students bring their own notions and expectations about the spiritual, in ways that do not fully resonate with the Brazilian spiritual imaginary (e.g., communication, influence and hierarchy of spirits). They are often familiar with basic notions of parapsychology, occultist or New Age systems, but only a few convey a more systematic account about the spiritual. Most are self-identified as newcomers timidly exploring the spiritual field, usually motivated by some odd experience or, still, the realization of one's own mortality. As illustrated by a Projectiology teacher,

When they come to us, it is not in the vacuum, because they have already had some experience or were involved with some group in their past. Our difficulty lies more in explaining the range of psychic phenomena through the multi-dimensional paradigm of Projectiology and Conscientiology. This can be overwhelming to them, so we have to slow it down.

This observation is confirmed by international students: "It is a lot of information to be absorbed but gradually it starts to make sense. Several Projectiology claims make sense as plausible and, at the very least, are quite rational." The challenge for teachers in these cross-cultural settings lies less in describing psychic phenomena under individualist notions of spiritual development, but rather in ensuring that Projectiology may be internalized

as the general language for understanding and navigating the spiritual world. As an illustration of translation efforts that are required in the process, although notions of 'self-development' are ingrained elements of Western culture, Projectiology teachers must be skillfully when tying it to the category of 'evolution' as a teleological, linear and multi-episodic narrative by which self-development is understood. As a solution, they make tangential references to international celebrities of quantum physics, parapsychology and New Age thought (Stanley Krippner, Robert Monroe, Charles Tart, Stanislav Grof, Fritjof Capra, Stephen Hawking, Lobsang Rampa, Carlos Castañeda, etc.). Mentioning these popular views of spirituality seem to help as provisional steps toward more complex teachings of Projectiology that integrates Spiritism and positivism. The question, therefore, is to what extent this pedagogic strategy is effective and, in the eyes of Projectiologists, satisfactory enough for engendering a comprehensive understanding – and internalization – of Vieira's Projectiology by foreign audiences.

At the organizational level, even as internationalization is stamped on its brand name, there is little strategic or investment planning in the transnational growth of the IIPC. Historically, initial explorations took place in Argentina during the early 1990s facilitated by Vieira's former contacts from this time as an independent researcher. Later on, US offices were opened by an American-Brazilian couple relocating from Rio de Janeiro. Branches in UK, Spain and Italy were then opened by Brazilian dual-citizens helped by local contacts. As a general pattern, such outreach initiatives are prompted by the will of trusted individuals who propose the possibility to the IIPC leadership. As migrant teachers, they must test foreign grounds, delivering lectures and workshops, escalating up to the opening of a permanent branch. A few become 'itinerant instructors', regularly traveling to attend to IAC duties. In any case, a formalized top-down systematic approach for international growth is rarely, if ever, the case.

This rather contingent approach is, in part, a response to economic constraints faced by the organization; nevertheless, cosmological beliefs also play a role on how the IIPC/IAC seizes expansion opportunities. Projectiologists hold a paradoxical view of evolution: though it is a universal capacity of all living creatures (humans, animals and spirits), the general population is not interested in disciplined efforts to engage with the spiritual truths and techniques availed by Conscientiology. Agreeing with the New Age criticism, they blame mainstream religion, politics, materialism, pop entertainment and psychological inertia for prolonging the disjuncture between humanity and spiritualism. Tautologically, Projectiologists point at IIPC's slim audiences as a proof of such apathy.

Yet, they also oppose populist proposals to adapt the parascience to the general population. Though occasionally giving press interviews, Vieira vehemently opposes pedagogic simplification. He indicates that his focus lies on refining a technical science of the consciousness, not its popularization per se. The hermetic terminology he incessantly multiplies over the years creates additional difficulties to newcomers, and is deemed by some an unnecessary, even preposterous exaggeration. Moreover, his elitist statements give strength to this sectarian bent: "I am not interested in the masses of people. I only compromise with the consciously aware minority." As it is here implied, this special minority is comprised of Projectiologists and other individuals experiencing OBE-induced spiritual awakenings. Even the exceptional plan for a nationwide TV advertising had the fundamental goal of reaching a very small number of geographically scattered individuals deemed spiritually ready for embracing Conscientiology. Whether as a cause or a consequence of its limited (niche) internationalization, the IIPC leadership has no intention of making efforts to become a popular movement at any level or rate.

Animist beliefs also contribute to the limited marketing of the IIPC network. Similarly to the spiritual ecology of location (above outlined), Projectiologists claim that the level of intellectual, spiritual and emotional affinity among individuals may remotely bring them together by means of an 'energetic' connection or pull (for discussions about animism, see Levi-Strauss 1962; Durkheim 1912; Mauss 1904). This magnetic affinity can be manifested in the form of improbable coincidences (synchronicity). Projectiologists believe that whenever someone is ready to engage with spiritual matters, he or she is bound to come across with the IIPC. This blend of animism and mysticism does not render marketing communications unnecessary, but retools it as a catalyst for the probabilistic encounter between those individuals in a spiritual search and the community of Projectiologists. Therefore, despite their solipsistic 'conscious-centric' ideology, Projectiologists concede that not everything is subject to the willful mastery and control of the individual. There are 'per-course accidents', as Vieira puts it, denoting the certain degree of unpredictability involved in the interplay of wills, predispositions and circumstances.

Decades prior to emerging as a global economic power, China already was positively valued by Waldo Vieira as the civilization relatively providing the best conditions for spiritual development. He recurrently stated over the years,

China has some big problems, with communism and overpopulation. But, generally, it is the civilization that knows most about working with energies

and serenity matters, with many highly qualified people mastering these issues, because it has been part of their tradition for a very long time. And we have some very good Chinese entities [spirits] here working with us in our assistance group; really very positive energies.

This is no small remark given Vieira's unapologetic critique of virtually any historical celebrity, group, religion or nation he is regularly queried about. His notions about China somewhat resonate with Weber's classical essays on religion. Predicated on Confucian values and Taoist practices, Chinese millennial civilization is characterized by a basic orientation towards orderly universal balance and temperate wisdom, encompassing (though not unproblematically) the magic manipulation of cosmic forces (Weber 1911).

As Vieira and Projectiology psychics have noted, these Chinese mandarin-styled entities provide 'energetic support' to the spiritual practices regularly conducted by Projectiology teachers and students in the premises of the IIPC network. According to Vieira, these Chinese-looking spirits are very influential, for they have spent several past lives reincarnating in China where they honed powerful skills on energy manipulation and healing.

In several occasions, Vieira has discretely indicated his intention to reincarnate in China in his next life. In fact, he has personally paid for the translation of *Projectiology* (1986) into Mandarin, and sent two thousand free copies of the book to main libraries in China. In addition to bringing a 'leading-edge neo-science' to Chinese audiences, this editorial endeavor fits Vieira's own personal goals, as he expects to come across this book in a future life, helping him to recall his spiritual trajectory sooner in life. This project anteceded the widespread commercialization in Brazil of the Internet, a technology that Vieira has been ambivalent about. Whether or not the book has reached Chinese libraries, it can be speculated that future generations of Projectiologists will be tempted to locate Vieira reincarnated as a Chinese student of Projectiology, in a fashion perhaps resembling the traditional Dalai Lama identification protocol.

Given the relevance of China since Projectiology has formed in the mid 1980s, it is somewhat surprising that an IIPC/IAC branch has not been opened in that country as of early 2010s. Besides the book initiative, institutional efforts to take Projectiology to Asia have been quite slim. As noted, Vieira believes in the providential appearance of volunteers who propose taking Projectiology overseas. In line, a couple of 'itinerant teachers' residing in New York obtained permission from the Chinese government

to deliver lectures, which have been more recently repackaged within cultural exchange seminars in tourist fashion. From the online videos available, these were lectures delivered to an apparently homogeneous, predominantly male audience of around 100 people. The communication was facilitated by an English-Chinese interpreter in a formal yet modest setting. Comparatively, these seminal efforts are not unlike international tours of Asian gurus across Western societies, precariously interpreted events symbolically expressing a sincere intention and curiosity rather than an effective instance of substantive debate. Language barriers may also hinder the dissemination of Projectiology at some level, as currently no Projectiologists speak fluent Chinese, and the mostly Brazilian teachers are not quite fluent in oral or written English.

Yet, translation is not only about speech but primordially involves a semantic and cultural process. Despite the popularization of paranormal and New Age since the 1970s, Projectiology teachers are thoughtful when communicating with foreign audiences. Adopting a tactic often seen in various spiritualist groups, they avoid lecturing on religiously sensitive topics (e.g., reincarnation or mediumship) in public appearances and introductory lectures. As observed in introductory videos aimed at American, Japanese and Chinese audiences available at YouTube as well as in classes I attended in Spain and Brazil, Projectiology teachers focus on descriptive aspects of psychic phenomena, such as body sensations, mind states and sensorial exercises, and often refer to basic parapsychology and psychology scholarship. As tropes of 'energy', 'experience' and 'self-development' have wide currency in Western societies, they also abound in Projectiology speeches, resulting in a more amenable approach for attracting and engaging foreign students.

Conversely, whereas New Age systems are highly malleable to suit local needs and commoditization processes, Projectiology seems way less flexible to adaptation. This is only partly related to Vieira's criticism of mainstream society, but also stems from Projectiology's own internal ideological structure tightly binding notions from medium spirituality, positivist doctrine and therapy culture. Two examples may illustrate how challenging the work of translation is for Projectiology teachers operating in foreign environments. Although the notion of 'serenity' has a commonsensical understanding, its Projectiological definition presupposes familiarity with notions of reincarnation, evolutionism and animism, merged in ways that are very unique comparatively to the mainstream religious landscape. Similarly, the concept of 'self-development', which has become a hegemonic tenet of work and life in modern societies, is seen in Projectiology as

a proxy of 'evolution', a linear, measurable and cumulative eschatology of spiritual progress linked with a supernatural claim of reincarnation. Thus, while central for Projectiologists, Kardecist Spiritists and New Agers alike, notions of 'serenity' and 'evolution' are enmeshed in a singular web system of meanings whose acceptance require a considerable interpretive effort on part of new audiences, or otherwise risk a fragmented and superficial grasp of this parascience, broken into discrete practices and ideas. Teachers are thus faced with a dual challenge: adapting a singular spiritual worldview (which they see as natural) to foreign audiences while maintaining its internal coherence as forged by Waldo Vieira.

The cultural globalization of Projectiology, therefore, unfolds between two opposite extremes. In one pole, there is the proficient conversion of Brazilian migrants to the systematic view of Projectiology, because, although residing overseas, they have been primarily socialized in a national culture that takes for granted spiritual communication as an ordinary aspect of reality (Damazio 1994; Velho 1994). In the other extreme, there is the fractured appropriation of Projectiological bits and pieces by foreign individuals whose interests, needs and worldviews are shaped by diverse cultural, religious and material backgrounds. In the middle-ground and comprising a wide palette of possibilities, Projectiology students demonstrate a prior familiarity with OBE/NDE phenomena and use their intellectual skills to learn and rethink parascientific systems in ways that actually broaden their horizon of experience. It is worth noting that OBE is not a Projectiological invention but has become a regular feature of popular imaginary and experience in contemporary societies. Future research can thus compare how subjects that undergo such psychic experiences actually signify spiritual-positivistic discourses, such as those of Projectiology and Kardec Spiritism, when socialized in cultures that have largely ignored these.

The presence of foreigners in the ranks of a parascience provides an interesting topic of research, and can be here suggested for future studies. In the case of Projectiology, the very few present ones may seem to enjoy a relatively distinct status, which derives less from the common hospitality that post-colonial subjects typically dispense to metropolitan visitors, and more from the need that Projectiologists have in verifying the universality and instrumentality of OBE phenomena. To date, there are no Chinese Projectiologists in the IIPC network, but it can be hypothesized that their presence would be highly valued (perhaps anxiously so) due to the positive assessment that Projectiologists confer to that millennial civilization.

CONCLUSION: NATIONAL COSMOLOGIES AND TRANSNATIONAL  
POSSIBILITIES

The primary audience of Projectiology is the 1% of the general population who, according to Projectiologists, can vividly recall an out-of-body experience; still, Projectiology could be very appealing to anyone interested in parascientific approaches to the paranormal and spirituality. However, its modest growth as indicated in basic stats does not indicate that Projectiology is arising as a 'natural' or 'obvious' explanation of the spiritual world. Much of Waldo Vieira's popularity is circumscribed to Brazil, and significantly stems from his period as a medium writer during the 1960s Spiritist movement. This past attribute could have been successfully capitalized under a different organizational model. As seen, based on quantitative and discursive indicators, Projectiology does not manifest expansionary drives such as those found in popular parascientific groups, such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Transcendental Meditation, Osho Meditation or Scientology (D'Andrea 2007, 2006; Urban 1996).

In outlining its trajectory 'from Ipanema to China' as our basic refrain, we examined how the cosmology and ethos of Projectiology shape the practices and strategies of the IIPC network. On the one hand, its organizational planning is formal and jargon-ridden, expressing efforts to emulate science and professionalism. On the other, its outreach strategies are conservative and opportunistic, based on individuals who willfully volunteer to take Projectiology overseas. The small scale of operations is only partly related to financial or linguistic barriers, but also stems from elitist assumptions Projectiologists hold toward society. While claiming that OBEs and spiritual evolution are universal human features, they maintain that only a minority of special individuals are interested in such an effortful, disciplined and rational approach to spirituality.

In addition to organizational and idiosyncratic factors, Projectiology's moorings in Brazilian national religious contexts represent another major constraint upon its internationalization. Although the paranormal has been gaining visibility and even acceptance in global pop culture, the markedly Kardecist-like dispositions of core Projectiologists lead them to naturalize a cosmological view that is very specific to certain segments of the Brazilian middle class in its struggles for modernization throughout history. As seen, this form of spiritual positivism does not seem to be easily adaptable to just any other international culture indistinctively. Yet, although rejecting proactive marketing techniques, Projectiology teachers emulate a common pedagogic practice of not discussing polemical topics during public or introductory encounters.

While 'projectability' operates as its practical category, 'conscious evolution' stands as the fundamental tenet of Projectiology, or, paraphrasing Max Weber, the 'irrational core' that structures this cosmological rationalization meaningfully (1905: 52). Projectiologists seek to maximize their performance and rewards toward higher levels of spiritual awareness, emotional balance and psychic power. Speed is particularly important, as 'to evolve faster' is an expression recurrently heard across the IIPC network. In valuing change over permanence, Projectiology expresses middle-class aspirations for legitimizing autonomous individualism in an age of modern compression, as the myth of the self-made person reflects the paradoxical social construction of idiosyncrasy (Russo 1993; Bourdieu 1979). All in all, nothing is as modern as the accountancy-like rationality of *karma*, often translated as a mathematical calculation of the vicissitudes of life: "The most formally perfect solution to the problem of theodicy is the Indian doctrine of 'karma', the so-called belief in the transmigration of souls. The world is an ethical cosmos of uninterrupted retribution [by which] the individual is responsible for creating its own destiny" (Weber [1913]: 354–5). In technocratic societies, this rationalization is epitomized in measurement constructs, such as Vieira's '*conscienciograma*' (1996), a structured questionnaire for quantifying one's spiritual evolution in terms of 'cons' ('units of consciousness measurement').

Despite the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the expansion of Projectiology has been characterized by very specific modes of interaction in quite localized socio-cultural sites. These are groups of expatriates, occultist experts, university students, psychologists and therapists, quite often individuals with an interest in psychic experiences who demonstrate some knowledge of parapsychology and New Age spiritualities. The patterns of dissemination identified in Projectiology outreach efforts overseas are quite different than the homogenization processes involving mass conversion to a material or ideological commodity as often proclaimed about globalization. Instead, they involve very specific audiences, channels and translation efforts configuring a type of specialized diffusion that I have here termed *niche globalization*.

Future studies about the growth of Projectiology and other parascientific and new spiritual groups should consider examining the impact of physical and digital mobility on organizational practices, structures and strategies. The recent boom of Projectiology materials in digital media (websites and social media) would, at least theoretically, dispense with the financial and logistical burden of managing a number of physical offices around the world. The 'itinerant' model of nomadic teacher, delivering events as needed, seems to be working as a cost-effective manner to



promote Projectiology internationally. Despite post-9/11 surveillance and environmental costs, air travel is expected to continue trend upwards in years, even decades to come. Due to their relatively high levels of education, professional skills and support networks, Projectiologists seem to enjoy favorable conditions to move internationally. In the digital realm, the adaptation of Internet resources to local and global audiences is a point to be considered. Most online materials of Projectiology are provided by Brazilians in Portuguese (or highly-accented English). But beyond language, the possibility of stripping, tweaking or calibrating Projectiology's harsher moralist, nativist (made in Brazil) and positivist edges is a point which future generations of Projectiologists may need to confront.

Increased digitalization and mobility have not dispensed with spatial concentration, and, in some cases, are promoting it, as paradoxically detected by globalization studies (Florida 2008; Massey 2007; Sassen 2006; Beaverstock 2005). 'Global cities' are a striking example of how certain urban centers have harnessed major command-and-control functions of the global economy, thus attracting dynamic groups of people: executives, artists, students, tourists and migrant workers (Hannerz 1996). In this context of increased mobility and concentration, Projectiologists need to make decisions about where to work, live and teach (Florida 2008).

In line with the niche globalization of Projectiology examined throughout this chapter, the IIPC network is already moderately expanding across a few dynamic urban centers which are, in turn, connected with pleasant campus-like amenities in the periphery. This spatial arrangement seems to provide desirable conditions for the immersive practice and research of Projectiology, and is also found in other gentrified spiritual groups, such as Siddha Yoga and Osho Meditation (D'Andrea 2007). This is very much aligned to the tastes and needs of a new middle class of knowledge and creative professionals caught in between secular and spiritualist trends. In ethical or commodity forms, there seems to be a demand for hybrids of self-spirituality and human development strategies that may add value, pleasure and meaning to their lives.

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