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The Possibility of Spirits

An essay film

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Mattijs Van de Port holds a chair in 'popular religiosity' at VU University Amsterdam. He did research in Serbia, and since 2001 in Bahia, Brazil. He is author of a monograph on Gypsy musicians and their Serbian customers (1998) and on global encounters on the threshold of *candomblé* temples in Bahia (2011). His first documentary, *Saborear Frutas Brasileiras*, on eating Brazilian fruits, was shown at the RAI Ethnographic Film Festival in Edinburgh, and theorized, with Annemarie Mol, in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (2013). *The Possibility of Spirits*, using footage from six years of filming in Bahia, was completed in 2016, and has been selected in various ethnographic film festivals.

The Possibility of Spirits

Mattijs Van de Port

Abstract

What is it that you film when you film a spirit?

Shot in Bahia (Brazil), *The Possibility of Spirits* is an essay film that keeps the baffling mystery of spirit possession center stage.

In a poetic assemblage of images and words, it offers an alternative for the kind of documentary that either exoticizes spirit possession in spectacular imagery, or extinguishes the wonder of the phenomenon in explanatory prose.

Possession ceremonies are filmed in close up, but the images first and foremost reveal that we don't know what it is that we are looking at.

Words -- of the filmmaker, as well as of his interlocutors -- are allowed to drift out of meaning. Trying to grasp the phenomenon, they become silence, or laughter, or screaming.

Paying tribute to the extra-ordinariness of its subject matter, this film invites viewers to allow themselves to be confused and -- in that confusion -- consider the possibility of spirits.

Keywords

candomblé; essay film; spirits; Bahia; Brazil

Full Text:

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