Spirit media : charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana

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Conclusion: Making Sense

This thesis has examined two religious organisations in Ghana, the charismatic International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and the neo-traditionalist Afrikania Mission, as they manifest themselves in complicated entanglement in the liberalised and commercialised media sphere. Throughout the chapters, two interrelated issues have remained in focus. The first concerned the question of how charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion relate to each other in the public and the more private domains, and what the mass mediation of both religions does to this relationship. Secondly, the focus on mass media allowed me to lay bare a more general and basic problem of religion that I have introduced at the beginning of this thesis as the problem of mediation. This problem concerns the tension produced by religion's simultaneous need for mediation and denial of mediation. This tension is at work in all kinds of religious practices of connecting to or rendering present the divine, but gets accentuated in religious groups' struggles with and ideas about mass media. I have thus compared how the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission in dealing with mass media deal with the problem of mediation. In particular, I have explored how in both religious traditions practices of electronic mass mediation relate to other modes of religious mediation. Such a comparison not only reveals much about charismatic Pentecostalism and traditional and neo-traditional religion in Ghana and the dialectics between them. It also offers insights into the much broader question of religion and mediation. In the first two sections of this concluding chapter I reflect on these issues on the basis of the ethnography I have presented. In the last two sections I place the discussion in a wider cross-cultural perspective and offer some additional reflections on the enchanting power and semiotic ideologies of media technologies and on the sense-making capacities of religious mediations, and the epistemological challenges they pose.

Dialectics

I have studied the International Central Gospel Church and the Afrikania Mission as part of a single religious field with a shared genealogy and a partly overlapping audience. The ethnography I have presented shows that the relationship between charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion in this field is characterised by a paradoxical dialectics of opposition and entanglement. In opposing each other and asserting difference, charismatic Pentecostalism and (neo-)traditional African religion not only influence each other, but are intimately bound up with each other. This dialectics is historically informed by the 'long conversation' between Christianity and indigenous religions, but gets amplified in the present era, in which religious manifestation is increasingly mass mediated. The mass mediation of religion, which boomed with the liberalization of the Ghanaian media scene in the 1990s, both sharpens religious antagonism and generates religious forms that are shared across religious boundaries.

I have addressed the ways in which the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission seek to access the new public sphere. Both the charismatic and the traditionalist revival movement have been inherently mass mediated from their very beginnings in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, however, the synergy of democracy, media liberalisation, and neo-liberalism brought about a revolution in the relationships between the Ghanaian state, mass media, religion, and commerce that fundamentally changed both movements' styles and strategies of public presence and representation. From 1992 onwards, Ghana's formerly state-controlled media scene gradually developed into a plural, liberalized, and commercialized field of interaction. Religious groups, and especially charismatic-Pentecostal churches, made use of the new media opportunities this offered. This has intensified religious competition for public presence, expressed in terms of public visibility and audibility, and tensions between born-again Christians and traditionalists in the public sphere. In this field charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion seem at first sight to be radically opposed in terms of media use and public presence.

The new commercial public culture of personality creation, spectacle, and dramatisation provides particular fertile ground for charismatic-Pentecostal media strategies. Charismatic Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on charismatic leaders, massive crowds, and embodiment and dramatic expression of spirit power, flourishes in Ghana's public sphere, where pastors become celebrities and mass mediated sounds and images facilitate the flow of the Holy Spirit. I have traced the success of the televisual culture of charismatic Pentecostalism in Ghana to the correspondence between the formats, styles, and modes of address of commercial broadcast media and those of communicating spirit power in charismatic ritual. I have argued that African 'Men of God' such as Mensa Otabil tap into the globalised commercial formats of celebrity, spectacle, and branding as a source of power in a local religious context in which religious specialists are perceived to embody divine power. The convergence of these two kinds of power in the figure of the pastor-celebrity enhances his charismatic appeal.

The Afrikania Mission has much more difficulty spectacularising traditional religion and bridging the gap between the practices of shrines and the formats of the commercial public sphere. Having lost its earlier state sponsored radio broadcast to democratisation processes, Afrikania has adopted new strategies for the public representation of Afrikan Traditional Religion (ATR) that make it visually attractive for a broad media audience and seek to counter Pentecostalist demonizing representations of traditional religious practices. These efforts, however, are hampered by lack of resources and dependency on Christian oriented media houses and professionals. On a deeper level, what complicates Afrikania's media activities is a clash between the requirements of the Christian dominated televisual public sphere, that presuppose certain formats for what 'religion' is and should look like, and the dominant formats of spiritual mediation in shrines. The latter are not modes of visual attraction, spectacle, and mass address, but rather of seclusion, secrecy, and concealment. In representing ATR in the media, Afrikania thus has to negotiate with traditional priests and priestesses, who are often wary of audiovisual media.

This difference between charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion is reinforced by their antagonistic position towards each other. In forming and

authenticating religious identities and subjectivities, both strongly affirm boundaries, stress discontinuity, and create the other as ultimate Other. I have discussed how the charismatic-Pentecostal stance towards traditional religion as the evil Other finds expression in sermons, healing and deliverance rituals, and media representations. Otabil's intellectualist stance towards African traditional religion takes some distance of the sensationalist demonisation of it that inundates the popular media. Nevertheless, his message of radical cultural transformation equally identifies African traditional religion and culture as the root of Africa's problems, albeit with a less spiritualist, and for his audience more sophisticated coating. In a mirroring move, Afrikania holds Christianity, and charismatic Pentecostalism in particular, responsible for all evil in Ghanaian society. Only a return to traditional religious systems of morality, crime prevention, and social and spiritual control could save the country and the African continent.

Behind the surface of religious differentiation and antagonism, however, interesting continuities and mutual influences emerge. Four shared aspects of charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religions are particularly relevant here; first, a religious imaginary that recognises the direct presence and influence of spirit beings in people's daily lifeworld; second, a practical, thisworldly (rather than otherworldly) focus that is directed at spiritual problem-solving and physical, material, and social wellbeing; third, an emphasis on the role and power of divinely elected religious specialists as intermediaries between human beings and spirit powers (despite the Pentecostal rejection of such mediation) and, by extension, a competition for clients between such religious specialists; and forth, a bodily regime that values expressive, emotional modes of worship and constitutes the body as the prime medium of interaction with the spirit world. Despite its marked globalism and explicit distancing from African traditional religion, charismatic Pentecostalism thus resonates with much of indigenous religious traditions. Moreover, this is crucial to understanding its tremendous appeal.

Conversely, the foundation of the Afrikania Mission and its neo-traditionalist revival can be understood only in direct connection with the historical and contemporary presence of Christianity in Ghana. I have discussed how the very notion of African Traditional Religion is a historical product of the close interaction with Christianity. Continuing this interaction, Afrikania has adopted a Christian derived form and concept of religion for its reformation of traditional religion, despite its fierce opposition of Christianity and its claim to provide an 'authentically African' alternative. At present it is the same charismatic-Pentecostal type of Christianity that has pushed Afrikania to adopt a more explicit anti-Christian attitude, that now also provides the format for what religion is and drives Afrikania to take over many of its practices and symbols, including its confirmation that African spirits are real and to be dealt with.

Religious groups' increased use of mass media strengthens both tendencies of mutual opposition and entanglement, thus amplifying the paradoxical dialectics between charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion. On the one hand, with the adoption of mass media, religious groups establish an ever stronger public presence. They become more assertive and self-conscious while religious differences

and antagonisms become ever more marked. Religion increasingly becomes a site of public clash and occasional violence, especially so between Pentecostals and traditionalists. At the same time, the global dissemination of religious messages through television, radio, audio and video tapes and CD's, print media, and Internet sites generates and reproduces similar religious formats not only across spatial boundaries, but also across religious boundaries. Clearly, mass media are more favourable to some religious formats than to others. Through their extensive media activity, charismatic churches have by now become mainstream and established a strong auditory and visual presence in the public arena, thus providing the format for 'religion' in general and influencing not only other Christian denominations, but also non-Christian religions seeking media access. The mass mediatisation of charismatic Pentecostalism thus has a cross-religious impact on media representations and styles of performance, as other religions that do not accept or even radically reject its messages, do draw upon its formats of representing religion, albeit with varying success.

In the current religious and media climate, Afrikania employs the media mainly in response to charismatic Pentecostalism's repression of traditional religion and 'colonisation' of the nation. It draws on dominant styles of representing religion, however, that derive exactly from charismatic Pentecostalism and emphasise visual attraction, sonic impression, spectacle, and crowd imagery. These formats of extraversion are at tension with religious formats of shrines. Paradoxically, however, the current Pentecostal hegemony in Ghana's public sphere at the same time pushes Afrikania closer to shrine practitioners. The Pentecostal emphasis on the reality of African spirits and the ways they offer to deal with them, widely publicised through their media ministries, drives Afrikania to also claim access to spiritual power and allow more room for spiritual practices. This also has an economic aspect of competition in the spiritual market place. For Afrikania this is risky business, however. As it depends on media formats that don't allow it to control the content, such claims to offering access to spiritual powers easily slip into popular media formats that visually and discursively present traditional religion in a sensationalist idiom of evil and resonate with widespread Pentecostal notions about the threat of evil spirits, witchcraft, and juju.

The other way around, the incorporation of African religiosity into charismatic Pentecostalism seems at first sight not to be enhanced by the adoption of mass media. Pentecostal practices of burning 'fetishes' or vomiting frogs, snakes or strange objects believed to be the physical presence of demonic powers in people's bodies are close to African traditional practices of dealing with spirits, but these hardly appear in their 'media ministries'. Charismatic-Pentecostal TV programs all convey a similar image to the general public: these churches and their members are dynamic, young, modern, and successful. And apparently snakes and fetishes do not fit this image. This tendency to conceal part of religious practice is particularly strong in Otabil's ICGC, which only shows Otabil's 'life-transforming' teaching sermons and deliberately keeps its healing and deliverance ministry – where African spirits and other demons are dealt with (albeit without fetish burnings or frogs) – out of the media. It seems that the televisual representations of Pentecostalism in Ghana are much more modelled after the formats and styles of the global televangelical mediascape than actual practices, where people have more freedom to divert from this model.

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On closer inspection, however, charismatic-Pentecostal practices of seeing and hearing, in which (mass mediated) images and sounds can transfer the power of the Holy Spirit or of demons to the viewer or listeners, show a continuity with traditional African ideas about seeing, hearing and spiritual power. The audiovisual mediation of the Holy Spirit by charismatic television broadcasts, even if not limited to Ghana or Africa, has a particular resonance in the Ghanaian context, where traditional ideas about the senses and spiritual power emphasise the possibility of mediating the presence of spirits through sounds and images. This point will be elaborated below.

Mediations

My research focus on modern mass media brought me to a problem that characterises religion in general. As a socially organised practice of mediating the imagination and experience of an extrasensory presence, religion at the same time authenticates this presence, and people's experience of it, as beyond mediation. Religions always need media in the wider sense of the term: material, visual, aural, or otherwise perceptible forms that mediate between an extrasensory power - glossed as supernatural, divine, spiritual - and people's sensory experience and imagination of that power. From prayer and ritual to books and images, such forms have to give people a sense of divine power and at the same time convince them that the source of this power lies outside these mediating forms. I found the notion of format particularly useful to fine-tune the problem of mediation. Religious mediations, whether modern media or ritual performance, always imply formats, that is, more or less fixed and recurrently repeated forms that frame people's perception and experience. The reproducibility and continuous repetition of religious formats both informs their power and threatens their successfulness. A tension between people's awareness of the mediating format and their sense of immediate spirit presence thus underlies religious mediation practices. This is always a problem, but it appears sharply when religious groups explicitly engage with mass media. The crux of the problem of mediation is that 'media,' 'representation,' 'immediacy,' or 'presence' are not self-evident analytical categories, but social attributions. Throughout this thesis the aim has thus been to identify when, in what context, and by whom certain religious media are recognized as mediation or representation (implying distance) and others are sacralized and valued or feared as an immediate manifestation of spirit presence. The success of new religious formats depends on how they fit or do not fit with established forms of religious mediation. With detailed ethnography I have shown that the problem of mediation is not only a theological problem, but is implicated in struggles for and over social authority, and in bodily and sensory practices.

As pointed out above, charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion converge with regard to their authentication of the human body as the primary medium for the manifestation and experience of spirit powers. Traditional processes of spirit possession, initiation, and healing, as well as charismatic-Pentecostal processes of Holy Spirit reception, conversion, and healing, mediate an experience of spirit presence through specific bodily and sensory formats of sound and silence; revelation

and concealment; touch and avoidance of touch. Such formats are acquired and grad-
ually embodied through participation in religious performance, but authenticated as
occurring spontaneously. Certain bodily behaviours, expressions, or afflictions are sig-
nified as outward manifestations of the presence of spirits in a person's body, that is,
as a specific deity in traditional cults; as the Holy Spirit or demonic spirits in
Pentecostalism. Charismatic Pentecostalism and traditional religion also converge in
their emphasis on the body of the religious specialist as a channel for spirit powers to
become present. A traditional priest(ess) is called by a deity to be an intermediary
between the human and the spirit world. His/her body is used by that deity to become
manifest and communicate with humans. In charismatic Pentecostalism, by contrast,
God calls everyone and every Christian can and is expected to embody his Holy
Spirit. Nevertheless, certain people (mostly men) are perceived as being chosen by
God and endowed with a special 'anointing' that enables them to transfer the power
of the Holy Spirit to their followers. Both traditional and charismatic-Pentecostal spirit
mediators make use of specific bodily techniques and formats to convince audiences
of their spiritual capacities and hence to establish religious authority. The tension
between people's awareness of such techniques and formats, and their sense of spirit
power gives room for insecurities and contestations of the authenticity of claims to
spiritual authority and power. Both traditional and charismatic-Pentecostal religious
specialists risk being accused of 'pretending', 'just performing the tricks,' being 'false
prophets.'

It is with regard to mass media that the ICGC and the Afrikania Mission deal
very differently with the problem of mediation. The two groups face different chal-
lenges in translating bodily mediations of spiritual experience and religious authority
into audiovisual formats. The ICGC, like charismatic Pentecostalism worldwide, is
first of all concerned with the coming into presence of spirit power. Media images and
sounds must 'touch' and the experience of 'being touched' while watching or listening
is signified as the presence of the Holy Spirit. Just as the bodies and voices of 'anoint-
ed Men of God' mediate the presence of the Holy Spirit in church services, their tech-
nologically mass-reproduced body images and sounds are expected to mediate Holy
Spirit touch over distance. The challenge is to avoid that media representation
remains 'mere' representation and fails to become presence. This might happen when
the audience's perception of the construction of the media format (of the work done in
the editing studio) blocks their sense of authenticity, of immediate spirit flow. To pre-
vent this, Otabil and his media team have to renew the format all the time. The suc-
cessful media formula they have developed is not inexhaustible. In this respect, the
charismatic ritualisation of renewal links up with a key characteristic of commercial
media spheres, which continuously reproduce an expectation of newness. This makes
that media formats can only be successful for a limited period of time, while at the
same time continuity is always stressed: 'to be continued …'

Whereas the ICGC thus seeks presence, the Afrikania Mission, by contrast,
struggles for representation. Being primarily concerned with representing a group of
otherwise unrepresented religious adherents in the public sphere, Afrikania leaders
either do not consider spirit presence important or relevant in the first place, or they
explicitly do not want it. Compared to charismatic-Pentecostal TV programs, which

may mediate an experience of Holy Spirit power, Afrikania's media representations hardly mediate a sense of spirit presence. I have analysed the tension between Afrikania's very project of public representation and shrine practices of working with the presence of spirits as fundamental to the movement's predicament in the public sphere. Ironically, Afrikania remains out of touch with those it seeks to represent; for many shrine priests and practitioners spirit presence is more important than religious representation. But another problem Afrikania faces is that representation can become unwelcome presence. This may happen during Sunday service, when the drumming calls spirits, who 'scatter a lot of things' when they come and take possession of one of their mediums present at the service. Their touch is too violent for Afrikania and destroys its representation of ATR as 'religion'. Representation may also become presence when media audiences experience or fear images and sounds of traditional religion as a presence of evil spirits. Afrikania's strategies of authentication that highlight otherness vis-à-vis Christianity are risky in this respect. In the widespread Pentecostalist moral framework of God and the Devil and its visualisation in tabloids and video movies, an image of otherness easily becomes a touch of evil. The tragedy of Afrikania's struggle, then, is that its drawing upon dominant, Christian formats for representing traditional religion in the public sphere is counter-productive. Its formats of public representation either clash with traditional formats of invoking spirit presence or do evoke a sense of spirit power, but within a Pentecostal discourse of evil. This latter possibility, however, does remind us that efforts to mediate African traditional religion by modern mass media are not necessarily doomed to remain powerless. As the appearance in cyberspace of the South African Zulu 'shaman' Credo Mutwa described by David Chidester (2005a:172 ff.) shows, premodern religious resources may become extra powerful and compelling when cast in global formats of commercialised spirituality in the new religious space opened up by the Internet and other mass media. The gap between media representation and spirit presence that confronts Afrikania with a major dilemma ultimately reinforces the power of African spirits and might thus also be its major resource. It is still to be seen whether Afrikania's new leader will be able to exploit this resource.

Technologies

Charismatic Pentecostalism and African traditional religion converge in their ascription of 'talismanic' qualities to modern media technologies. They share a perception of the senses and their technological extensions that ascribes to media images and sounds a power to connect people not only to each other, but also to spirits. In charismatic-Pentecostalism, a television set, a radio, or an audio cassette may be used as an object for tapping into the sources of supernatural power. These technologies function not only as media of representation and communication, but also as 'spirit media' that transfer supernatural powers into viewers' and listeners' bodies and so affect their being, for the good or for the bad. Media images and sounds can thus transmit the Holy Spirit, in which case seeing and hearing is encouraged, but also evil spirits, in which case restrictions are placed on seeing and hearing. In this respect as well,

charismatic-Pentecostal practices with audiovisual technologies show a remarkable continuity with traditional African religious practices, in which images and sounds do not so much represent or symbolise the divine, but embody and convey spirit power. As such, charismatic-Pentecostal media practices are much closer to traditional African ideas about the interrelatedness of the senses, spirit powers, and personhood, than Afrikania's use of media as technologies of representation.

The problem that complicates Afrikania's media representation of ATR, then, is not that African spirit power cannot be mediated by audiovisual technologies, but rather that it can. According to long-established semiotic ideologies in West-Africa images and sounds, including technologically reproduced ones, can be used to bring spirits into presence or to connect to the presence of spirits. Just as an effigy or a drumming rhythm are taken to make a deity present in the ritual context of a shrine or a possession ceremony, a photograph or video shot of that effigy or a sound recording of that drumming are also believed to possibly make the deity present in the context in which the image is viewed or the sound is heard. The difficulty for Afrikania, and the difference with charismatic-Pentecostal media strategies, then, lies in the organisation and restriction of access to spiritual power in traditional cults. Whereas charismatic Pentecostalism democratises access to the power of the Holy Spirit and thus encourages its mass mediation, traditional religious cults restrict access to the powers of deities and spirits to those who are initiated. This divinely granted and exclusive access to a deity's power is fundamental to the authority and status of a priest(ess). Technologies of mass mediation and reproduction, even if used by shrine priests themselves (e.g. photography), may then be perceived as threatening to the structures of spiritual authority when used by outsiders.

An analysis of the magic of technology in African religiosity risks being read as blunt exoticism. In an attempt to escape that risk, I wish to emphasise that the ascription of magical qualities to media technologies is certainly not particular to the African, or broader, 'non-Western' context. The transmission of miraculous healing power through the television screen is a familiar phenomenon in global televangelism. The American charismatic faith healer, Ernest Angley, for example, is known for his televised faith-healing services ending with a shot of his open palm, thus projecting the image of an enormous hand into American living rooms and inviting viewers to bring any afflicted body part into contact with the screen (Chidester 2005b:59). Under the heading '*Do you need a miracle or healing?*', Ernest Angley's website claims that 'Untold multitudes have been healed as they put their hand against mine on the screen' (www.ernestangley.org). In the hands of Ernest Angley, David Chidester writes, 'television truly became a tactile medium, a medium for establishing a kind of physical contact that manipulated unseen powers of healing' (ibid.). Long before the advent of televangelism, David Maxwell reminds us, early 20th century Pentecostal broadsheets published in the US reported of the miraculous healing effects that reading these printed materials could have on the reader. Thus, he emphasises, 'it was not only in Africa (Hofmeyr 2002) and pre-modern Europe that sacred texts were put to non-literary uses' (2006:29).

But the association of media technology with supernatural powers in the West is also much more widespread than Pentecostalism. In *Haunted Media* (2000) Jeffrey

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Sconce gives an historical account of the persistent association of new communication media (from telegraph, radio, telephone, television, to computers) with spiritual powers and phenomena in American popular culture. Examining stories of ghosts in televisions, spirit voices heard through radio, and communication with the dead through telegraphy (see also Stolow 2006b), Sconce shows how such discourses are connected to the dominant understanding of media in terms of liveness, network, and flow. Throughout history the idea that media have a 'living presence,' that they can transcend space and time to put us into direct contact with realms outside our normal sensory perception, has included the live presence of spirit worlds (see also Peters 1999).

The magic of electronic communication technology enchants people worldwide, especially when technologies are still new and people's interaction with them is not yet part of daily routine. But also for people like myself, who are used to work with technological devices, there remains a certain uncanniness about the working of technology, which springs from a combination of a sense of awe and wonder inspired by impressive technological advance and performance and a lack of control and predictability; an experience of technology taking over agency from us. In certain contexts this 'technological sublime' (Marx 1964; Nye 1994) is marginalised by dominant collective representations that favour rationalist, scientific approaches to technology and deconstruct its magic ('the how of wow,' as the Amsterdam Hogeschool voor Techniek (Institute of Technology) puts it in its 2007 student recruitment campaign). In other contexts, however, the awesome power of technology may link up with particular religious imaginaries, which enhance its prominence and exploit its religious potential. When the mystery of new communication technologies meets the mystery of religion, the intersection of religious and media ideologies of liveness, presence, and immediacy may generate experiences of being in touch with (a) spirit power(s). The charismatic-Pentecostal ideology of immediacy and the living presence of God in particular appears to fit well with television's 'ideology of liveness' (McCarthy 2001; see also Alvez de Abreu 2005), thus producing in Pentecostal audiences a feeling of being touched by the Holy Spirit. This again has acquired a particular resonance in the Ghanaian context of traditional beliefs about the presence and direct influence of spirits and practices of communicating with these spirits and embodying their power.

Sense

To conclude, I wish to turn to the sense-making capacities of religious mediations. Despite their linguistic proximity, the terms 'sense' and 'senses' are commonly associated with supposedly separate spheres of human experience and knowledge. While 'sense' is mostly connected to reason and meaning, and 'making sense' to an intellectual process of logically interpreting and understanding the world, 'the senses' are often perceived as belonging to the body. On the basis of the ethnography I have presented, I wish to argue for the deep entanglement of sense and the senses and thus to challenge the mind-body split that still informs hegemonic understandings of knowledge.

SPIRIT MEDIA

Particular sensory regimes allow people to 'make sense' of the world in a particular way, that is, first, to have certain sensory perceptions of the world (that rule out others) and, second, to translate these perceptions into a 'worldview.' Positing an extrasensory dimension to reality, religion at the same time depends on the senses for making that dimension imaginable, experienceable and real. As I have shown for charismatic Pentecostalism and traditional religion in Ghana, religions organise people's engagement with divine presence through particular sensory regimes that tune their senses to this presence. Religious mediations thus 'make the senses,' they form the sensorium and thereby shape what people perceive through their senses in the first place and how they interpret these perceptions in the second. The embodied forms and sensibilities that come with long-term participation in religious practice help shape religious subjectivity, belonging, imagination, and experience. It is thus that religious mediations 'make sense,' that they are meaningful to people and help them to interpret and explain the world and their being in it. Whereas to an outsider certain religious mediations may appear nonsensical, they make sense to insiders because they have tuned their senses to particular sensory perceptions and interpretations. The production of meaning, understanding, and knowledge, then, is not solely an intellectual process, but is contained in the cultural formation of the senses that enables people to sense and to interpret their sensory perceptions. The body thus plays a key role in processes of 'making sense.'

This has important implications for anthropological fieldwork. When we acknowledge that making sense has bodily and emotional dimensions, we also have to acknowledge that our own making sense of what happens in the field requires not only intellectual understanding, but involves bodily participation and gradual tuning of our own senses. While 'participant sensation' is thus a required, and unavoidable, part of ethnographic fieldwork, it also gets us onto thin ice. I experienced the confusion it can lead to when I searched for the recording of my interview with Dr. Beckley and found the disc to be empty, as I described at the very beginning of this thesis. Why had the 'occultist's' voice not appeared? I could not explain this unfortunate event and suddenly the spiritualising explanations that both charismatics and traditionalists often gave to misfortune carried me away. Not in the register of conscious reasoning, but pre-consciously, causing particular bodily sensations in my fingers and head even before I became aware of the inexplicability of the event by rational standards, and of the alternative, religious explanations. Confronted with the limits of reason, the religious mediations that I studied unexpectedly and quite literally 'made sense' to me in a way that challenged not only my own worldview, but also the sensorialist foundations of anthropological research and the knowledge that it generates.