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Drifting selves: possession and the possession trance

The long-lasting discussion on religiously interpreted possession phenomena has been marked by a fundamental tension between naturalizing approaches, on the one hand, and contextualizing phenomenological approaches on the other. According to the interpretivists, possession is not a 'thing' to be explained, but a complex culturally bound series of patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviors. Going against the grain of interpretivism, the universalists would claim that we can validly ask questions about the universal psychological and sociological mechanisms that underlie the very formation of these culturally bound patterns of concepts, beliefs, feeling and behaviors, collectively called possessions. Understanding possession within one unifying paradigm is basically possible. Erika Bourguignon suggested that spirit possession is neither a form of cultural theater nor a form of mental illness. Possession is dependent on the possibility of separating the self into one or more elements. According to the "dissociativists", the humans have evolved a psychic structure fostering multiplicity – the capacity for shifting multiple versions of the self in relation to the social environment. The relationally functional and apparently unified self is nothing else but a useful illusion, the very creation of the dissociative human mind. The illusionary unity of the self is heavily negotiated in the context of possession trance. The possessed subjects, in various ways, drift temporarily away from their former apparently stable identities. Restoration and reintegration of the self are the supposed aims of the possession episodes. Pathology arises when the restoration of the self fails.

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FRA IL VANGELO E IL VUDÙ (45')

Regia: Massimiliano Troiani - **Montaggio:** Celeste Taliani e Paola Terracciano

Un proverbio dell'Africa occidentale dice : "*Per sapere cos'è il vudù bisogna aspettare la fine del mondo*". Il documentario riporta il complesso rapporto tra il cristianesimo, presente da secoli in questa zona, e i riti tradizionali le cui origini si perdono nel tempo. Cerimonie vudù, divinazione, trance, rapporto con gli spiriti anche di animali, piante, sirene del mare. Rituali che spesso prevedono azioni violente nei confronti del corpo dei partecipanti; un mondo difficile da comprendere ma soprattutto da accettare per la mentalità occidentale.

