

About Normative Sanctities and Dissident Spiritualities

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Abstract

This work provides an overview into the semiotic study of Spanish mysticism (Golden Age), and distinguishes between normative mysticism, characterized by adherence to established canon and literary tradition, and another one, which deviates from the norm, particularly in the context of mysticism in New Spain. The paper discusses the case of *beatas*, women who were often at odds with ecclesiastical authorities due to their unconventional experiences and practices. These spiritual anomalies that germinated since that century grew exponentially towards the 20th century, so much that today religious practices and spiritualities in Mexico often seem to be made “à la carte”, some even associated with criminal lifestyles. These lines expose the challenges faced by a semiotician, especially one inclined towards structural semiotics, in analyzing religious manifestations and emphasize some methodological and interdisciplinary problems.

Key Words

Semiotics; Mysticism; Norm; Abnormal; Religion.

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1. Introduction

The work I present below is a passage through my line of research and the results it has yielded at different times over almost twenty years. For a long time, I devoted myself to the semiotic study of the written texts of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross to unravel and propose a Spanish mystical discourse that, after many trials and obstacles, became standardized and typical in Hispanic culture, that is, it was shaped as a model of religiosity (Solís 2016). From this type of discourse, I was able to contrast others – from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth – that followed accurately the canon or presented some singular variants or seemed to present certain “anomalies” and go against the norm (Solís 2008).

Now, within my general interests in religion, I was inevitably confronted with its contemporary manifestations, more specifically those that emerged from the second half of the twentieth century. In the culture to which I belong, the Mexican culture, new religiosities – many of them evidently syncretic – and novel spiritualities began to emerge, some of them even associated with criminal lifestyles (Solís 2021).

The challenges that a semiotician – particularly one of a structural inclination – must face in the analysis of significant manifestations from the religious domain, are of different natures. The first one is, in my opinion, the approach to signs, symbols, texts, and practices that give the most meaning to human existence and have become, in turn, the object of study of zeal disciplines with a long tradition. What can a semiotician say before the depth of exegetical treatises? How to argue from a science of language before theological dissertations? The complications are, then, of a methodological and interdisciplinary nature, or better yet, in the “alliance” between two disciplines or epistemes (Darrault-Harris 2007: 38). And although these are some difficulties, they are also advantages, they are a handhold for the researcher, because what better than to take advantage of the delimitation and previous work.

However, it is less difficult to return to and remain within the traditional texts already delimited and even studied, but when faced with singular, novel, different or “mixed” religiosities or spiritualities, which also manifest themselves not only “on paper”, the challenge for a semiotician is also greater.

So, in the following lines and to the extent space allows me, I will return to some of the results of the works I have referred to above, to present some ideas of how semiotics can contribute to the study of models of religiosity and how it also allows us to recognize the variants and even the marked oppositions to these models.

2. Mysticism and its regulation

Among the different Eastern and Western mysticisms, it is the Spanish of the Golden Age that has become typical, not only because of its expressions but also because it has become an authentic science of saying, as De Certeau has considered in his emblematic work on the subject (1993). In other words,

we can find not only testimonies or poems but also didactic texts, explanations and even manuals.

By definition, mysticism is an extraordinary experience, the experience of being facing – or with – something or someone that surpasses the physical world and all understanding (LeLoup 1994), a transcendent entity which for theistic religions is the divinity. The mystical experience is indescribable – and for that reason *secret* –, an experience of union between man and God, thrilling and ecstatic, which is generally accompanied by other “graces” such as the “glossolalia” studied in our scientific environment by Nathalie Dubleu-mortier (1997) and Ivan Darrault-Harris (2023), and levitation, a subject that has been analyzed in detail by Jenny Ponzio (2023).

We can affirm that not all mysticism is religious (if we think of non-de-ist spiritualities and especially if we pay attention to the Latin roots of *religare* and *religens*)¹ and not every religious is a mystic, just as not all mystics have achieved sanctity (even if they have been recognized as Servants of God, Venerables and even Blessed). In the case of Teresa and John everything is fulfilled. Because they are recognized as mystics, saints, and doctors of the church, by their experiences, their acts and ... their texts.

The mystical experience is, then, unexplained; however, it has been written. Over the many texts that describe the mystical experience, we can find a very particular way of expression, with some lexical forms, rhetorical figures, and a singular narrative, some affective or passional states, and a particularly interesting state called by the experts on the subject, the theopathic state, which is not only the socialization of the experience, but the passage to the act in favor of a community, expressed as evangelization, missions (Bastide 1996: 112). This is the ultimate expression of the “heroic virtues” aimed at beatification and sanctity.

For a language scientist and even more for a semiotician “by their texts you will recognize them”, and this was surely well known also to those in charge of examining, regulating, sanctioning, or prohibiting the growing religious textual network in the sixteenth century. Thus, we know that Teresa of Avila paid special attention to her experience and the description of it, for example in *The book of her life* (2006: 31), she uses some rhetorical strategies aimed at convincing her readers about the validity and orthodoxy of her writing, all this under the supervision of Pedro de Alcántara, her confessor and spiritual guide, and we know that John of the Cross – in a meta discursive exercise – wrote the *comments* or *warnings* explaining the meaning and function of his poetic texts and arguing in their defense in front of the Holy Office.

Francisco de Osuna, in his turn, has recommended in *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* not to fall into error of interpretation and to take care of any expression of spirituality. And of course, in the same way the normative entities and different mechanisms of examination and analysis (qualifiers, commissioners, examiners) and apparatuses such as the Inquisition.

Now, if we affirm, as Paul Ricoeur (1992: 52) did, that the different spirit-

¹ *Religare* as human disposition and attitude of re-uniting with the divinity. *Religens* as “duties to the gods”, also organization of a community that shares an attitude toward the sacred.

ualities are expressed in different ways and that we can access them through their language and texts, it is evident that semiotics – and in our case, structural semiotics – can be very useful. In my case it was useful to identify, differentiate, understand and explain mysticism in terms of practice and significant experience from its modes of verbal expression – for this reason my restriction at that time to its written texts.

3. Semiotization of normative mysticism (mystical discourse)

Based on Ricoeur’s suggestions and the observation of a textual *corpus* – paradigmatic, representative, and homogeneous –, I have proposed a general model of mystical discourse. As I said above, the mystical discourse presents a general narrative of three sequential stages. The first one I called the stage of negation – which coincides with asceticism –, in this first sequence the mystic, or subject in semiotic terms, tries to separate himself gradually from social life, from material possessions, from bodily desires or pleasures, from memory, understanding and will, either by depriving them of value, inverting values, or even destroying that value. To the second stage I gave the name of affective states, because in this stage the mystic, upon encountering the divinity and later separating from it, experiences ecstasy, ambivalent love and melancholy. Finally, the third stage is that of reincorporation or theopathic state of which I spoke briefly before.

The mystical discourse also comes from a religious tradition (the Song of Songs, the Pauline letters, medieval mysticism and spirituality manuals) and a literary tradition (popular and cultured pastoral poetry) which is reflected in the metrics, the lexicon (amatory, bucolic, from the emblematic tradition, from the field of hunting), the rhetorical figures (enumeration, antithesis, oxymoron, parallelisms) and the syntactic constructions. The texts of the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century are written in prose (didactic or descriptive) or verse. In the first case, they present a singular “withdrawal” or identification between explicit author, explicit narrator and character. One of the best forms of this “withdrawal” is the autobiography. In the second case, that is, in poetic texts, there is a direct style.

A good example of how this “norm” crossed the religious and literary tradition until the twentieth century is Concepción Urquiza – Mexican poetess of the early twentieth century –, who presents in her poems not only the subjects, the constructions, and the vocabulary of mysticism, but even she follows a dialogue with it. As we see, some of Urquiza’s verses are a response to those of John of the Cross.

Juan de la Cruz
¿Por qué, pues has llagado
aqueste corazón, no le sanaste?
Y, pues me le has robado,
¿por qué así le dejaste
y no tomas **el robo que robaste?**

Debajo del manzano,
allí conmigo fuiste desposada,
allí te di la mano,
y fuiste reparada
donde **tu madre fuera violada.**

Concepción Urquiza
No devuelvas **el robo que robaste;**
guarda el amor que con amor venciste,
y el corazón que con dolor ganaste.

Te espero en el recinto misterioso
donde en dolor **mi madre me engendrara.**

4. Abnormal mysticism (discursive “disengagements” and mixed mysticisms)

In a second time in my research and in an exercise to understand the incidence and textual differences and meaning between standard mysticism and the variations of mysticism in America, I reviewed an extensive *corpus* of texts and their respective studies. What I found is that mysticism in New Spain is manifested in two ways: one that follows the established canon loyally, another one (original and unique), in contrast, totally out of step with the established canon.²

We can find conventual texts that, although they introduce some slight nuances, are faithful to the norm, that is, they are very similar to the texts of the mystics from the Spanish Golden Century – beyond their literary or stylistic value –. This is not strange if we consider that these texts were the pillow book for the religious of the new Spain and that, in all cases, they were written at the request of the ecclesiastical authorities. However, the texts that did incur in “anomalies” were usually written by the so-called *beatas* and precisely for that reason were a problem, at least for the Mexican Holy Office.

And it is just because of the marginal character of these women – which have their antecedents in the medieval Beguines of the twelfth century – and their practices, the relative freedom they possess, their distance from the watchful eye of the clergy, and their non-institutional ways of manifesting their experiences that they are a threat to the ecclesiastical authority with whom they have had strong conflicts since their beginnings.

The case of these *beatas* is just between the normative mysticism (emerged from the peninsular culture of the sixteenth century) and the abnormal phenomena that will be exposed below. A *beata* is a woman who does not belong to the religious institution and she is neither part of daily lay life, nor professed, nor married, and if she is, she is chaste. In New Spain, in addition, that women were creole or *mestizas* (a mixed race), neither peninsular Spanish, nor indigenous.

Many of these *beatas* were investigated by the Inquisition, tried, and punished for the religious “anomalies” they presented. They were accused of being *alumbradas* or *ilusas* and jailed for fake or heresy, and for their excesses.

Teresa of Avila, who did not ignore this phenomenon, introduced two terms to refer to false ecstasy: *rabiamiento* and *abobamiento* (instead of *arrobamiento* and *embebimiento*).³ These terms refer to a single type of experience considered false or dangerous, but in fact, for each stage of the path of mysticism, for each affective state and for each “grace” there is a false equivalent. Thus, asceticism is opposed to the annihilation of the body, love to lust, melancholy which comes from the “flower of blood” is opposed to that which

² As was also pointed out, from another theoretical perspective, by Lavin and Loreto (2002, 2006), Rubial García (2006) and Zayas (2017).

³ The *arrobamiento* is the ecstasy and the *embebimiento* is one of the effects, that is being dedicated and full of God. On the other side, *rabiamiento* refers to rage and *abobamiento* refers to foolishness.

has its origin in the “dregs of blood”, the theopathic state to the apathy (the religious acedia, which can lead to sin); visions are opposed to obsessions and body postures to contortions.

Let’s look at the example of Josefa de san Luis Beltrán, a *Beata* born in Puebla city, Mexico. By her are preserved five hundred seventy-three pages under a large title, in english something like *The forty-five stations cleaned up by Don Joseph Bruñón de Vértiz from the drafts he wrote of what he heard by Josefa in her raptures*.⁴ According to Bruñón, who was the *beatas*’s notary, he transcribed what he witnessed for two and a half years of Josefa’s religious and ecstatic experiences. She revised and corrected the writings until she was satisfied. Several times, Josefa in her raptures has produced in (or from) her body different voices that simulated a dialogue between different entities (in one of them, for example, the devil and Jesus Christ). During those public ecstasis, Josefa also used a series of strategies to stage her experience, making use of gestures and body movements and interacting with the audience, making them participants in her dialogue scene.

From the forty-five stations I focused on the 4th, precisely the one that presents a dialogue between Josefa herself, Jesus Christ and the devil. A first problem I faced is the fact that in this text there is no narrator’s voice, what appears is a direct dialogue, which also simulates oral discourse. We are, in the same way, “contaminated” by the information that Bruñón offers us: he has written what he has witnessed: Josefa’s body inhabited by other voices that interact with her and create the dialogue that Bruñón himself writes. We are faced, then, not only with difficulties of the text and the story it presents, but also with a conflict of levels of semiotic pertinence, since the fact that Josefa has made an enunciation in act, immersed in a predicative scene, and Bruñón has tried to describe this act in writing, places us in different situations, different signifying manifestations, in short, different texts.

Thus, we can see that: 1. Josefa’s speech is not a first-hand source, it is presented as a mediatized text. 2. Josefa’s discourse manifests itself – before the written version – verbally and corporeally, and different voices came from different actors but in the same body. 3. In the case of Josefa, a great importance is given to the corporal staging. 4. Josefa is inhabited by Jesus and by the devil. 5. Josefa not only externalizes her experience but makes it public.⁵

Then, Josefa does not follow the model of Spanish mysticism but introduces foreign elements that seem to belong to another discursive system that may well be that of demonic possession (De Certeau 2005).

We could affirm, then, that it is a frontier discourse, but it is so for other reasons as well, since Josefa’s discourse is born of extra-conventual life, outside of any ecclesiastical institution; for this reason, it becomes a phenomenon of marginal, non-institutional character, which resulted in a threat and a constant conflict with the ecclesiastical authority.

Finally, Josefa de San Luis Beltrán was charged in 1649 as an *alumbrada*, thanks, perhaps, to the presence of Bruñón and twelve other men who fol-

⁴ Archivo General de la Nación (general archive of the nation), volume 1503, Inquisition.

⁵ Unlike Teresa of Avila, who tried to hold ecstasies because she was “very sorry” that they happened to her in public.

lowed her as apostles. However, due to the characteristics of the experiences of this *beata*, I dare say she could have been judged as illusory and deluded.⁶

Another notable case of “abnormality” or false mysticism is that of Ana de Zayas. This laywoman, despite her apparent orthodoxy and impeccable behavior, was investigated by the Inquisition due to her written texts, because in them, she showed marks of a Neoplatonism connected with the *alumbrismo* an *dexamiento*.⁷ Ana wrote with absolute freedom, and sought, under an air of superiority, to indoctrinate even members of the clergy. The best example of this woman’s writing is the “Danza moral o juego de maroma” (something like “the moral dancing or the game of somersault”).

This text of 126 verses, although it respects the themes and some figures of mysticism (the rapture, the *imitatio Christi*), presents a multiplicity of mixtures at different levels, from the prosodic (free verse) to the thematic (the virtues, the dance, the temptation).

The poem was written by Ana from a vision during a rapture and describes the dance of the virtues (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance) to the sound and rhythm of the “angaripola”, a dance of doubtful origin (probably African).

The most particular thing in this poem is the appearance of a word that was decisive in Ana’s judgment: the word “dexarse”, as we see below:

Ay, le, le
y yo les diré por qué
pues Dios me dice en la D
ay
dexarse en manos de Dios.⁸

This word, condensed in meaning, is not pertinent and leads us into another sphere of meaning, precisely the heterodox sphere, particularly that of heresy and the way of life of the so-called “dejados”.

One small word could, then, make the difference, as Juan de Cazalla knew in his *Lumbre del alma* which, in contrast to John of the Cross with his *Llama de amor*, could not avoid the suspicion from the Spanish Holy Office.

This is what happened to Ana de Zayas, or was it rather the hint «To preach virtues and exercise vices is to have lost / the good sense, because it is impossible that none pay attention / to the eloquent doctrine in view of the licentious life» addressed to Fray Alonso de Jesús, to whom Ana dedicates the poem?

Now, we can see that alternative or dissident spiritualities and religions emerged since the sixteenth century in New Spain, now Mexico, associated

⁶ Caro Baroja offers us an extensive and detailed study on the differences and nuances of each spirituality in his major work (Caro Baroja 1985).

⁷ As pointed out by Zayas (2017), sometimes the same term, such as *alumbrado*, was used indistinctly and it is necessary a more detailed typification and a rigorous analysis of the texts that were labeled as heterodox and to understand that these signs of heterodoxy are not in all cases a spirituality of lesser value.

⁸ Ay, le, le / and I’ll tell you why / because God tells me in D/ ah, be left in God’s hands.

in those early centuries and thanks to the caste system, to frontier lifestyles, mixed or *mestizas* forms or fully marginal expressions.⁹

5. Marginal spiritualities and “à la carte”

As we well know, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, a strong trend towards secularization and the emergence of new religious movements began in our West, some of Christian or Protestant origin, but others very distant from the different instituted religions, especially from those with Abrahamic tradition. Champion (1997) describes the birth of either parallel religions or “religions à la carte”, the latter for me are rather de-institutionalized and mixed spiritualities, although with vestiges of the institution, that respond to individual or minority group needs.

Mexico was no exception, because it also followed both parallel spiritualities and “à la carte”. After the Cristero War (1926-1929) – from which cults, symbols and saints reaffirmed Catholicism – the phenomenon of religiosities or spiritualities that were partially or totally opposed to Catholicism reemerged. Thus, for example, in those years, catholic figures such as José Sánchez del Río,¹⁰ faithful to the model of the catholic martyr, was opposed to José Fidencio Constantino¹¹ (Niño Fidencio), in whose rituals and beliefs pre-Hispanic and Catholic components were mixed.

Of the multiple possibilities, I approached since 2018, almost by chance, spiritualities arising from or associated with delinquency and organized crime, that is, to a way of life that in principle is marginal and peripheral to the rest of a culture, because of its character of illegality but that, in the case of Mexico, found its most powerful form in drug trafficking, becoming central and transverse. We could think that, to subjects marginalized by society and institutions, or who perform illicit or illegal acts, correspond deities of the same nature.

Nowadays, within the various criminal groups, we find cults such as Santa Muerte (Lady of Holy Death), the “santón” Jesús Malverde, the “Angelito Negro” (little black Angel) and Juan Soldado (John the Soldier). Some of these cults, due to the number of their members, have tried to “regulate” and “institute” themselves, such is the case of the cult of Santa Muerte, which in 1999 tried in a “covert” way to be registered as a religion, but the government found some irregularities and denied it formal recognition.

Now, regarding these spiritualities, some more distant from the religious institution than others, some more syncretic than others, several questions can be asked: how are they manifested and registered? Do their discursive

⁹ We know that in Spain there were many cases of varied heterodox spiritualities, many of them associated with the nascent Protestantism, Judaism or Islam or, in other cases, forms of syncretism with other ancient philosophies.

¹⁰ Cristero from Michoacan who was tortured and executed by the military at the age of 14, beatified in 2005 and canonized in 2016.

¹¹ Healer from the North of Mexico. According to popular knowledge, President Plutarco Elías Calles, head of the war against the Catholics, was one of his patients.

and textual structures are similar in any way to the models to which I have referred? Are their experiences similar to canonical religious experiences, and do they include the mystical experience, a subject that has occupied me incessantly? And, finally, how far or how close are they to the religions we know?

The first point to be questioned is the definition of religion (from its *religens* and *raligare* roots), since in most of these spiritualities there is a rather lax duty to the divinity¹² and in other cases the link (re-ligare) to God is not such, even though many of its figures are in the place of divinity.¹³ The greatest difficulty is found in ambivalent cults, as in the case of the Templars of Michoacán.¹⁴

One obstacle in observing these manifestations of spirituality is the fact that there are very few primary sources, although there are extensive studies and fictional narratives (in which these popular spiritualities appear surrounded by quotations from philosophers, foreignisms and an unlikely cosmopolitan atmosphere). We found few testimonies, because the zeal of the proselytes of these cults does not allow much approach because they belong to the domain of what Lomnitz (2023) calls “negative sovereignty” (which is opposed to the predominant morality) and “illicit economies”, consequently rejected and persecuted. Thus, a first difference with the texts to which I referred at the beginning of this work is that, from the “à la carte” spiritualities, there is no eagerness to explain the experiences nor a systematization by those who have lived them.

Despite these difficulties, the semiotician can rely on these texts – unwritten and sometimes non-verbal – to approach the understanding of these spiritualities. In the case we will focus on now, I have resorted to the survey of some testimonies that have been made from anthropology, that is, I stick to a certain convention and to the disciplinary choice that others have already made. I refer to the case of the cult of Santa Muerte, which seems to be an echo of pre-Hispanic cults forbidden during the Colony (the figure with which it is presented), plus some Afro-descendant rituals (offerings) and a clear syncretism with Catholicism (the rosary, processions, novena, the mass and altars).

As in religious mysticism, Santa Muerte¹⁵ devotees have visions or witness miraculous apparitions, and it is they themselves who evaluate whether that experience is sacred or otherwise (Perdigón 2008: 81); therefore, there is no “authority” evaluating the experience.

¹² For example, in the devotion to Santa Muerte, devotees can even personalize the figures that represent her and ask for all kinds of things, but not stop worshipping her.

¹³ The devotees of the Angelito Negro (Little Black Angel) are very clear about the opposition between God and the Devil and know why and how they bind themselves to the latter, who is not God but possesses certain power. In the case of Santa Muerte, some devotees ask God’s permission to worship her and get away from Him.

¹⁴ Spiritual movement founded by Nazario Moreno “San Nazario” (1970-2014), leader of the cartel La Familia Michoacana, which is governed by precepts similar to those of Catholicism.

¹⁵ The first records of this cult as such come from the second half of the 20th century in Catemaco, Veracruz. Some authors believe that the origin is in the state of Hidalgo. As I have mentioned, its antecedent is found in some colonial beliefs and practices, such as that of the “good death”. Currently, the cult of Santa Muerte has spread to several cities in Mexico, Guatemala, Paraguay, Argentina and the United States (especially in California). Despite its territorial extension and the growing number of followers, the leaders of Catholicism condemned this cult in 2016.

In an anonymous small fanzine that circulates popularly, Santa Muerte is described as: «A spiritual entity created by God himself, for the benefit of the human being, also considered by some mystics, shamans and healers of our country as an intermediary between God almighty and the human being.»

We can observe that the experience of God is mediated by this “spiritual entity” that, having been created by God, becomes one more of the “creatures” but of a spiritual nature, therefore it is not a state but an anthropomorphic figure, evaluated by mystics, shamans and healers, actors that appear undifferentiated in these lines.

The experience that some proselytes have had of Santa Muerte is narrated as follows:¹⁶

At first I was afraid, but I did my research and started coming to the Santa Muerte rosaries. I feel calm every time I come. I leave everything outside. Since I enter the sanctuary I only listen to her songs, her rosary; I am happy when I leave and even my headache goes away. Many people have seen the Saint, but I have not had the joy. But when I sing her songs I feel that she approaches me and touches me; it makes my skin crawl, it is something very beautiful, it is like being in a bubble, in a cloud.

In this short paragraph, we see elements typical of Catholicism such as the practice of the rosary, the sanctuary and the effect on the worshipper. The singularity of this text is found in the last lines, in the moment of the encounter between the devotee and Santa Muerte since it is a sensitive experience in which touch and the bodily reaction it provokes predominate. It is not the ecstasy of mysticism, in which body and soul are invaded by pleasure, nor the visions described by Teresa of Avila of an intellectual nature, in which the “eyes of the soul” participate.¹⁷

Another testimony tells us:

People who are extrasensory perceive energies, for example, I have felt the Santa and my blood pressure has dropped, my body has become cold as if I were dead; I bristle, it makes me itch, as if ants were walking on my skin, as if my back was being blown. Those are also the classic issues of when you were next to an entity that is traveling, an energy of someone who has just died; a tense cold environment, the energy goes on the rampage.

The bodily effects of feeling Santa Muerte are: low blood pressure, cold body, stinging and shivering (bristling), very different from the effects that mystics like Teresa of Avila describe: a very great and soft delight, a pleasurable faintness.¹⁸ Some other testimonies claim to have seen Santa Muerte as

¹⁶ <https://www.vice.com/es/article/aeje5e/testimonios-de-seguidores-de-la-santa-muerte>

¹⁷ Augustine of Hippo (Book XII of *Genesis to the letter*) and John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, chapter two) made a differentiation between natural and supernatural visions, which could be corporeal, imaginary and intellectual. The last ones, the intellectual ones, were the truly divine ones, while the corporeal and imaginary ones were dangerous because the Devil could take advantage of them for trickery.

¹⁸ Teresa of Avila describes in detail the effects of the ecstasy or encounter of the soul with God

shadows («I saw clearly that it was the shadow of a person») while Teresa of Avila describes in her visions having seen the light without seeing it.

To be able to delimit the cult of Santa Muerte accurately, to differentiate well the elements of diverse traditions that are mixed and to understand the spiritual experience of its followers, we should have a more extensive corpus, more “fixed”, less “evanescent”. In spite of these obstacles, we can now make some provisional hypotheses about the meaning of this belief, and we can also realize its remoteness – greater than that of the texts of the seventeenth-century blessed women – from the standard texts of the religious mystics.

6. Conclusions

Finally, I could say that the problems I have faced in the analysis of religious texts have been, first, of an interdisciplinary nature, because it is difficult to dialogue with these other points of view of long tradition. However, the security provided by these studies are an axis and a north for the vision of the semiotician. In addition, studying texts written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave me a temporal and cultural distance that allowed me a good distance to observe them.

The texts to which I referred towards the end of my paper, those of spiritualities within the criminal world, present not only problems of a methodological nature, but also call into question my ethos as a researcher. Not only I am confronted with texts of other expressive substances and in continuous expansion and transversality, but also with texts that are non-canonical and precisely linked to organized crime. Although understanding and explaining is not justifying.

Now, what is the usefulness of a semiotic analysis of the texts I have presented? Semiotic analysis is useful to understand the modes of expression of religiosity or spirituality, the effect of meaning that the texts produce, and to envisage their enunciators and even to the forms of life that sustain them. To differentiate how close or distant the various religions or spiritualities are to each other, which ones stick to the instituted religions and, even, to observe how a single religion is transformed through time. The semiotic glance gives us, as Floch (1990: 3-14) said: «more understanding, more differentiation, and more pertinence» of the meaning of religion.

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