

Mediumship as the Best Evidence for the Afterlife: Francisco Candido Xavier, a White Crow

Alexandre Caroli Rocha, PhD

Marina Weiler, PhD

Raphael Fernandes Casseb, PhD

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SUMMARY

Death is a democratic phenomenon for which there is or is not an afterlife. Belief in life after death permeates human history, regardless of culture and ethnicity. In our society, the verdict of whether an afterlife exists should lie in the hands of science—the accredited judge of the truth owing to its remarkable success in understanding nature. Motivated by this premise, we begin this essay by listing what we believe to be the governing rules in the science game because they seem often to be ignored in favor of authority and prejudice. We mainly advocate that to abide by its rules means observing the facts and providing hypotheses that accommodate all the phenomena observed. Then, we analytically showcase what we believe to be the most convincing evidence for an afterlife: the mediumistic work of Francisco Cândido Xavier, or Chico Xavier, as he came to be known. Xavier's work is particularly rich in providing objectively verifiable information that can be used to investigate whether or not his communication with the deceased is genuine. We assess his work in light of the most common explanatory hypotheses (conscious fraud, unconscious fraud, super-psi, and survival of the mind) and find that the only hypothesis that adequately fits the observations is the survival of the mind, indicating that his mediumship is genuine. With this validation support, we conclude the essay by claiming that Xavier's work is the best evidence of life after death.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Not religion, not mysticism

On a Friday night, you and your friends decide to gather after a long time of not seeing each other. One of your friends, Adam, recently lost his brother in a car accident and has been consumed by grieving and suffering. Aiming to find comfort for his pain, Adam visited a psychic he had recently heard about. Most likely, a few of your friends (if not the majority) will soon think, *this guy went to visit someone who talks to dead people? Crazy talk*. Another friend, noticing the skeptical and almost reproachable look in everyone's eyes, soon tries to change the topic to prevent further discomfort for Adam. And Adam, who initially felt upset, now also feels embarrassed from telling his friends he ever did that.

This imaginative event describes what usually happens when the topic of life after death arises in a conversation. *What happens after we die?* Despite being one of the most intriguing and enduring questions humankind has ever asked, it can also generate fear and embarrassment when posed. And this paradox happens for one main reason: the concept of an afterlife is often and mistakenly attached to mysticism and religion. It is not rare, for example, to find psychic people working in an esoteric environment, hiding behind the smell of incense and claiming to tap into magical energy to contact the deceased. Using tricks and body-language reading to deceive their victims, they may take advantage of a grieving person's suffering to finish the session with a handful of money. In a manner not so dissimilar, religions have also played a central role in the afterlife debate, often arguing that all the seeds sown throughout a lifetime (either good or bad) will be harvested in the afterlife or in another incarnation. Specifically, the Umbanda, an Afro-Brazilian religion, takes the existence of the afterlife as an incontestable truth. For Christians, eternal faith in God and virtuous behavior during life lead to the soul's resurrection into Heaven in the afterlife. The sacred texts in Judaism and Islam talk about an afterlife, which God promised. Buddhists believe in reincarnation, based on the tradition of the Buddha's remembering his past lives when he reached enlightenment.

From this perspective, it is understandable that some of Adam's friends were skeptical on that Friday night. Religion and mysticism are grounded on beliefs based ultimately upon moral

sentiments, that others do not always share. Beliefs can be true or false, or they can be neither. They do not have to represent how the world really is; they may be wrong. Beliefs and opinions can be contradicted and turn any friendly conversation into a heated debate. However, not all people who accept life after death would consider themselves religious. In fact, the topic has increasingly garnered attention among those who are not religious at all.

Thus, perhaps the foremost challenge we face here is detaching the afterlife topic from any type of religion or mysticism and, then, scrutinize whether evidence accumulates in favor of or against the survival hypothesis solely from a laical position. And we succeed only if we talk about facts, instead of beliefs and opinions. Different from beliefs, facts remain facts and do not change; they are true by definition, regardless of opinions. And so, before starting our journey into the evidence, we will break the first dogma attached to the afterlife topic: it is not about religion nor mysticism—but about facts.

1.2 Facts and science

Science is the official method used to investigate the world and the universe. And that is so because, instead of beliefs and opinions, science works with observations and facts, making it very good at explaining and predicting things. From a very broad sense, being grounded in observations constitutes the main principle of science.¹ Once these observations are systematically organized, scientists create laws that either describe (phenomenological laws) or explain the phenomena (explanatory laws, also known as hypotheses) and propose new experiments and predictions based on them. By observing events and understanding patterns, humankind can predict when it will rain, when meteors will pass by the Earth, or how long a broken bone will take to heal.

Once hypotheses are posited, scientists value the simplest explanation for a phenomenon or the simplest possible solution to a problem, a principle known as parsimony, or Occam's razor. A scientific theory, in turn, is a hypothesis for a phenomenon that is widely accepted among the

¹ Exceptions do exist, such as mathematics, that resort to logic to build their core principles and undergird their theorems. However, for the purposes of this essay, it is more appropriate to restrict the introductory aspect of science to areas related to external facts, such as physics and biology, because they address observed phenomena per se and not logical concepts as is the case for mathematics.

scientific community and well substantiated by facts and experiments. Importantly, though, facts have precedence over parsimony: if any given hypothesis is radically simpler than another but excludes or ignores some observed facts, then it should be revised or replaced by another one that accommodates those facts, even if the outcome is more complex. Hypotheses are dynamic, evolving with the facts and accommodating new observations; they are somewhat tentative and intrinsically imperfect. Unfortunately, a problem emerges when scientists negate unexpected observations that do not conform to a particular theory; instead of adapting hypotheses and theories, they claim that the *observation itself* is not possible or a delusion. In good scientific practice, hypotheses and theories should accommodate the facts, not the other way around.

To make this philosophical concept more understandable, let us imagine a scientist who states that, after years of observing crows, all crows are black. In this context, he predicts that all crows yet to be observed will also be black and further observations of black crows by either him or other scientists provide additional evidence for this law. Nonetheless, any hypothesis needs to be revisited and reformulated once unexpected facts emerge. So, if anyone in the world spots one white crow, then the initial statement that all crows are black needs to be adjusted [1]. To deny the observation of a different-colored crow because the original formulated hypothesis accepts only the existence of black crows is neither fair nor honest. Any new hypothesis needs to adapt and manage to describe or explain the occurrence of this one white crow.

Understanding the world based on observations rather than beliefs gradually occurred during the Scientific Revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Concepts evolved in the following centuries, markedly including the works of Karl Popper, one of the most influential philosophers to address the criteria for qualifying a theory as scientific (also known as the demarcation problem). According to him, any hypothesis should be unbiased and aim to explain as much as possible the phenomena it covers. Scientific hypotheses, models, theories, and laws ought to be objective and describe or explain the observations of our world, no matter how

abstract, complex, or general they are—they are valid if tied to the facts.² Popper also argued that, besides being grounded in empirical evidence, any given theory should be falsifiable in light of new evidence. In other words, once proposed, hypotheses should be rigorously tested by further observations and experiments, with special value given to counterexamples (like finding a white crow) because they would foster the refinement or the rejection of a hypothesis. This falsifiability principle forces any new hypothesis to be clear and precise, subject to tests and experiments, and open to refutation (i.e., it should be able to offer predictions that can be tested to favor or undermine itself); otherwise, it would be taken as pseudoscience.³ Following his work, many other philosophers added to the field of scientific epistemology, including Imre Lakatos and, more recently, Philip Kitcher. Although all of them considerably contributed to the topic by introducing the idea of auxiliary hypotheses, the foundation of science still lies in observations and facts.

From this perspective, additional corroborating observations strengthen any explanation or established theory. Nonetheless, no observation can be taken as final *proof* of anything, a generally misunderstood idea among academics who mistakenly claim to have found proof of something through any given observation or set of observations. In our world, nothing is ever proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, and everything comes with a level of uncertainty. Instead, scientists collect evidence to favor one conceptual framework over another via experiments or simulations. The key to increasing confidence that a hypothesis or theory is correct relies on the accumulation of evidence, especially from multiple independent sources. The currently accepted theory of a phenomenon is simply the best explanation or description for it among all available alternatives. So the next time you hear a scientist claiming to have found proof of something, raise a red flag because this concept is simply not correct.

² Einstein's theory of the photoelectric effect, for example, was considered absurd by his peers, but it was later endorsed by experimentation and rendered him a Nobel prize in 1921.

³ Popper cited Einstein's postulations as an example of a falsifiable hypothesis because it could potentially be contradicted with several observations or experiments. By contrast, he classified as unfalsifiable some obscure and unclear theories that introduce ad hoc reinterpretations or excuses to avoid refutation when counterexamples appear, such as astrology, the Marxist theory of history, and Freud's psychoanalysis.

To sum up, the preceding principles modestly and limitedly summarize the main scientific directives that one should bear in mind when assessing observations. Their importance resides in a standard agreement of fairness to protect science from authoritative or political moves and make it as successful as possible.

1.3 How can we study the survival of the mind after death in a scientific way?

Generally, in academic institutions, the afterlife topic resides under a broad philosophical umbrella known as the *mind–brain relationship*. Such research holds investigations to find out how the happenings of our mental lives are related to chemical and physical processes in our brain. And like any other question in science, it must be addressed rigorously, free from bias and dogmatism.

So what happens after we die? This timeless, intriguing, and straightforward question leads to answers generally classified into two main groups: the physicalist (or materialist) view and the dualist view.⁴ If your answer to this question is, *Nothing happens; when we die, we die*, you are a physicalist and assume that the mind is a by-product of the brain and nothing remains after bodily death. If, however, you think that *something happens and somehow we stay alive*, you are a dualist and assume that the mind is independent of the brain (although related to it) and survives when the heart stops beating and the EEG flatlines. These two points of view cannot coexist. You either think that somehow we stay alive or everything dies; you either assume that the mind is independent or the mind is a product that depends on the brain's metabolism. One or the other. And in the scientific game, either position needs observations and evidence to be endorsed.

In this sense, how can we assess whether the human mind still remains after bodily death? How can we gather evidence in favor of the survival framework? To answer these questions, we first need to understand the concept of *mind*. For our purposes, the mind will be defined as *consciousness, person, or identity*, which can be more easily understood with examples.

⁴ While this classification is oversimplified, it helps the reader understand and follow the ideas presented here. In addition, to describe each philosophical approach of the mind–brain relationship is beyond the scope and interest of this essay. For a more detailed explanation of these complex and still-evolving concepts, we refer the reader to [2].

Imagine, for instance, you received an anonymous email. If the sender is someone close to you, you might identify the author because of the information it contains (e.g., words, expressions, stories, jokes, or style). As another example, think about two identical twins you might know. At first sight, you might have trouble recognizing who is who, and only after you engage in a conversation with them can you distinguish one from the other. Recognition comes because the interaction gave you access to mental items, which are peculiar and particular to each one, such as ideas, emotions, and desires. Therefore, although the concept of a person is closely tied to the existence of a physical body, the mental traits (i.e., *information*) are what characterize and individualize a subject [3]. In the dualist mind–body view, having access to this information after bodily death is a checkmate, for one can have access to something only if this something exists. Ultimately, any legitimate observation that implies the independence of the mind, such as near-death and out-of-body experiences, as well as memories of a past life, provides evidence for the dualism.

Yet another phenomenon that could elucidate this debate and tip the scale in favor of dualism is mediumship, whereby “an individual (the so-called medium) claims to be in communication with, or under the control of, a deceased personality or other non-material being” [4].

Regarding the phenomenon itself, legitimate information from deceased individuals, provided by mediums, represents robust evidence for the dualist mind–brain relationship because it goes beyond subjective data supplied as first-person reports. Such information can be objectively verified, making any hypothesis more adequate for tests and falsification. Mediumistic writings, specifically, tend to offer great amounts of objective information with the privilege of being permanent documents, allowing additional assessments from multiple independent sources.

Although challenging, studies in mediumship can provide a wealth of evidence to the mind–brain relationship debate. If a medium can reliably and genuinely access the mind or personality of a deceased person, strong evidence accrues in favor of the mind’s survival after bodily death. To be taken seriously, however, researchers have emphasized that studies about mediumship need to be meticulous in controlling potential sensory leakage and accurately assessing the generality of the mediums’ statements and be blindly judged [5]. Only when all these requirements are met can researchers verify the information the mediums provide.

Unfortunately, we recognize that not all examples of mediumship are genuine and that several psychic readings and mediums were found fraudulent over the past centuries. Harry Houdini (1874–1926), for instance, one of the most famous magicians in the twentieth century, debunked many “mediums,” including a very renowned one, Mina Crandon (1888–1941), better known as Margery. Likewise, the self-described psychic James Hydrick was revealed as a trickster when he confessed that his paranormal demonstrations were tricks learned in prison. More recently, some laboratory-controlled studies have failed to provide evidence that mediums can access information about the deceased [6, 7], ultimately culminating in the creation of criminal laws to regulate this practice [8]. In the science game, the failure to observe authentic examples of mediumship supports the physicalist view of the mind–brain relationship (i.e., the mind is a product of the brain and dies with the body). That is so because, if one cannot access something (in this case, the mind of a deceased, the information), the simplest explanation is that this something does not exist. Nevertheless, if a given medium can provide reliable and verifiable information that was not obtained by ordinary means, then we have a white crow. Notably, the observation of one white crow does not deny that all other crows are black, meaning that the existence of one genuine medium does not provide evidence that all self-claimed psychics and mediums are genuine. Instead, it means only that this medium is legitimate even though many others may not be.

The American Leonora Piper (1857–1950) was why William James (1842–1910), a Harvard professor and one of the greatest psychologists and philosophers of modern history, coined the saying that *one white crow proves that not all crows are black* [1]. She became to him the one genuine medium who refuted the claim that all mediums are fakes. Under extensive investigation in the nineteenth century, Piper claimed to manifest the personality of some deceased people and would provide information about them. Scientists of the Society for Psychical Research in England and the United States wrote thousands of pages about the phenomena she produced while living in England. She was under their scrutiny for several years and followed by private detectives to exclude the possibility of fraud. In a notable feat, Piper was introduced to 150 people, out of which 30 were friends with a deceased young man she

claimed to incorporate.⁵ During trance, Piper was able to correctly identify and adequately have a conversation with twenty-nine of these friends (the thirtieth person, who was not recognized because he had grown up, was accurately identified in a second try [9]).

In this essay, we have chosen to analyze in-depth the mediumistic writings obtained by a Brazilian medium, Francisco Cândido Xavier (1910–2002), our white crow. Also known as Chico Xavier, he was one of the most famous mediums and a very popular figure in Brazil in the twentieth century. In 2010, on his one hundredth birthday, his biography was published in English [10] and French [11], when he got the title of *the most astonishing medium of the twentieth century* [12]. We specifically chose Xavier's work because it contains a huge amount of objectively verifiable information, making any hypothesis more adequate for tests and falsification.

2. A WHITE CROW

Xavier was born in 1910 to poor and illiterate parents in Pedro Leopoldo, a small town in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. His father, João Cândido, worked in a lottery retailer, and his mother, Maria João de Deus, was a housewife and washerwoman. Together, they had nine children. His mother passed away when he was five, and his father, who was unable to take care of them, had to separate the family. Relatives and friends took care of the children, and Xavier went to live with his godmother. His biographers tell that, during these trying times, he suffered from daily punishments attested by the scars on his belly caused by fork pokes delivered by his godmother [13, 14]. Fortunately, in 1917, João Cândido married his second wife, a very caring and loving woman, who made a point of bringing all the children to live together again and sending them to school. However, to afford school supplies, she had to grow vegetables that Xavier would sell across town. Throughout their life together, the couple had six more children.

⁵ George Pellew (1859–1892), an American writer who died in 1892 at age 32.

Xavier concluded elementary school in 1923, completing only four years of formal education, not to ever return to any educational system. However, claiming that Xavier was almost illiterate is wrong; despite the restricted access to formal schooling during his youth, Xavier was a passionate reader during his entire life. His limited access to written materials occurred because of poverty and long work sessions. He started working very early in life, at the age of nine, in a clothing factory where he later developed pulmonary problems caused by unhealthy workspace conditions. He worked ten hours a day after school, from 3:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. When employed as a dishwasher, he would work thirteen hours a day, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. At fifteen years old, he started working as a clerk in a small grocery store, working similar hours for the next ten years. Then, in 1933, he started working at the Ministry of Agriculture until his retirement in 1961 from an eye illness.

Xavier had no wives or girlfriends. With a calming voice, humble manners, and jolly speech, he dedicated his entire life to work, religious activities, and charity. His literary production, one of his primary life purposes, was astonishing. After publishing his first book in 1932, at the age of twenty-two, Xavier wrote incessantly. The first forty books were issued at a pace of two per year; in his seventies, he wrote fifteen per year, and, at the age of eighty-nine, he was still able to write six books. Claiming only to be an instrument for deceased authors, he never accepted the copyright of any work and donated all the revenue from the sales to charities. Around two thousand charity institutions were helped with the copyrights from his books and his charity campaigns [13], besides the millions of people who were comforted by his words.

Although living a very modest life on the small salary from his job, his intense performance as a medium and religious leader for more than seventy years made him one of the most popular personalities in Brazil. In 1971, when invited to participate in a TV show interview, the broadcast system saw the highest audience numbers of a show in Brazil to date: 75 percent of the televisions were transmitting his words. Three-fourths of the viewers stopped to watch the timid countryman answering interesting and provocative questions about the most diverse topics with admirable respect and politeness. His language and choice of words on the show

were peaceful, elaborate, and eloquent. To the audience's surprise, he ended his participation by psychographing a sonnet in front of the cameras in less than five minutes.⁶

In 1981, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. When he died, on June 6, 2002, the governor of Minas Gerais, Itamar Franco, declared official mourning for three days. The then president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, released a note to the press: "The President of the Republic received with sadness the news of the death of Chico Xavier. A great spiritual leader and figure, dear and admired throughout the country, Chico Xavier left his mark on the hearts of all Brazilians, who, over the decades, have learned to respect his permanent commitment to the well-being of others. On his behalf, and on behalf of all Brazilians, the president expresses his feelings and expresses his solidarity with Chico Xavier's friends and family" [15].

2.1 The communication with the deceased

Xavier's alleged mediumistic experiences started around the age of five when he claimed to see and have conversations with his deceased mother. As Xavier described, "*[I]n 1915, I would often see my deceased mother in the backyard of the house I used to live in, but other people could not understand my visions and thought I was lying or suffering from mental perturbation*" [16]. This behavior is illustrated by the punishments applied by his godmother when he was little, for she would take the ghosts as devil's work. At the age of nine, during elementary school, he would also contact deceased people, making him a constant target for bullying. "*Since very early, I would see myself surrounded by deceased people. During class, I would often hear voices or feel hands on top of mine, live hands guiding my writing. However, no one else could see or hear them, making me feel very embarrassed*" [16]. At home, his family would not welcome his visions either. Roman Catholic by religion, they often contradicted Xavier's claims and threatened to put him in a psychiatric hospital. Sebastião Scarzelli, a priest to whom Xavier confessed his sins at the time, intervened and told the family the boy was hallucinating and should be kept away from books and magazines, which were assumed to be the cause of his

⁶ The entire episode is available on YouTube in Portuguese: "Pinga Fogo with Chico Xavier (1st TV interview)," accessed July 6, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JD3wmC2ABU>.

mental issues. Following the priest's recommendation, Xavier's father burned all his son's prints and put him to work in a clothing factory.

Things started to change in 1927 when one of his sisters had symptoms of a mental disorder and doctors could not cure her with allopathic medicine. Helpless, the family decided to rely on alternative approaches, asking help from some followers of Allan Kardec's ideas—Spiritism. Through prayers and passes,⁷ Xavier's sister recovered, arousing the interest of Xavier and his brother in Spiritism. They became very fond of the new ideas and, in the same year, founded the Luiz Gonzaga Spiritist Center, the first one in the small town. The change was positive for Xavier, for his relation with the invisible came to be accepted in this new space and his visions were understood as mediumship. At the age of seventeen, he started practicing psychography to receive written messages from deceased people. *"When I write psychographically, I see, hear and feel the disembodied spirit who is working, by my arm, and, many times, I register the presence of the communicator without taking any knowledge of the material on which he is writing"* [16]. During these episodes, Xavier would hold a pencil in his right hand over a blank sheet of paper and place his left hand over his eyes. After a few moments of silence, his hand would glide over the paper continuously with such speed that a helper was required to switch to a blank sheet of paper.⁸ When psychographing alone, he changed the sheets of paper with his right hand, as shown in his biographical film [17].

Phenomena like these would occur during public sessions or in restricted sessions containing only a few people. In some situations, he managed to maintain apparent independence between psychography and his attention to something external. Dr. Mello Teixeira,⁹ who observed Xavier's activity in the 1940s, reports that *"his quick right hand glided across the paper, in a purely automatic, mechanical movement, while he, Chico Xavier, in perfect lucidity,*

⁷ Also known as spiritual healing, the pass is one of the methods used in Spiritist centers for the relief or healing of people's suffering. Although anyone could give a pass, it is usually done by trained people. The act consists of the pass giver standing in front of and laying his hands on the person receiving the pass, to purportedly resupply vital fluids and improve the harmony of the body, which should result in better physical and mental health.

⁸ Examples of Xavier's psychographing can be seen in youtu.be/8JD3wmC2ABU?t=7019 at 1:55:00 and in youtu.be/p9rYyiDnfXE?t=2390 at 40:00.

⁹ Dr. João Mello Teixeira (1891–1965) was a medical doctor and professor emeritus in the School of Medicine, University of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

could respond to one or another accidental interpellation without interrupting the writing of what he elaborated" [18]. Also, according to Dr. Teixeira, instant writing did not depend on the nature of the text; prose, poetry, philosophy, and history were all written one after the other, continuously. A sonnet would take him a minute to compose [19]. Remarkably, Xavier also psychographed texts in English, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, and Braille among other languages, although he did not master any of them. He also psychographed backward messages in English, a type of writing readable using a mirror [20, 21].

In 1931, a spirit called Emmanuel supposedly appeared to Xavier and offered help supervising his work if he promised to be extremely organized and focused. In Emmanuel's words, there would be three rules to accomplish this task: *discipline, discipline, and discipline* [13]. After psychographing dozens of poems attributed to several deceased Brazilian and Portuguese poets in the following year, Xavier published his first book, *Poetry from Beyond the Grave* (1932) [22, 23]. At that time, Xavier was only twenty-two years old and already suffered the symptoms of his eye illness [24]. Throughout his life, he published around five hundred books (including dissertations, poetry, novels, short stories, chronicles, letters, and children's literature; for a list, see reference 25), all attributed to deceased people. His most successful work, *Nosso Lar: Life in the Spirit World* (1944) [26, 27], translated into fifteen languages, has sold over 2.5 million copies and was adapted for film in 2010 [28].

These hundreds of books, along with thousands of letters, demonstrate that the primary and most notable form of alleged communication with the deceased was through psychography. But Xavier could also use his voice and speak on behalf of the deceased, a practice known as psychophony, whereby his facial expression, tone of voice, and speech cadence would change according to the communicator. Those episodes mainly occurred in the mid-1950s, when he would go into a trance state at the end of seances and produce a spoken message attributed to a deceased. In other cases, Xavier would concentrate and tell people what he could apprehend from the invisible world while lucid. He would provide names and describe objective situations as if he were watching a film. The messages were mainly dissertations, reports, and poems, all recorded by witnesses and later compiled into two books: *Psychophonic Instructions* (1956) [29] and *Voices from the Great Beyond* (1974) [30].

Besides psychography and psychophony, Xavier was also able to produce materializations of spirits and objects, as described in some of his biographies [11, 31, 32]. However, Xavier decided to stop holding this type of act, which, because of its spectacular nature, gained great press and attracted hundreds of curious people. According to his spiritual mentor, Emmanuel, his mission would be to write the books, not produce the materializations, because the influence of the books would reach a greater number of people and more efficiently spread the Spiritist ideas of charity and benevolence.

While Xavier's mediumistic writing contained a significant body of remarkably accurate information, the medium himself recognized that mediumship is an imperfect means of communication because he would be only a "translator" for the communicators. Depending on various factors, the text could be more or less faithful to the intended message. In 1931, for instance, the spirit of the famous Brazilian poet Augusto dos Anjos supposedly appeared to Xavier when he was watering some garlic beds. The spirit of the deceased poet required Xavier's attention so he could get acquainted with the vocabulary of a poem the spirit would later recite so that Xavier could psychograph it more easily. The poem was "Voices of a Shadow," published in his first book, *Poetry from Beyond the Grave* (1932) [22]. As Xavier described, "*He [Augusto dos Anjos] started talking with those wonderful, technical words. I, holding the watering can, found it difficult to understand. And he talked and talked, saying that he liked to write in the field, and that was the time he wanted to dictate so that I could hear and understand when writing later. As I struggled to understand his words, the poet said: 'Look, do you want to know something? I'll write whatever I can because your head can't really take it!' And the poem in the book represents the best I could have done, but it was much, much more, it was beautiful! He spoke of photons, colors, worlds, galaxies. Who was I to understand all those things? Me, who was watering the garlic beds?*" [21].

2.2 Xavier's legacy

Xavier's extensive work has not yet been properly organized nor mapped and remains to be fully documented. In this essay, we divide his work according to types of authorship, which also correspond to the intellectual demand used to write them, helping us organize our assessments later. The groups are (1) books attributed to deceased individuals whose identities while alive

are uncertain, (2) books whose authorship is attributed to writers who have published their work while alive, and (3) letters whose authorship is attributed to well-identified deceased individuals who were not authors of published work. In all these cases, we stress that the objective information offered through the communications, either in books or letters, is the heart of our investigation. Dates, names, signatures, content, and other information can be falsified. Hence, we invite the reader to focus on these falsifiable elements, which will be discussed later, in light of the hypotheses usually presented to account for these phenomena.

2.2.1 Group 1: Books attributed to deceased individuals whose identities while alive are uncertain

The two principal alleged authors in this group are Emmanuel, presented as Xavier's spiritual guide, and André Luiz, a supposed Brazilian physician who preferred not to reveal his identity. Xavier wrote more than 120 books attributed to Emmanuel and around 25 attributed to André Luiz. Emmanuel's books dealt with historical, religious, moral, Christian, biblical, spiritual, and social themes. He is the supposed author, for example, of five novels containing a very expressive body of historical knowledge about Rome in the first century (*Two Thousand Years Ago*, 1939) [33, 34]; Christianity in the second and third centuries (*Fifty Years Later*, 1940, and *Hail, Christ!*, 1953) [35–38]; Europe and America in the seventeenth century (*Renunciation*, 1943) [39, 40]; and the lives of saints Paul and Stephen, biblical figures of the New Testament (*Paul and Stephen*, 1942) [41, 42]. In what follows, we present a passage from one of his mediumistic historical novels along with an analysis of the data, as performed by di Spirito [47].

Example: Excerpt from the mediumistic book *Two Thousand Years Ago* (1939) [33, 34]. The passage talks about the tragic fate of Saul, a young Jew who was sold as a slave by determination of the Roman Senator Publius Lentulus. This novel presents elements based on historical facts, portraying rules for the sale of slaves in ancient Rome.

Young Saul had vanished from prison in what pointed to a desperate and unforeseen escape. This information was relayed to Publius Lentulus without him knowing that corrupt civil servants often sold young prisoners to ambitious slave traders who operated within the more populous sectors of the capital of the world. [...]

In nearly all the Roman provinces, dreadful groups of thugs lived in the shadow of the state structure as unscrupulous traders of human beings. The young Jew, with his youthful vigor and health, had fallen victim to these soulless creatures. Sold with others to powerful Roman slave traders, he was put on a ship in the ancient port of Joppa and was bound for the capital of the Empire.

Moving ahead two months in our chronology of events, we find him on a large platform near the Forum, where men, women and children all together are lined up nearly naked [a] with a small placard hanging from their necks [b]. Eyes ablaze with revenge, Saul stood there semi-nude, a white woolen cap covering his head [c] and his bare feet lightly dusted with gypsum [d]. In the midst of that cluster of unfortunate beings walked a man of ignoble and repulsive features, shouting in a raspy voice to the crowd of curious onlookers surrounding him: "Citizens! Come take a look! ... As you know, I am in no hurry to dispose of my merchandise, because I owe no one, but I am here to serve you, illustrious Romans!" And pausing in front of this or that human merchandise to call the crowd's attention, he continued in his crude and insulting harangue: "Look at this lad! ... He is a superb example of health, thrift and submissiveness. He obeys at the first command. Take a good look at the strength of his flesh. Disease will never attack it. "Look at this man! He speaks good Greek and is well made from head to toe!" With this commercial pitch, he continued advertising each individual before the multitude of buyers who besieged him, until finally it was young Saul's turn. The young man reflected his rage and ferocious sentiments, despite his miserable appearance. "Check out this lad! He has just arrived from Judea as the finest example of temperance and health, obedience and strength. He is one of the finest samples of today's lot. Look at his youthfulness, illustrious Romans! ... I am offering him at the small price of 5,000 sesterces!" The young slave stared at the trader, his heart boiling with hatred and the fiercest desires for revenge. A bustle of curiosity formed around this interesting and highly original figure, his Jewish features certainly making an impression on the square's crowd that morning. [33, 34]

Comments:

[a] In Ancient Rome, the slaves' clothes were removed as a way to allow the identification of physical deficiencies or illnesses [43].

[b] Slaves were placed on a platform with a plaque around their neck showing age, abilities, and bodily defects if any [44–46].

[c] This accessory (*barrete*, in Portuguese) was used when a captive had difficulties in submitting to his master, as a guarantee to show the buyers the disobedient slaves. Therefore, the acquirer could not complain later on the fact that he had bought an insurgent slave [43]. Notably, the Portuguese word *barrete* is not used today, and to understand its meaning, we refer to the Italian word *barreta*. This particularity illustrates some of the examples of the etymological link with Roman history [47].

[d] Painting someone's feet with gypsum meant they came from overseas. This data was especially relevant to the acquirer for several reasons, among which knowledge of the slave's culture and language could be determined [43, 44].

The book *Two Thousand Years Ago* (1939) is accurate because not only does it reveal Roman rules that indeed existed but it also demonstrates the peculiar situation of Saul, as expressed through the context presented. The novel's author, however, never provides a direct explanation of each of these strange practices. Instead, he narrates the history as a witness to them [47]. Markedly, when the books were composed in 1939, the texts containing the historical information regarding the sale of slaves in ancient Rome were available only in Latin, whereas other indirect sources commenting on these texts were available only in English [47]. Xavier, however, stated that he never researched any of these themes before psychographing the books. Parenthetically, when he wrote many of his books during the late 1930s, he was busy working several hours or taking care of fourteen siblings, making it difficult for him to perform any research. In this sense, researcher Playfair commented:

Emmanuel began his literary output with a series of five historical novels, four of which appeared between 1939 and 1942 and the fifth in 1953. The first two, totaling 734 pages, were written in the same year. The third, Chico's longest single book, set in the first century Rome, runs to 553 pages and took him eight months to write. They were all, of course, written at a time when Chico was a full-time government employee with only evenings for literary activity. (By comparison, Lew Wallace's historical novel Ben-Hur, set in the same period, took eight years to research and write). [10]

The books attributed to André Luiz are mainly stories and descriptions about the spiritual world. His debut book, for example, *Nosso Lar: Life in the Spirit World* (1944) [26], presents a “city” inhabited by deceased people. Because the spiritual author introduces himself as a doctor, his texts highlight knowledge of biological areas, relating them to Spiritist topics, such as mediumship. Xavier declared that, although he had psychographed André Luiz’s books, he was not able to understand the content of some of them, such as in *Evolution in Two Worlds* (1958) [48, 49] and *The Mechanics of Mediumship* (1960) [50, 51]. Strikingly, some books attributed to André Luiz were produced in co-authorship with Xavier’s friend, Waldo Vieira,¹⁰ also a medium, who did not live in the same city at the time. In the book *Evolution in Two Worlds* (1959) [48, 49], Vieira would receive André Luiz on Wednesday nights and write the odd chapters, whereas Xavier would receive the spirit on Sunday nights and write the even chapters. The composition of this book is an example of the so-called cross-correspondence phenomenon, wherein different mediums receive pieces of information unknown to each other that make greater sense when combined [52].

Books by André Luiz also brought unexplained knowledge about the pineal gland at a time when scientists knew very little about it. In 2013, the scientific journal *Neuroendocrinology Letters* published an article entitled “Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Pineal Gland: Comparison Between Theories Provided by Spiritism in the 1940s and the Current Scientific Evidence” [53]. The researchers compared descriptions of the pineal gland and the epiphysis in thirteen books written by André Luiz in the 1940s with the scientific knowledge available sixty years later. They found that several highly complex data were in line with the current medical literature:

The fact that a text written by an unlearned individual without academic training or involvement in the field of health, who resided in the hinterlands of Brazil during a time when access to articles was limited (the case of Mr. Francisco Candido Xavier), furnishes highly complex concepts and information on

¹⁰ Waldo Vieira (1932–2015) was a Brazilian spiritual author, medium, dentist, and physician who founded the spiritual movement of Conscientiology and Projectiology, which posits that human consciousness is a nonphysical phenomenon. In 1955, he met Xavier, and the two co-authored several books on Spiritism. His books were translated into English, Spanish, Italian, German, and Chinese.

the physiology of the pineal gland 60 years before any scientific confirmation, raises deeper questions as to the true source of this information. The first hypothesis is that the author, drawing on books and articles available in the 1940s detailing the physiopathology of the pineal gland and published before the isolation of melatonin, created these theories himself, wording them in non-specific language, thus allowing them to appear to be supported by subsequent advancements in science. A second hypothesis posits a mere coincidence of findings, whereby the author randomly created several theories surrounding the pineal gland, many of which happened to be confirmed by scientific evidence. The third hypothesis centers on alleged communication with “spirits,” that have “brought forward” future findings related to the pineal gland. [53]

2.2.2 Group 2: Books whose authorship is attributed to writers who have published their work while alive

This group is formed by hundreds of writers, mainly Brazilian, some of whom Xavier attributed several texts. Most of them were born and died in the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth century. The profiles of these authors are diverse: they were part of different literary movements and professed different religions or were atheists; they were men and women, white and black.

The book *Poetry from Beyond the Grave* (1932), the first one psychographed by Xavier, is an anthology of sixty poems attributed to fourteen authors. New compositions were added throughout the years, and, in 1955, the book contained 259 poems attributed to fifty-six Brazilian and Portuguese poets [54]. Among them are well-known names in Portuguese-language literature, such as Castro Alves, Olavo Bilac, and Antônio Nobre. Alexandre Caroli Rocha, one of the authors of the present essay, studied more closely the poems attributed to five of these poets—the Portuguese João de Deus (1830–1896), Antero de Quental (1842–1891), and Guerra Junqueiro (1850–1923) and the Brazilian Cruz e Sousa (1861–1898) and Augusto dos Anjos (1884–1914)—aiming to verify whether the characteristics described by critics of the literature were also part of the psychographed verses [55]. Parenthetically, an example of a study used in the research was Amorim de Carvalho’s book, in which the critic

identified characteristics such as types of symbolization, satire and caricature, type figures and symbol figures, the bucolic feeling, nostalgia, versification aspects, the style, and stylistic tones as well as six constant features present in Guerra Junqueiro's poems [56]. Using this and other stylistic identification guides, Rocha found that formal and thematic characteristics of the five poets' work also appeared in Xavier's book. Likewise, other studies have identified evident similarities between in-life and mediumistic works from other attributed authors in the anthology [57, 58]. Some poems present innovations such as Spiritist principles, to which many of the poets were oblivious before, as well as the perspective of someone who had already experienced death. These new features, however, were expressed in verses that intentionally recapitulate several characteristics of the works of the alleged authors. According to Rocha, whoever conceived the poems possessed various poetic skills and necessarily knew very well the subtle particularities of each of the poets [55].

A significant part of Xavier's work was attributed to Humberto de Campos,¹¹ a writer who died at the height of his popularity. Aiming to investigate the features present in some of Campos's books, Rocha researched twelve of them, five of which were *Chronicles from Beyond the Grave* (1937) [59]; *Brazil, the Heart of the World, the Homeland of the Gospel* (1938) [60]; *New Messages* (1940) [61]; *The Gospel of Truth* (1941) [62]; and *News from Beyond the Grave* (1943) [63]. He found that several texts in this set presented a relationship with the contents published by de Campos while he was alive that go beyond the meanings and messages captured from the first reading [64]. Intertexts (i.e., texts referred to or alluded to by another text subsequent to it) were used in two ways: direct, in the form of obvious references, or indirect, presented as allusions¹² or subtle paraphrases. Again, this strategy demonstrates a deep knowledge of the attributed author's work, as illustrated below:

¹¹ Humberto de Campos (1886–1934) was a journalist, critic, and memorialist, born in Maranhão, Brazil. In 1910 at the age of twenty-four, he published his first book; in 1919, he entered the Brazilian Academy of Arts and Letters. Many of his chronicles, anecdotes, stories, and recollections were published in the years following his death.

¹² An allusion is an intentional figure of speech used to reference a person, place, thing, event, or other literary work with which the reader is presumably familiar. As a literary device, allusion allows a writer to compress a great deal of meaning and significance into a word or phrase. However, allusions are effective only to the extent that they are recognized and understood by the reader; if, however, an allusion is obscure or misunderstood, it can lose its effectiveness and confuse the reader.

Example 1: Excerpt from the mediumistic book *Chronicles from Beyond the Grave* (1937) [59]:

I had the opportunity to claim while there in the [living] world that, if someday I managed to pay off all my debt to the land of Maranhão and the Lord decided to dive my spirit into the Letes of the flesh, I would want to be born a paulista or baiano.¹³

São Paulo and Bahia were the two strong arms that supported me in the ordeal. My debt to both states is sacred and irredeemable. It was from the affectionate bosom of Bahia, the motherland of Brazil, that the cheers of incitement to the fight reached me; and from the generous and plentiful barns of São Paulo came most of my bread. [59]

Comments: Although Xavier wrote something that resembles de Campos's previous work, the source is not identified and is left to the reader. Particularly, it refers to the following excerpt from de Campos's book *Shadows That Suffer* (1934) [65]:

If, however, one day I managed to settle my gratitude accounts with the land of Maranhão, doing all the good it deserves and I wish to it and, in the next world, the Lord would ask me in which part of Brazil, excluding Maranhão, so badly served by me, I wanted to return to the torments of life, my answer would be ready:

– Lord, make me born, now, paulista or baiano!

I have, in fact, with these two States, such a great debt that I could only pay them by consecrating them a new existence if I had one. [65]

Example 2: Another strategy observable in some books attributed to de Campos was using quotations that were not part of the alleged writer's work in literal terms but were related to his cultural repertoire. Excerpt from the mediumistic book *New Messages* (1940) [61]:

Renan used to say that "the brain burnt by reasoning thirsts for simplicity, as the desert thirsts for pure water." And we observe that the science of the world, in its outbursts of unconsciousness, is now reduced to a handful of rubble. [61]

¹³ *Paulista* and *baiano* refer to someone born in São Paulo and Bahia, respectively.

Comments: Ernest Renan (1823–1892) was a writer widely cited by de Campos while alive in his books, as illustrated in the book *Memoirs* (1933) [66]: “‘Man does great things by instinct, as the bird does its trips guided by a mysterious old geography chart that it carries in its brain,’ says Renan. I had a script inside me, which I unconsciously consulted in the hours of sleep.” The mediumistic passage from the book *New Messages* (1940), especially, is a translation of Ernest Renan’s book *Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse*: “*Le cerveau brûlé par le raisonnement a soif de simplicité, comme le désert a soif d’eau pure.*” Surprisingly, among de Campos’s personal library, located in São Luís, Maranhão, we can find a copy of *Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse*, a book that belonged to de Campos.

Example 3: Excerpt from the mediumistic book *The Gospel of Truth* (1941) [62], once again quoting Ernest Renan:

[A]ll historians of the origins of Christianity stop the pen, amazed at the deep faith of the first disciples who dispersed throughout the desert of the great cities to preach The Gospel of Truth, and, observing trust serene of all the martyrs who have sacrificed themselves in the infinite wake of Time for idea of Jesus, they ask astonished, like Ernest Renan, in one of his works:

– Where is the wise of the Earth who has already given the world as much joy as the affectionate Mary of Magdala?

Comments: Ernest Renan’s sentence can be found in his book *Les Apôtres*: “*Où est le sage qui a donné au monde autant de joie que la possédée Marie de Magdala?*” When translating to Portuguese, however, the word *possédée* was translated to *carinhosa* (*affectionate*, in English) and not the literal translation *possuída* (*possessed*, in English), as a nonfluent French translator would expect it. Such modification was made because the literal word would carry a disrespectful meaning. Note that, in this sense, the alleged author of these passages was able to translate from French and understand and correctly use the words in a specific context, as was the case with de Campos.

Example 4: Excerpt from the mediumistic book *Lazarus Resurrected* (1945) [67], that contains the following passage: “*Listening to their references, I remembered the satanic character in Lesage’s book, disturbing Madrid’s houses, raising their roofs.*” This piece relates to a book

written by Alain-René Lesage (1668–1747), *The Devil upon Two Sticks*. In *Secret Diary* [68], a book written by de Campos but not published until 1954 (note, nine years after the mediumistic book was written), we can find the following excerpt: “*What should I say about my childhood, my youth, my entire life, spent amid selfish and utilitarian characters, of a small world that always seemed to me to come out, whole, from the pages of Gil Blas, of Lesage?*” This passage from the book *Gil Blas* also quotes the writer Alain-René Lesage, just like the mediumistic book. To produce such a thing, Xavier would also have to have been a reader of Alain-René Lesage, but nine years before de Campos’s book quoting Alain-René Lesage was published.

Example 5: In 1939, *Jornal do Brasil* published a letter written by Gastão Penalva entitled *To Humberto de Campos (wherever he is)*. In a fraternal tone, Penalva addressed his anguished letter to the chronicler, who had died nearly five years prior, referring to his literary work and imagining de Campos in the context of World War II. Two days later, in Pedro Leopoldo, Xavier psychographed *Letter To Gastão Penalva*, attributed to de Campos, wherein we read:

*I was spiritually with you, before you wet the pen in your embittered heart to address me your affectionate letter. Listening to your intimate considerations, when you handled the bible of anguish of my life, I intensely wanted to imitate **the famous gesture of Ulysses, in Alcino’s palace, when the Demodocus’s singing made him cry at the description of his sufferings**, recounted from praises to the heroism of dead comrades.* [Bolded emphasis added]

Comments: The mediumistic letter contains a passage from Homer’s poem *Odyssey*. Notably, de Campos had written the preface and revised the translated version of the poem in 1928. The mediumistic passage, specifically, was one of de Campos’s favorite from *Odyssey*, a piece of information registered in his diary, *Secret Diary* [68], but only published fifteen years later :

*For the last two days I have been working intensively on the final revision of the *Odyssey*, translation by Odorico Mendes, work that should be ready within eight days, to be sent to Maranhão. I had already read Homer in its entirety, in the French versions of Leconte de Lisle and Mme. Dacier. Only now, however, reading as a proofreader, verse by verse, word by word, it was that I understood the greatness of the poem. The visit of Ulysses to the country of the Cimmerians*

*and his encounter, in the cave of Tiresias, with the great friendly shadows, is truly superb in the description; **how superb it appears, in the Brazilian translation, the banquet in Alcino's palace and the heroic song of Demodocus;** and, in particular, the appearance of Helena at the moment when Menelaus receives Telemachus, who is wandering in search of his father. [68]*

Example 6: Excerpt from a letter attributed to de Campos written to his mother, May 1, 1936 [69]:

Today, Mommy [a], I am not writing to you from that den [b] full of wise books [c], where your son, poor and ill, watched the specters of human enigmas pass by, next to the lamp that, little by little, devoured his eyes, in the silence of the night.

The hand that serves me as a pen holder is the tired hand of an impoverished man, who worked all day looking for the bitter and daily bread of those who struggle and suffer [d]. My secretary is a rough tripod furniture by way of a table, and the walls around me are bare and sad [d], like those of our uncomfortable house in Pedra do Sal [e]. The unlined roof lets through the mournful wind of the night, and from this humble backwater, where poverty hides exhausted and discouraged, I write to you with no insomnia or fatigue [f], to tell you that I am still living to love the noblest of mothers [g]. [69]

Comments:

[a] Even as an adult, de Campos called his mom *Mommy* [70].

[b] De Campos would use the word *den* to refer to the room in his house where he worked [71].

[c] The original room where de Campos worked when alive had four walls full of books [71].

[d] Refers to Xavier and his surroundings.

[e] Refers to the house where de Campos and his family spent the first night during the summer of 1895, in Pedra do Sal, Piauí, Brazil. In the book *Memoirs* (1933) [66], de Campos wrote: “Many families from Parnaíba had gone there for the summer so that we couldn’t find a less uncomfortable house. The one my uncles had rented had still to be covered with carnauba

palms the following day: so, we had to content ourselves for that night, with another one full of holes, a few meters from the sea. For us to sleep, we had to cover the holes in the ceiling with bed sheets, through which it entered, whistling like boys and cutting like razors, the salty and inclement wind" [66]. Note that it is necessary to know the excerpt from *Memoirs* to compare the precarious house in Pedra do Sal to Xavier's poor house in Pedro Leopoldo.¹⁴

[f] De Campos suffered from insomnia and fatigue [71].

[g] The passage *the noblest of mothers* alludes to the expression *the holiest of mothers*, from the chronicle *Mother's Day* [72] by de Campos.

After reading de Campos' letter and other communications attributed to him, his mother was convinced that her deceased son indeed wrote through Xavier's hands. The medium, however, claimed he had never researched the work or life of de Campos. Remarkably, although de Campos was one of the best-known and best-selling writers in Brazil at that time, Xavier's work contains information about de Campos that was not yet in the public domain.

Unfortunately, fate played a cruel trick on Xavier, and the books attributed to de Campos escalated in an intensity not predicted by the medium, yielding him and the publisher a lawsuit in 1944. In the dispute, the writer's family asked the judge whether de Campos had indeed produced the books attributed to him. If the answer was negative, the family requested appropriate punishments from those responsible for the books; if positive, they required the copyrights. As a result, the judge decided that defining who authored those books was not a matter of law and rejected the action [18]. The following year, the medium began to attribute texts to Brother X, an unidentified author at the time. However, the identity of Brother X and the reason for using this new name was revealed thirteen years later: de Campos himself adopted that pseudonym to avoid further legal issues to Xavier [73]. In the book *Lazarus Resurrected* (1945) [67], for example, the first one signed by Brother X, there are several veiled references to de Campos and the psychographies attributed to him as well as the 1944 lawsuit.

¹⁴ Pictures of Xavier's house in Pedro Leopoldo are available in youtu.be/p9rYyiDnfXE?t=2390 at 35:05.

Remarkably, the book presents a game of literary allusions, a kind of puzzle whose intelligibility depends on studying data related to de Campos [64].

Other books by Xavier, such as *Talking to Earth* (1951) [74], which gathers texts attributed to dozens of writers and politicians, have not yet been analyzed regarding their authorial construction. Investigating the intertextual relationship between the work and life of the authors to whom the texts are attributed could shed some light on the structure of these authorships.

2.2.3 Group 3: Letters whose authorship is attributed to well-identified deceased individuals who were not authors of published work

The third group comprises thousands of letters attributed to ordinary but well-identified deceased individuals, who supposedly sent letters to family and friends.

The regular reunions where Xavier would psychograph these letters took place, more ostensibly, between 1967 and 1987, on Friday and Saturday nights, in a modest Spiritist center in the city of Uberaba, Minas Gerais. Xavier received the public from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., when he talked to the dozens of people who were waiting for a consultation, always for free. During this brief chat, he learned their names and those of the deceased and, eventually, heard comments about the departed. In some cases, during these conversations, Xavier reported the “presence” of deceased relatives, citing their names. Other times, he would refer to facts related to the deceased’s death or family problems [75]. Those who couldn’t talk to Xavier while in the line would sit in the audience of two hundred to three hundred people and patiently wait for a message from their loved ones. (In a few curious cases, the family did not even go to Uberaba requesting messages; Xavier simply received the communication, which was then delivered to the unaware family.) After these brief interviews with families, Xavier would prescribe treatments for those in need while under the alleged influence of the spirit of Bezerra de Menezes.¹⁵ Finally, around midnight, he would start writing the letters.

¹⁵ Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti (1831—1900), better known as Bezerra de Menezes, was a physician, military man, writer, journalist, politician, and philanthropist. He was known as “The Doctor of the Poor,” for his attitude as a charitable doctor, serving people who needed but could not afford the consultations.

Those sessions easily went far into the night, many times ending at around 4:00 a.m. Each night, the medium psychographed around five letters; he then read them to the public and handed them to the respective family. The messages usually contained much private information about the deceased and their family, significantly affecting those who received them. As written by a witness, *“these are moments of undisguised emotion for many, of victory over perplexity from others, and the shake of skepticism for some. And, no doubt, some disappointments because, according to the expression of the medium, the ‘phone only rings from there to here’ and not ‘from here to there’”* [75] (on the grounds that the deceased themselves used Xavier to transmit the messages and it was not up to Xavier to evoke them). Some information in the letters was known to the families and friends; other pieces were known only to the supposed author of the writings but unknown to the families. It is estimated that the medium produced around ten thousand of these private letters, many of which were compiled and published into about 150 books. The movie *The Mothers of Chico Xavier* [76], premiered in 2011, dramatizes three of these cases, and a documentary produced in 2010 shows interviews with some of the families [77].

Analyses of their content reveal recurrent patterns in the messages [13, 75]. Many of the letters asked the parents to stop crying for the child who had died, which made the spirits’ healing difficult in the spiritual dimension. They also suggested that parents convert mourning and grieving into service to the needy. Some deceased claimed that writing texts was a complex and imperfect process. Others claimed meeting with previously dead relatives and talking about the hope of a reunion in the afterlife, asking forgiveness for murderers, or acknowledging one’s fault or error in cases of suicide and reckless deaths. Some talked about the recollection of a past life to justify the cause of a past death, brought messages to other families, requested debt payment, and verified paternity. In general, there were no cases in which the deceased was angry or dissatisfied because the letters were intended to comfort the family. Strikingly, many of them provided the cause of death in rigorous detail (or even an alternative version of it) and descriptions of the moments that preceded death. In addition, letters from the same author written on different dates contained the same stylistic elements and figures of speech, as recognized by family members [75, 78].

Another notable feature that drew attention to some of Xavier's psychographs was the presence of signatures that resembled the deceased's. To be trustworthy, such comparison must be performed by a forensic handwriting analysis in a technical investigation wherein several points are verified, such as the tracing, speed, direction, connections, alignment, spacing, and angulation of the letters. Forensic handwriting analysis was applied in 1978 to a message written in Italian and attributed to Ilda Mascaro Saullo, an Italian woman who had died in Rome the previous year. According to the forensic examination, the handwriting switched between Xavier's and the communicator's but contained many irrefutable graphic characteristics, including those of the signature, sufficient to reveal and identify Mrs. Saullo as the author [79].

Among the constellation of objective and personal knowledge contained in several letters psychographed by Xavier, we can cite first names, full names, nicknames, secrets, typical words, addresses, contexts, and geographic references. Some letters even contained passages written in a language known by the deceased, such as in English, Italian, German, Spanish, and Hebrew. The amount of information contained in the letters is of such magnitude that it would be impractical to include it in this essay. However, we present below a selection of a few examples, along with the verification of the identified information, as gleaned from interviews with family members.

Example 1: Excerpt from a letter attributed to Carlos Henrique Branco Rodrigues, April 17, 1982 [80]:

Grandpa Francisco [a], in order to better identify himself, recommends that I tell Papa Hélio that he is still his grandson's 'dog' [Cachorrão] [b]. [75]

Comments:

[a] Francisco was the name of the paternal grandfather of the communicator.

[b] The nickname *dog* was the affectionate way in which grandson and grandfather treated each other.

Example 2: Excerpts from a letter attributed to Germano Sestini, May 13, 1978 [81]:

I remembered the Bela Vista farm [a], the beautiful Felicidade farm [b], and I wanted to be a young man again [c]! I wanted to start over, weeding the earth and then walking little by little [...]

Mariquinha [d], I reviewed everything [...]

The birth of our children: Hilário, Martha, João, Hilda, Alceu, Germano, Gérson, Maristela [e] [...]

My God, everything had passed as quickly as if the existence of more than eighty years had been just eight [c] [...]

Hilário asked me to calm down [f]. [81]

Comments:

[a] Germano spent his youth at the Bela Vista farm, in the city of Cravinhos.

[b] Later, Germano went to live at the Felicidade farm, in the city of São José do Rio Preto.

[c] Germano died at the age of eighty-three.

[d] Maria Perini Sestini, also known as Mariquinha, is the widow of the communicator.

[e] Hilário Sestini, Martha Sestini dos Santos, João Durvalino Sestini, Hilda Sestini Grisi, Alceu Sestini, Germano Sestini Filho, Gérson Sestini, and Maristela Sestini were their eight children.

[f] Hilário, his firstborn, was the only one who had already died.

Example 3: Excerpt from a letter attributed to José Fonseca Guaraná de Barros, October 15, 1988 [82]:

Despite recognizing that I am aware of this, I visit Heloísa, Ricardo and Beatriz [a] whenever it is possible for me. At first, everything was too much for me. Now, however, having time, I visit the Laranjeiras Street, the Pelinca Avenue and the Tabapuã Street [b], where our children have located their home, especially when they remember their dad, currently in another life. All are well and I ask Jesus so that they don't get lost in excess of comfort. [82]

Comments:

[a] Heloísa de Barros Spaggola Hermida, Ricardo Faria G. de Barros, and Beatriz de Barros were children of the communicator.

[b] Street names where they lived, in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Campos, and São Paulo, respectively.

Example 4: Excerpts from a letter attributed to José Roberto Pereira da Silva, September 29, 1973 [83, 84]. The full letter is presented in **Appendix A**.

Since that last morning of June 8 [a] the longing has been among us, but love grew and grows more and more. [...]

I remember, dear mother, Dad working hard to save for the future [b]. I remember him asking me to put all my attention in my studies as he dreamed of a hospital where a career in medicine was waiting for me to follow my calling of being close to the sick and needy [c]. [...] I implore him not to get discouraged and not to get tired [d]. [...] Besides our dear Sandra [e] we have other hearts to help. [...]

Don't for a moment think of me as someone smashed by the accident [f]. [...]

Dad, listen to my scream. I did not die! Work, my father, keep your vitality of a man of integrity [g]. Do not wish to die to be with me [d] because I am still living to be with you, each day more encouraged to fight in favor of good. Don't go looking and asking for me in tears in that corner of the earth where my picture has been filed away! [h] [...]

The train from Mogi on June 8 last year did not bring all the young men here [i]. You wanted me to remain to accomplish your dreams [c]. However, I am not dead, father! I am alive! And I will work with your hands.

I still remember what you told me as you recalled the days of your childhood [j]. You wanted a son working in a hospital to assist the needy children and to satisfy the needs of the ill that are afflicted without resources [l]. And who said I am not going to help?

From conversations, now I know more about our Maquiné cave [m]), and even Father João de Santo Antonio [n], who our family always honored with devotion

*[o], came to see me and hug me in the name of the affection of our ancestors.
[...]*

Grandpa lanez [p] received me as soon as I needed support. I am saying as soon as because after the fall from the train it was as if I had taken a strong tranquilizer. I slept deeply. [...] In my dreams I was in the railroad car, joyfully talking to my friends about the things we were planning for the next vacation [q]. I continued to sleep, as the trip seemed to never end, until it became a nightmare from which I woke up in a bed at a peaceful hospital, with a band around my head [r]. [...]

What really happened? I do not know the details yet. I have the appearance of someone who has suffered a long process of anesthesia, without memory to remember details. Grandpa lanez and Grandpa Leite [s] and the nuns, who were friends of my grandmother since her days of devotion to Saint Anthony [t], help me with affection and blessings which gives me more strength [...]

Remember, Dad, and also Mom, that since my early days at school the idea of a train was with me [u] and my preoccupation with time would make me write dates on everything [v]. Something inside of me told me my days on earth would be short and that a train was waiting for me for a final trip [f] [...]

Last year, it was terrible for me on August 6 [x]! If you can, on my next birthday [x] celebrate our spiritual communion by offering a cake to the children of “Lar de Jesus,” who were unable to have their own homes, I will be there with you and we will find much joy. [...]

Beto [y] [83, 84]

Comments:

[a] José Roberto Pereira da Silva died on June 8, 1972.

[b] José’s father was a hard-working and wealthy businessman. He worked fourteen hours per day for thirty years, having thus accumulated significant savings for the family’s future.

[c] José’s father wanted him to become a doctor to look after the poor and sick children.

[d] José's father was experiencing severe depression and was having suicidal thoughts after his son died. These events were not shared with anyone in the family.

[e] Sandra Pereira da Silva, José's only sibling.

[f] José died in a train crash going to Mogi.

[g] José's father had stopped working since his son died.

[h] José's father would frequently go to the cemetery to cry at his son's tomb, sometimes three times a day.

[i] The train was carrying around a thousand students, and twenty-four died in the crash.

[j] José's father had an impoverished and deprived childhood. He used to tell his son that, in the highly deprived rural area in the northeast of Brazil, where he spent his childhood, children would die from the lack of doctors and medical resources. José's mother, the only one who attended this meeting, was not aware of this private conversation between father and son.

[l] José's father said he would build a hospital so his son could work as a doctor.

[m] Maquiné Cave, a famous touristic attraction in Brazil located at Cordisburgo, which José visited once during his childhood.

[n] Father João de Santo Antonio was a priest, founder of Cordisburgo, the birth town of José's grandmother.

[o] The priest had baptized José's relatives, and he was a friend of old members of the family.

[p] Afonso lanez, José's great granduncle, had already died.

[q] The train that crashed was known as the "students' train" because it was used by students commuting to the university in Mogi. Students used to play cards and share lively talk during the journey.

[r] José died from a head injury, the only visible injury to his body. Only Jose's sister and his uncle knew that his head was wrapped in a bandage.

[s] José Leite, first cousin of José's grandmother.

[t] José's grandmother was a devout Catholic. In her hometown, Cordisburgo, there is a traditional celebration of Saint Anthony every year, which is part of the cultural heritage of the state of Minas Gerais.

[u] José had been a fanatic about trains since childhood, and he chose to study at the University of Mogi das Cruzes, mainly because of the train commute.

[v] José used to write his name and date on personal objects, papers, newspapers, and other small objects.

[x] José's birthday.

[y] Beto, as family and friends knew him, was the deceased's nickname.

José's parents received around twenty more letters from their deceased son. These, added to several letters attributed to José Roberto Pereira Cassiano, were later compiled into a book [85]. Although names are similar, there is no relationship between the two.

Another interesting aspect observable in some of the psychographed letters is the so-called *drop-in* communicators. *Drop-in* communicators bring unexpected and unknown messages in the letters, normally reporting facts unknown to both the medium and the deceased's family [52]. An illustrative example of this feature is presented in a mediumistic message written by Jair Presente. In the letter, containing his joyful speech marked by his peculiar expressions and slang, Jair reports the presence of another deceased, unknown to the family or to anyone else in the audience.

Example 5: Excerpt from a letter attributed to Jair Presente, July 19, 1975 [83]:

And another friend by my side is Irineu Leite da Silva, a fine young man who dressed the wooden suit [died] on the 7th of last June [1975]. I was among the people working at Flamboyant Park [cemetery] when he was considered a person of eternal sleep. But he woke up by us, and although he is fine, he asks for prayers for his parents, Sérgio and Rita, and he insists that the close friends be comforted. [83]

Comments: No one in the family knew who Irineu Leite da Silva was. Jair's sister, Sueli Presente, decided to call the manager of the Flamboyant Park cemetery in Campinas, Mr. Renato Mangiaterra, who denied the existence of such a person buried at that cemetery. Sueli insisted on the investigation and found an article in a local newspaper stating that Irineu Leite da Silva died on the reported date (June 7, 1975) in a car accident and was buried at the Flamboyant Park cemetery. She called Mr. Mangiaterra again, who was impressed by the new details and perused the cemetery documents. He found out that the victim was in fact buried there but had been erroneously registered as *Pirineu* instead. Sueli and a journalist visited the cemetery, validating the accuracy of the mediumistic information.

Example 6: Excerpts from a letter attributed to Roberto Muszkat, November 16, 1979 [75, 86]. Roberto was a nineteen-year-old Jew who used many Hebrew expressions in his messages (a typical example of xenoglossy), describing facts and situations typical of Jewish customs. All of these were completely unknown to Xavier, who had to ask for the help of Roberto's father to correctly pronounce the Hebrew expressions and to explain their meaning to the audience present at the session. This and several other letters attributed to Roberto Muszkat were compiled in a book by his father [86].

I am touched. A different party in a new environment for the celebration of 20 Novembers on Earth [a]. [...]

I realized that I was moving out of the body although remaining linked to it when in the midst of the effort to define what I was feeling to be analyzed by my own reason, I clearly heard over me the unforgettable voice of someone saying the saintly words: 'Baruch Dajan Emét' [b] and I knew that this sentence did not come from the family at home. [...]

I was then taken over by a strange sensation of well-being and I heard the words: 'Leshaná Habaá bi-Yeru-shalayim' [c]. I understood that it was a good-bye and slept with the tranquility of a child. [...]

He comforted and encouraged me, reestablishing my self-control and self-confidence. When he took me to meet other friends at the place dedicated to prayers, within the broad school-hospital, I cried, touched to see a beautiful

group of friends who I didn't know, saying the words: 'Boi Beshalom' [d]. Then, these new companions sang the hymn 'Shalom, Aleichem' [e]. After the song, my Grandfather Moysés came close to me and showing me the 'Maguem David' [f], said, blessing me: ' - May God make you equal to Ephraim [g] and Menashés [g]'. Tears washed my face while Grandfather conducted the Seder [h], during which I was allowed to ask my questions. I came to know then that I was in Erets Israel [i] or Land of Rebirth, whose beauty cannot be described. [...]

My grandfather says that tomorrow, before the beginning of a new calendar day, we will have our 'Oneg Shabat' [j]) and we are all very happy. [75, 86]

Comments:

[a] This message was written the day Roberto would complete twenty years of age.

[b] In the Hebrew tradition, the final act of the burial ceremony ends with the sentence *Baruch Dayan Emét*, which means *Blessed be the true judge or blessed be the judge of the truth*. With the same sentence, Roberto was supposedly received by his grandfather in the spiritual world.

[c] Signifies *Next year in Jerusalem!*, a sentence used at the end of some Jewish celebrations.

[d] Means *Come in Peace*.

[e] Hymn welcoming the angels of peace, sung on Friday nights.

[f] David's Star.

[g] Means *God makes you equal to Ephraim and Menashes*—twin brothers, sons of Jacob. This phrase is a traditional paternal blessing.

[h] The festive supper on the first and second nights of the Passover. Celebrating the Seder was a habit much cultivated by the paternal grandfather before he died.

[i] State of Israel.

[j] *Saturday's Joy*. Saturday is a sacred day dedicated to spiritual satisfaction and physical rest in his culture.

Example 7: At the end of another letter attributed to Roberto Muszkat, February 13, 1982 [86], the author signed as *Rob*, instead of using his full name. The parents found this signature

strange because the son had never previously used it. However, three years after Roberto's death, leafing through one of his son's notebooks, the mother found out Roberto used to artistically draw his name as *Rob*. This piece of information was personal to Roberto and totally unknown to the medium and the family.

Example 8: Message attributed to Mrs. Ilda Mascaro Saullo, July 7, 1978 [75], another example of xenoglossy.

Ortensio, figli del mio cuore, sono appena arrivato da Roma. Oggi già me sento un pó meglio. Un baccio in Salvatore tutta la famiglia. Dio con te mio figli. La madre, Ilda. [sic] [75]

Comments: The message reads "*Ortensio, son of my heart. I have just come from Rome. Today I feel a little better. Kiss Salvatore and all the family for me. May God be with you, son. Your mother, Ilda.*" Xavier, however, was illiterate in Italian.

Xavier's letters were so full of personal details that they easily convinced the family of their legitimacy. The magnitude of such recognition can be illustrated by some cases in which the letters were used as legal documents in the judiciary system [87–90]. In the examples described below, the deceased people were shot dead by friends or family members and told an alternative version of the story in the letters, acquitting the defendant.

The first case happened in 1976 with the death of twenty-three-year-old Henrique Emmanuel Gregóris, who died while playing Russian roulette with his friend João Batista França. Amid the distraction and the drinks, João accidentally shot Henrique, who died instantly. The judge decided that there was no intent or guilt, and he acquitted João. Dissatisfied with the decision, Henrique's mother filed an appeal in the superior court. Just two days after the request was filed, Xavier received a message from Henrique, containing the following passage: "*Tell mom to suspend the case against João França. He is innocent, and this situation is hindering my growth.*" The medium was then unaware of this homicide process but personally traveled 250 miles to deliver the letter to Henrique's mother, who asked the attorney to close the case and drop the appeal. Later, Xavier also psychographed another letter from Henrique thanking his mom for this decision.

In 1976, sixteen-year-old Mauricio Garcez Henrique was shot dead without witnesses by his best friend, José Divino Nunes, eighteen, who consistently asserted innocence. The case was solved two years later when Xavier requested Mauricio's parents to visit him because he had received a letter attributed to their deceased son. The letter, which bore Mauricio's signature, contained detailed information about the murder scene and emphasized that the shooting was accidental. The letter said that *"José Divino was not guilty, nor was anybody else in my case. We were playing, considering the possibility of shooting a person's reflection in the mirror. When I passed in front of my image reflected in the mirror, without making any movement, the shot hit me. Neither my friend nor I were guilty."* [75]. As much as Mauricio's parents were seeking justice and trying to incriminate José Divino Nunes, they were astonished by the information contained in the letter and recognized it as being their son's. The experts who reconstructed the events concluded that the version narrated by José was fully compatible with the data provided in the letter, without any contradictions. The letter contained a wealth of details about the crime, including forensic information (which the family was unaware of) and the probable signature of the dead boy (as stated in the identity document and confirmed by the parents). The judge ultimately considered the document legitimate and declared the defendant not guilty.

The third case comprises the story of João Francisco Marcondes de Deus, convicted of murder in 1980, after being accused of shooting his wife, Gleide Maria Dutra. According to João, the gun was accidentally discharged while he was trying to remove it from its packaging, and the bullet hit Gleide in the neck. João left in despair carrying his wife to a hospital, who died seven days later. The defendant's preventive detention was declared, and he attempted suicide in jail. Later, while holding a habeas corpus petition, João visited Xavier and received three messages from his deceased wife. In every letter, she cleared her husband, described the couple's married life as happy, and gave a short account of the tragic night, confirming that the firing had been accidental. In addition to the psychographed messages, the testimonies of four nurses at the hospital also weighed in favor of the defendant; they stated that Gleide herself defended her husband while in hospital. In 1982, João was unanimously acquitted by the jury court.

3. HYPOTHESES FOR CHICO XAVIER'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION

In the previous section, we displayed a selection of objective information well-documented in the books and letters psychographed by Xavier. Next, we turn our attention to the hypotheses posited to explain the phenomena, regardless of how unusual or farfetched these phenomena may seem. Like the scientist who stated that all crows are black needs to accommodate the observation of a white crow, so should academics regarding the mind–brain relationship topic. Unfortunately, at this point, we come across scientists who, moved by beliefs hardened into dogmas, find it so difficult to conceive the truth of the overwhelming facts described here that they prefer to ignore or summarily deny their existence. However, *“disapproval of an idea does not disprove it”* [91]. Instead, science entails observing the world, taking the facts into account, and elaborating hypotheses for them. Again, facts are the bedrock of science, and a scientist who ignores the facts is the same as a lawyer who ignores the law; it makes no sense.

Based on the primary assumption that the phenomena described here are then considered, the tentative explanations for them generally fall into two major categories. One category implies that the events are a fraud, either conscious or unconscious, and mediums obtain information by ordinary means. The other one takes the reality of the described events as fact and assumes that the medium has acquired that information without using ordinary sensory channels.¹⁶ That category of phenomena supposes that the evidence cannot be explained in a conventional way, such as coincidence, illusions, hallucinations, or fraud. Then, if skilled mediums can in fact report accurate and specific information about the deceased, this set of hypotheses addresses specifically which mechanism is involved in the process: the super-psi function, or the survival of the mind.

Examining the facts in light of the explaining hypotheses is a necessary step and a safety procedure to validate the evidence and guarantee that it is indeed an adequate answer to the essay's main question. Only if we exclude all the alternative hypotheses and explain the

¹⁶ Nonordinary sensory channels are also known as extrasensory perception (ESP), anomalous cognition abilities, or psychical skills.

phenomena based solely on the survival of the human consciousness after the bodily death, we can claim our evidence to be valid.

3.1 Mediumship as a conscious fraud

The standard mainstream explanation for mediumistic communications is in terms of deceptive practices called cold reading because, for many people, belief in the “paranormal” derives from personal experience of face-to-face interviews with mediums. The cold reading method represents a set of strategies by which a reader, without prior knowledge, obtains information from someone, convincing them that the reader knows about their background and problems. In this method, the reader usually obtains information from the participant’s body language, age, level of education, clothing, manner of speech, and posture. Even a minimal amount of contact between the reader and participant has the potential to provide helpful information. Cold readings commonly employ high-probability guesses and unspecific statements, quickly picking up on signals about whether or not their guesses are in the right direction and then emphasizing and reinforcing chance connections and quickly moving on from missed guesses. The cold reading process initially depends on the Barnum effect—the tendency for people to embrace generalized personality descriptions as idiosyncratically their own. Research into the Barnum effect has consistently shown that people tend to rate certain types of very general personality statements as highly accurate [92]. Mediums and psychics can utilize this phenomenon to produce readings that may appear highly precise but, in reality, contain very general statements [7]. A Barnum description may gain even more believability when it is thought to be derived from a credible source, such as a professional psychologist or even professional mediums [93].

The closer the interaction between reader and participant, the more pieces of information the reader can gather. And readers can easily convince people to provide more details and verbally interact by emphasizing the cooperative nature of the reading, usually saying they see only pieces of a puzzle and need help to put them together. This increased verbal interaction between them, also called warm reading, makes the reading more specific [94]. Consequently,

depending on the participant's reaction, the reader elaborates a reading that seems so uniquely appropriate that it carries the illusion of being produced by "paranormal means" [93].

Considering this background, claiming that Xavier used the cold or warm reading technique implies that he obtained the information from the letters in a deceptive manner, either from a brief chat with the families or from previous research into the deceased's life. Regarding the books produced by Xavier, conscious fraud would be in imitating someone else's literary work. This technique, called pastiche, was a common practice during the end of the nineteenth century in France and represented a jocular, although respectful, technique. In fact, when the books Xavier psychographed were brought to the attention of the public, many critics accused him of practicing pastiche, as can be exemplified below:

Pastiche literature has long had an enormous vogue in France. The series of volumes "À la manière de ...," in which prose styles were copied, revealed very curious forms of intelligence. The most notable writers were imitated with bewildering perfection. All styles have stigmas and tics, which characterize the authors. The pastiches, for that very reason, require long studies. The genre started to be explored between us by Spiritism with extraordinary security and very fair success. [...]

Just now, here we have a chronicle by Humberto de Campos, sent from beyond the grave, through a "salesclerk," a skilled psychographer, who collected it in a trance. The pastiche is perfect. All the clichés, all the stigmas, all the characteristics of that writer's style are found here. [95]

3.2 Mediumship as an unconscious fraud

In most Western societies, if a person has recurrent dissociative experiences as Xavier did, they are interpreted as a sign of mental illness. A dissociative experience is a wide array of experiences ranging from a mild detachment of one's own body and immediate surroundings to a more severe disconnection caused by physical and emotional experiences [96]. Although dissociative states exist on a continuum from nonpathological forms to pathological states of derealization, the mental state of mediums has often been explained in the anthropological and medical literature in terms of pathology, or dissociative disorders.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (DSM-5) [97], people who present with possession experiences are diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder. The states of identity discontinuity or possession experiences are accompanied by alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and/or sensorimotor functioning. According to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, eleventh revision (ICD-11), people who experience involuntary or unwanted trances, with a temporary loss of both the sense of personal identity and full awareness of the surroundings, should be classified under Trance Disorders [98]. Although the ICD-11 further differentiates between dissociative or hallucinatory experiences that occur in a cultural context (religious or other culturally accepted situations) from those experiences that arise during schizophrenia, acute psychoses, or multiple personalities, it would still label mediumship as a disorder. Other researchers have proposed that mediumship is a way for individuals with multiple personality disorder to freely express their other selves, moved by the fear of being labeled as crazy when they experience visions or random possessions [99]. According to this point of view, which resembles the ideas behind the hypnotic therapy used to treat multiple personality disorder, mediumship is a potential resource used to transform involuntary behavior to voluntary actions [99].

Besides this diagnostic medical framework, some researchers have proposed that spiritual experiences could be an effect of abnormal levels of neurobiological molecules. The similarity of the symptoms produced by hallucinogenic substances, such as bufotenine and N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), and the subjective states induced by ecstatic religious occurrences [100], led some scientists to suspect that endogenously generated bufotenine and DMT could play a role in the distortion of perceptions observed during these occurrences [101, 102]. Bufotenine and DMT are endogenous alkaloids formed from serotonin and tryptamine that possess differing degrees of psychotropic/psychedelic activity in humans. The structure of DMT can be found embedded within the structures of better-known molecules such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin [103]. DMT is also one of the principal components of ayahuasca, a South American psychoactive brew used as a traditional spiritual medicine in ceremonies among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon [104]. Among other parts of the

body, DMT is produced by the pineal gland, which has had a long and romantic history with spiritual experiences, being considered the “seat of the soul” and “the third eye” [105].

Another conceptual framework to interpret mediumship has been established in terms of mental health and not a mental illness. In this social-functionalist perspective, possessions and mediumistic experiences are not treated as pathological because these experiences are socially valued [106–110]. According to this point of view, a person becomes a medium in a process that involves many factors, including the individual’s experience and predispositions (e.g., symptoms of anxiety, depression, or dissociative tendencies). The person is then frequently exposed to sources of psychosocial stress that eventually precipitates a somatic crisis. This structured behavior combines with social factors, such as race, class, gender, and environment. Hallucinations, in this context, are a window into the mind, shaped by cultural ideas and practices that affect the capacity to distinguish between what is seen or heard and what is thought. These individuals then find a positive transformation in their identities through a religious system when they assume a new social role as a medium. The spiritual narrative of the religion allows them to rewrite their self-narratives in new, more favorable terms and contributes to a therapeutic reduction in existential distress. These people acquire specific representations about the mind from this new system and are encouraged to use their minds in particular ways. Thus, the subject is given a new sense of spiritual security and confidence, which might spare them from the hopelessness of living a marginal existence.

3.3 Mediumship as a super-psi function

Also known as the living agent psi, or super-ESP [111], the super-psi hypothesis points to psychic functioning solely among the living people. Proponents of the super-psi claim that an essential link exists between the concept of a person and physical embodiment. In this context, deceased people would not be able to communicate with the living based on their lack of sensory-perceptual systems and a physical body to acquire knowledge about their environment. By ruling out the assumption that dead people can interact with the world of the living, the super-psi hypothesis rejects what is called discarnate interactionism [112]. Therefore, all the information obtained by the medium somehow comes from the living and never from the deceased.

If this framework is correct, Xavier would have received all the information through multiple psi processes—telepathically from a family member’s mind, clairvoyantly from the environment, or even precognitively from the future—when the family checks on the facts given in the communications and finds them to be accurate [113–116]. This hypothesis is based on the claim that most people have informational and influential faculties that are not mediated by the known bodily channels (i.e., psychic ability), although for most, this ability is usually inhibited. Nonetheless, specific individuals have strong skills of this kind (e.g., Xavier) that manifest more powerfully or openly under certain conditions, unleashed by an agent’s needs and interests. The implication is that, if people have a sufficiently strong motivation, they can manifest psi powers to an extraordinary degree [112].

3.4 Mediumship as the survival of the mind

The concept of survival of the mind is based on the idea that consciousness does not die when the body does. Survivalists attempt to explain the phenomena regarding the intentions, memories, beliefs, and desires of a deceased, or spirit. Thus, it assumes the continued postmortem existence of a formerly living person and the persisting mind with the psychological life associated with this person (i.e., the preservation of some identity between an antemortem and a postmortem individual) [52]. According to this hypothesis, a disembodied spirit can causally interact with living people and the physical world at some level, acquiring empirical knowledge of happenings in our world (i.e., discarnate interactionism). Assuming this explanation is correct, Xavier would have been only the mediator of all the works he psychographed, which in reality were produced by the attributed deceased people.

Historically, establishing the very moment when the belief in an afterlife first appeared may be challenging. Various cultures worldwide presented some form of metaphysical ideas, probably indicating that even relatively primitive societies would elaborate some sort of creed about the afterlife. Written or drawn records are the most reliable sources to exemplify that ancient Greeks, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the millennial Indian traditions, the Egyptian civilization, and a plethora of past societies had deep concerns about these matters. Later, modern philosophy burgeoned into revolutionary works with more formal and scientific tones. Surely, René Descartes (1596–1650) is one of the most praised modern representatives; he

reignited the discussion on the mind–brain relationship with the proposal of the dualism of substance, which was a sophistication of previous systems. According to him, there were two kinds of substances: matter (i.e., a body; *res extensa*), which is the substance that occupies spaces, and the mind (*res cogitans*), the source of the mental/thinking activity.

The evolution of this discussion culminated in a continuum of hypotheses ranging from dualism to physicalism [2, 101–103]. Currently, there are unending variations and derivations rooted in Cartesian dualism, which are always accompanied by counterproposals defending that there is no such mental substance but only matter. This debate on the spiritual matter has reached a level of refinement that is impossible to summarize here. Furthermore, we would risk being tedious due to the intricacies and technicalities of the arguments of this secondary point, that is, the constitution of mental substance. Therefore, we only take advantage of the core of this theoretical system, namely, the independence of the mind from the brain, and leave aside the debate on their constitution.

4. ADDRESSING THE HYPOTHESES

Our next step is to evaluate the hypotheses postulated to explain the phenomena, watching carefully whether they indeed cover all the observations. But before diving into them, we would like to recapitulate certain aspects about Xavier’s life. There are a set of capital points mentioned across the essay and summarized below that we draw particular attention to because they reveal the critical background to the discussions elaborated in this section:

- i) He spent his childhood in a poor environment, with little access to literate culture or any library.
- ii) He attended only elementary school, having four years of formal education.
- iii) He reported seeing deceased people and interacting with them during his childhood, around the age of five.
- iv) He discovered Allan Kardec’s ideas at the age of seventeen and kept his convictions until his death, at the age of ninety-two.

v) He started working at the age of nine and retired at age fifty, delivering around ten hours of work per day. When not working at the Ministry of Agriculture, he occupied his free time in charitable activities during the weekends, seeing hundreds of people a week and writing texts.

vi) The symptoms of his eye disease started when he was twenty-one and led him to a complete sight loss in one of his eyes when older. He retired at the age of fifty due to this physical disability.

vii) Throughout his life, he produced around five hundred books and an estimate of ten thousand letters. His first book was published when he was only twenty-two.

viii) He refused to receive copyrights for the books psychographed, claiming to be only an instrument for the alleged authors.

ix) He was never married nor had any children, devoting all his time to his supposed mission.

Then, by evaluating Xavier's psychographed work, we can make the following conclusions:

i) To produce the books classified into Group 1, he would have to have an in-depth knowledge of various areas such as history, religion, medicine, and philosophy as well as skills in composing novels, dissertations, and other types of texts.

ii) To produce the books classified into Group 2, he would have to have an in-depth knowledge of literature and the talent to write a wide variety of poems, short stories, and chronicles. He would also have to have the ability to produce texts that contained many cultural references, citations, and games of allusions beyond the first reading layer, consistent with their alleged authors.

iii) To produce the letters classified into Group 3, he would have to have access to much information in the private domain—information that was known only to families and friends and other information known only to the alleged author of the writings (but unknown to the families). Furthermore, he would have to have access to all this data in a time and place without computers, internet, or accessible libraries.

iv) To produce the letters classified into Group 3, he would have to have a minimal comprehension of several languages other than Portuguese.

v) To produce the texts from any of the three groups, he would have to have an ability to maintain internal coherence (thematic and intertextual) between texts attributed to the same person but written in different circumstances.

vi) To produce texts with distinct intellectual demands, he would have to have spent a different amount of time in each of them.

Now, we shall have a closer look into each hypothesis postulated to explain Xavier's access to information.

4.1 On the conscious fraud

According to this framework, Xavier purposely produced all the work and made pastiche to create the work from Group 2, specifically. Pastiche is a technique that depends on previous and daily reading of the authors to be imitated, requiring the patient effort of elaboration, retouching, and polishing of the achieved production, all of this done in time-consuming attempts. To be the real author of his work, Xavier would also have had to possess a rare talent to create unpublished work in prose, poetry, and various other types of texts of a different nature.

Nonetheless, some highly renowned and influential writers expressed their doubts regarding Xavier making pastiche. The Brazilian writer R. Magalhães Júnior,¹⁷ for instance, wrote an article for a newspaper in 1944, saying that, to produce Xavier's work, he would have to have a good background of culture and an exceptional cognitive gift, among others:

Whoever reads for sixty days, night and day, day and night, only Euclides da Cunha, will write in the style of Euclides without notable effort, without making very hard mental gymnastics. The same thing happens to those who read Machado de Assis and those who read Castro Alves. The more personal the writer, the easier he can be imitated. But imitation undoubtedly requires qualities of intelligence, a good background of culture, logic in choosing the

¹⁷ R. Magalhães Júnior (1907–1981), elected member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and Arts in 1956, was known for his extensive intellectual production in theater, journalism, and literature. He is the author of more than thirty theatrical texts and translator of numerous plays as well as a great defender of copyright. The staging of his magazines, costume comedies, and historical plays was successful in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

issues and in exposing ideas, in short, a certain awareness of literary—and I say this speaking only of intentional imitation, which is argued against Mr. Francisco Cândido Xavier, Chico Xavier. And for these same reasons, I declare that if Chico Xavier is a liar, he is a liar of talent. For a man who only attended primary school, his vocabulary wealth is surprising. His facility for imitating would be an exceptional gift because he doesn't just imitate Humberto de Campos, but also Antero de Quental, Alphonsus de Guimarães, Artur Azevedo, Antonio Nobre, etc. Whoever denies Chico Xavier as a medium will be praising him as a "pastiche maker." [18]

In this perspective, Monteiro Lobato¹⁸ said: *"If the man [Chico Xavier] really produced everything that comes from 'Poetry from Beyond the Grave' on his own, then he can be at any Academy of Letters and Arts, occupying as many seats as he wants" [117].*

According to the critic Agrippino Grieco,¹⁹ it would be challenging to take the pastiche technique so far. His comment was based on a poem attributed to the poet Augusto dos Anjos and to a letter attributed to his friend de Campos and addressed to him. Both texts were psychographed in 1939 in front of Grieco, who signed the blank sheets before the psychographic act to make sure Xavier made no fraud. The critic did not venture an explanation for the writing of the medium, but found that the language of the letter, unmistakably, was de Campos's and the poem expressed well the thought and form of Augusto dos Anjos [18].

The writer Afonso Schmidt²⁰ also commented on the chronicles attributed to de Campos:

I've always been a reader of Humberto de Campos. For years, attracted by the rumor being made, I also tried to read some chronicles attributed to him by Francisco Cândido Xavier, that young, modest, and illiterate store clerk in a small town in Minas [Gerais]. I observed the following: fantasy, fraternal

¹⁸ José Bento Renato Monteiro Lobato (1882–1948) was one of Brazil's most influential writers, mostly known for his children's books set in the fictional *Yellow Woodpecker Farm*. He also founded one of Brazil's first publishing houses (Companhia Editora Nacional). Before him, Brazilian books were printed in Portugal.

¹⁹ Agrippino Grieco (1888–1973) was a Brazilian literary critic and essayist. A voracious reader, he had a private library with a collection of over fifty thousand volumes.

²⁰ Afonso Schmidt (1890–1964) was a journalist, short story writer, novelist, and playwright. Being a writer extensively throughout his life, he was the author of a vast literary and poetic work gathered in more than forty books and is also a pioneer of science fiction in Brazil.

understanding of life, and good taste in composition are the same that characterize the work of our illustrious patrician. Until then, these are innate faculties that, by any chance, could be brought from the cradle by Francisco Xavier. The same, however, could not happen with culture, correctness, clarity, the particular way of feeling, of writing, of communicating one's impression to the reader. Finally, his personality, his attitude towards life, his silences, elements of success that Humberto de Campos achieved in forty years of incessant practice of literature. And the boy from Minas Gerais, showing such virtues, could not improvise what artists everywhere do not bring from the cradle and which is the most difficult to achieve. [118]

The physician Dr. Mello Teixeira, in turn, claimed that for Xavier's work be considered pastiche, it would be necessary to improvise culture, erudition, and knowledge—an impossible task:

But let such wonder be admissible: style is imitated; the technique of the verse; the preferred rhyme; the shake of the sentence; the choice of vocabulary; the appearance and nature of the images. But what about the manifestations of culture, of erudition, in the most diverse subjects that the context reveals? Can this also be imitated, improvised? How to explain, within the imitation of style, the right and adequate citations of dates and historical facts; of events and personalities; the explanatory purposes of the theme; the references, comparisons and scientific, critical, philosophical, literary concepts, which only a ballast of varied knowledge, sedimented and systematized in time allow and only dominated by previous readings and studies, duly meditated? To improvise culture, erudition, knowledge is to believe in spontaneous generation of wisdom; it is to conceive of congenital or hereditary scholarship. No. The subconscious receives, registers, accumulates, and reproduces, faithful or deformed, but only what has passed through the critical door of consciousness; it does not create from anything. Knowledge is not improvised; one gets. It is precisely the aspect of erudition, the disclosure of knowledge, which stands out most, far above the style, and in the cultural molds of the author, as in the posthumous work of Humberto de Campos, as in the poetry of Augusto dos Anjos. [18]

Xavier's production caused so much curiosity and disbelief that alternative explanations, also based on fraud, were raised by a Roman Catholic group [13]. Impressed by the contrast between texts psychographed by the medium and his lifestyle, the group suggested a conspiracy, in which a commission of writers oversaw the confection of poems in absolute secrecy. Xavier would then play the role of an ignorant person with no time or culture to write the poems. However, this idea has no evidence at all to back it up.

Regarding the production of the letters from Group 3, Xavier would need to have had access to thousands of pieces of detailed and private information about the deceased and their families to be considered a scammer. For that, he would need to count on the help of a network of informants and memorize all that information. In many cases, however, the information was unknown to the family, becoming known only when family members performed painful research and confirmed, with amazement, the data provided by the messages.

Although most of the letters produced by Xavier were never published, some of them, along with an extensive investigation, can be seen in [75]. This work was produced by Paulo Severino, a team of four medical doctors, and one engineer, who followed Xavier for almost twenty years. Based on interviews and documentation analysis, these letters provided examples of objective information that convinced recipients that the author was the deceased to whom they were attributed. According to the study, *"What is remarkable about these communications, provided by Chico Xavier's mediumship, is their impressive accuracy concerning the fidelity of identifying information about relatives and friends still alive or already deceased, who were part of the communicator's relationship. Furthermore, there are cases in which the spirit, when writing through the medium, uses personal expressions and even slang that he used when alive"* [75].

More recently, Rocha and collaborators [119] published a thorough study about a set of thirteen letters, all attributed to the same deceased, that contained objectively verifiable information. By conducting interviews with one of the deceased's sister and friends, the authors measured the accuracy of the information and the estimated probability of the medium's access to this information through ordinary means. The authors found that 98 percent of the information (out of 99 total pieces of information) was accurate and true. The

same group published a study case investigating a letter attributed to José Roberto Pereira da Silva [84] (Appendix A), from which all the identified pieces of verifiable information were assessed as true and accurate. The letter contained, for instance, birthdates and other personal data, which the family was adamant they had not told Xavier. Notably, the letter also contained some data classified as leak scale 0 by the researchers, that is, very specific information that was unknown by relatives or friends of the deceased or information that was a secret held by a friend or relative and never revealed. In both articles, the authors concluded that such an amount of accurate personal details could not be obtained by ordinary means.

The fraud hypothesis further lacks foundation to explain the letters from Group 3 because the medium did not know the recipients of the messages in the vast majority of the cases. There were no computers or internet to search for people's personal details, and their lives were never highlighted in any newspapers or magazines. Instead, the psychographed letters were obtained in open public sessions with hundreds of people, after an eight-hour period of brief conversation with the family (if ever). This hypothesis is also weakened by the many years of Xavier's visual impairment, which led him to retirement.

Another point to be considered to assume that Xavier was the real author of his work is that, to produce texts with distinct intellectual demands, he should have spent a different amount of time in each of them. Following the logical reasoning, texts that demanded more intellectual skills would require more time to be produced, whereas texts with less intellectual elaboration would require less. As noted, however, this was not the case. Xavier was able to move from prose to verse, from the page of fiction to that of philosophy or morals, in instant elaboration and writing, without even seconds of meditation to coordinate ideas.

Furthermore, Xavier would have to simulate for over seventy years that he produced these texts through psychography in public statements. While one might imagine the desire to gain notoriety as a religious leader, it is unreasonable to assume that someone with so many talents would decide to be a fraudster and deceive millions of people. After all, if he had all these skills, why did he not accept copyrights for his own books? In any case, the conjunction of such improbable and complex requirements is highly doubtful.

4.2 On the unconscious fraud

According to the unconscious fraud set of hypotheses, Xavier genuinely believed himself to be the mediator of deceased authors; there was no deception. Nonetheless, in the real world, no external agents dictated texts from the beyond: the medium's mind was responsible for elaborating his complete work without being aware of it. However, these hypotheses face the same challenges presented in the hypothesis of conscious fraud, except they do not imply dishonesty and possibly crime. This is because the medium's mind works in a way that he does not realize himself to be the true author of all the texts; yet he had access to all the explicit and implicit contents of them. As we have seen, this would require lengthy and costly research work, access to many books, access to thousands of pieces of private information, and a considerable amount of free time. It would also require special skills to write original texts in different styles and types of text.

The mental illness hypothesis is further refuted because Xavier never presented other symptoms of psychiatric disorders, such as loss of ability to perform daily activities, psychological suffering, social problems, and psychiatric comorbidities. Xavier was closely followed by the psychiatrist Dr. Elias Barbosa,²¹ who never found any sign of mental illness in the medium. In this sense, the latest versions of diagnostic manuals have changed to adapt to cases such as Xavier's, in which they now consider some sociocultural aspects that might influence the occurrence of dissociative experiences or hallucinations—yet still far from distinguishing nonpathological possession from mental disorder. For instance, diagnostic manuals do not acknowledge the interaction between the individual experience, which can be positive, and the stress caused by social stigma; neither consider how a possession experience can develop when framed within a belief system [120]. Research has shown that Brazilian mediums are socially adjusted, have a low prevalence of mental disorders or histories of physical or sexual childhood abuse, and do not use antipsychotics [121–124]. This profile suggests that the mediumistic process can be characterized by dissociative and psychotic

²¹ Dr. Elias Barbosa (1934–2011), a psychiatrist, met Xavier in 1955. Being a close friend to the medium, they would have weekly meetings. Barbosa attended the medical school at the current Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro, where he later became a professor. In 1969 he started working as an assistant physician at the Spiritist Sanatorium of Uberaba, where he remained for the next twenty-four years.

experiences not related to any psychiatric disorder. The challenging task of distinguishing nonpathological dissociative experiences from a mental disorder led some researchers to adopt the term *anomalous experience*, which does not assume psychopathological implications [122, 125]. Given this background, some authors have proposed a guideline to assess the clinical significance of spiritual, psychotic, or dissociative experiences, which considers the absence of psychological suffering, the lack of social and occupational impediments, the duration and frequency of the incidents, the capacity of the medium to perceive the unusual/anomalous character of such experiences and the insight that they may not be shared among others, the absence of psychiatric comorbidities, the control over the experience, and, finally, personal growth promoted by the experience over time [122]. Thus, diagnosing mediums with a psychiatric disorder based on the presence of dissociative experiences does not suffice.

Other possible explanations, posited based on abnormal levels of neurobiological molecules such as DMT, also lack foundation. Although the idea of having a center in the brain that could connect one to the mystical world sounds exciting, no abnormalities were ever found in the size of the pineal gland nor in the levels of bufotenine or DMT among individuals with mediumistic experiences [126, 127]. Moreover, the pineal gland would need to rapidly produce a six-hundred-fold increase of DMT to provoke a psychedelic experience—a heroic biochemical feat [128]. These results suggest that spiritual experiences such as the ones reported by Xavier are most likely not produced by an abnormal pineal gland nor by an extravaganza of endogenous psychedelic substances.

Likewise, the sociocultural hypothesis loosely fits the phenomena described here, inasmuch as Xavier allegedly started his communication with the deceased very early in life, around the age of five, when he did not understand it. As described by the medium, such episodes would lead him to either punishment or bullying, embarrassment at the least. Although one could argue that his mediumship released him from suffering, the “position” achieved by Xavier did not provide him any status to tackle an existential issue. Instead, at the age of seventeen, it offered him relief from and understanding of his abilities. So, overall, the hypotheses postulated based on unconscious fraud are ruled out because they poorly explain the phenomena described in this essay.

4.3 On the super-psi function

This hypothesis recognizes psychical communication such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition, limited to the living agents. In this case, the information obtained by Xavier would indeed be genuine yet obtained through psychic functioning. Because the limits of this functioning are not fully understood, the medium would be able to capture the thousands of pieces of data used in his books and letters through the mind of the living.

Although super-psi functions could explain some oddities of Xavier's production, it doesn't clarify much of the presented data. Because ESP occurs randomly, without regularity, not subject to conscious decisions, it would be difficult to explain some observations. First, Xavier would have needed to find several living people with the same writing skills as the alleged authors to compose so many texts with different styles and contents (which, in turn, are consistent with the alleged authorships). Another obstacle for this hypothesis is to explain the coherence presented in psychographed sets; that is, texts attributed to a deceased recapitulated thematically and linguistically other texts attributed to the same author produced on different dates. Because the medium attributed texts to hundreds of authors, it does not seem convincing to admit such internal coherence in so many authorships if they were just a product of this type of information gathering.

Furthermore, super-psi claims that the living agent is motivated by deep-seated needs or intense emotions. Telepathy usually occurs through a pair of people who have their minds synchronized to the same objective, maintaining relative affinity and placed in particular conditions. Therefore, the living agent would need to present a sufficiently strong motivation for the psychical exchange so that Xavier could manifest his psi powers to such an extraordinary degree. Nonetheless, this was not the case in the production of the works from Groups 1 and 2 where such psychological motivations were absent (and, in some cases, even generated stressful outcomes to Xavier and the deceased's family, as exemplified in the lawsuit case of 1944). For the letters from Group 3, although the family had strong motivation to obtain a message from the deceased, super-psi would have to explain that hundreds of people of the most varied conditions directed their insistent thoughts to a single receiver. Capturing the

messages in this context would be the first and most unique record of collective telepathy in the world [75].

An additional challenge to the super-psi is the fact that at times Xavier delivered information known only to the deceased. How could he, in such cases, obtain information from the living when the living did not know it? Drop-in communication, like the one presented before, is also an argument used to refute super-psi because, generally, people talking to mediums are interested primarily in contacting individuals they knew before. Why, then, would a medium waste time providing information about a total stranger, one whose story can be verified only with further investigation [52]? These are questions still remaining to be solved by adepts of the super-psi. Another obstacle is the manifestation of skills and abilities that the deceased presented, such as the cases of xenoglossy. The medium wrote letters containing, for example, passages in German, Italian, and Hebrew, all of which are languages to which he was illiterate (and are unlikely to be absorbed by telepathy). Hence, overall, we do not consider the explanation of Xavier's work based only on mind-to-mind communication among living agents.

4.4 On the survival of the mind

According to this hypothesis, the mind survives after physical death and, under certain circumstances, can communicate with other minds. Survivalist proponents assume the preservation of some identity between an antemortem and a postmortem individual. This postmortem individual expresses himself in the living world through the help of a mediator, the medium. In this sense, the medium would only be an instrument for the spiritual authors, as Xavier always claimed to be.

The idea that the authorship of these texts does not come from the medium's mind but rather from agents external to it solves the discrepancy between the medium's cultural repertoire and the contents and skills required to produce so many and diverse writings. As shown here, the lifestyle, intellectual dedication, knowledge, and skills necessary to elaborate on the texts from Group 1 were not present in Xavier's life. The scholarly work required to elaborate texts from Group 2 is even more complex: besides creating the texts, the writer included elements of the alleged authors' published work. The production of texts of this type, under normal conditions,

requires lots of reading, time, care, and rare talent. In addition to the contents accessible to any reader, part of the texts from this group contains a set of allusions and literary references that are identified only by those who dedicate themselves to studying the referenced texts much more deeply. Although Xavier was able to make general comments about most of his work, there has never been any record that he ever identified the most subtle piece of literary references and allusions; the medium himself always seemed unaware of such elements. The letters from Group 3, in turn, retrieve detailed private information about the alleged authors and their families but present fewer elaborated aspects from a textual point of view.

By dividing Xavier's work into three groups, we note that the act of psychography did not reflect the nature of the texts written. If the medium indeed produced all the texts he wrote, we would expect him to spend more time producing the more elaborated psychographies. Contrary to this logical conclusion, the act was always the same regardless of the type of text and intellectual demand: composing sonnets, or books containing historical or biological contents, or a letter to a mother, would all require similar effort and circumstances. All Xavier needed to write such diverse work was focus and concentration. Thus, because the psychography act did not reflect the work of textual elaboration, we suppose that it reflects a work of another nature: capturing texts that were previously produced by others. In this context, the medium's job was to capture texts previously elaborated by spiritual authors. If the means for communication existed, the minds of all attributed authors would express identity elements—knowledge and skills—acquired during their lives. This explanation accommodates the fact that Xavier wrote a substantial volume of well-finished texts, with varying degrees of complexity, in a very short time. Finally, this framework also resolves other oddities, such as the amount and richness of details in the letters, many times unknown to anyone else but the alleged author.

Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of our work because our analysis used the few studies available and in-depth studies investigating the work of Xavier are still scarce. Also, we acknowledge that Xavier had access to some private information when composing the letters and to some work of the alleged authors when writing the book—this essay is not a result of a laboratory-controlled experiment. Nonetheless, by using the phenomena that none of the

previous hypotheses could accommodate, we try to show the reader the explanatory power of the survivalist hypothesis. This is not to say that the survivalist hypothesis is ultimately right; after all, we can never have ultimate and definitive knowledge of nature. Rather, it is tentative and possibly imperfect, as are all the other ones. But it is, undoubtedly, the one that best accommodates the facts described in this essay.

5. CONCLUSION AND ADDITIONAL REMARKS

What is the best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death? In this essay, we have chosen to answer this question by presenting the phenomena produced by Francisco Cândido Xavier, our white crow. We specifically chose his mediumistic writings due to the huge amount of objective and verifiable information contained in his work, which makes any hypothesis more adequate for tests and falsification. Through a rigorous analysis of the events and further evaluation of the possible explanations, we conclude that the survival of the human consciousness after bodily death is the most probable and simplest explanation for all the observations. By confronting the posited hypotheses with the facts and showing that the phenomena described here cannot be unraveled in any other way, we legitimate our evidence. At the end of the day, we can claim our evidence to be the best only if we explain it solely through the survival explanation.

By contrast, the other posited hypotheses suffer some very significant limitations. They not only fail to accommodate all the observed phenomena, but they also require highly unlikely circumstances to occur (such as Xavier's having a team of spies stalking on people's private life or a team of intellectuals performing intense research on other writer's work). All of this in a time and place with no computers, internet, or access to a library. Those hypotheses also require Xavier to have either a super mnemonic ability—never recorded in any human being to date—or some kind of psychiatric disorder that was not in his medical record. In the best-case scenario, the hypotheses of fraud assume that all the information provided by Xavier is nothing but a colossal deception. In this sense, Xavier would be no more than a rotten apple—a shady,

nasty man who achieved a record feat of deceiving millions of people in exchange for reputation and funding of charity work. That appears not to be the case.

So, given that the hypotheses of fraud or super-psi function seem untenable at the very least, why does the survival hypothesis still significantly face resistance in the academic environment? What is the reason scientists either deny the facts or object to the afterlife option despite most of the population endorsing it?

The main reason we can think of is the general misunderstanding regarding the words *science* and *religion* and their supposed opposite nature. At this point, we hope that the reader understands that science is a way of investigating the world based on observations and facts, not a position regarding a topic. So, to say that science rejects the afterlife does not make sense; science is not an entity and does not accept or reject anything—scientists do, based on observational and experimental evidence. Religion and mysticism, in turn, are sets of beliefs that consider the afterlife (note that these topics are also present in some books and letters written by Xavier). The survivalist hypothesis, however, does not imply religion nor mysticism; they are independent of one another. Once we understand these concepts, we recognize that the afterlife can and should be investigated in a scientific manner. Unfortunately, many scientists struggle to understand it, defending their view of reality against any outside contender. The class of observations discussed in this essay challenges and causes discomfort to some physicalists [129, 130] who, driven by their own expectations, think these facts do not match their worldview. It is science made backward; it is one's point of view dictating the facts. The problem with mediumship censors "*is not that they believe too much in science, but that they do not believe in it enough*" [131]. Hence, from a scientific perspective, we believe that Xavier and his life's work are the best answers to the question posed in this essay.

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APPENDIX A

Letter from José Roberto Pereira da Silva, 1973, or Beto, as family and friends knew him. Beto was born in 1953, in São Paulo, Brazil, the son of Nery Pereira da Silva and Lucy Ianez da Silva. His sister, Sandra, was two years younger than him. In 1972, during the first year of medical school at the University of Mogi das Cruzes, Beto died at the age of eighteen in a train crash that killed twenty-four people. The following letter was psychographed in a morning following the regular meetings, attended by approximately fifteen people. The event was held on September 29, 1973, and the only relative present was the victim's mother. All the information Xavier had access to was her name, Lucy Ianez da Silva, and the name of the victim, José Roberto Pereira da Silva [75, 84].

Dear mother,

I ask for your blessing. To tell you what I feel now, dear mother, is impossible. Who could possibly describe what is felt between two lives? I don't know what to do at this time as I am seeing you again through these letters that your son is emotionally writing, being supported by friendly hands and guides that protect us. The paper looks like a mirror where my thoughts are reflected. ... However, dear mother, the paper does not reflect the tears. The tears of joy and gratitude that I raise to Jesus thanking him for these minutes of writing. Please receive the best feelings from your son in these statements that I am transmitting to the sheets of paper, without pondering how precise I am registering my feelings. ...

Don't cry any more, dear mother, and ask my dear father to help me with his fortitude that he has been rebuilding little by little. ...

Since that last morning of June 8, the longing has been among us, but love grew and grows more and more. And it is in love that we live because love is the presence of God. Help me. Don't lament the sudden departure of the son that would rather have stayed with you. ... The laws of God know more than our desires. If I could, I would have stayed until we would advance together in time, without separation or death. Don't believe that the pain of saying good-bye is not equally felt here. ... We are alive and almost happy, but it is necessary to remember that

“almost” is a blade of the longing that remains in our hearts strong in faith. We are happy and renewed, but the farewell hurts more because the weeping of those we love is a rain of afflictions upon us.

I remember, dear mother, Dad working hard to save for the future. I remember him asking me to put all my attention in my studies as he dreamed of a hospital where a career in medicine was waiting for me to follow my calling of being close to the sick and needy. ... I implore him not to get discouraged and not to get tired. ... Besides our dear Sandra we have other hearts to help. The companions that remain, that fight, that study and that expect better tomorrows of life, rely equally upon us.

So, I beg you, father, don't get discouraged because we need to continue ... to continue to value the time and the resources that the Heavens have granted us. ...

I have suffered a great deal with the anguish of my dear family members. If it was not for that, dear mother, everything would be better for me. Don't for a moment think of me as someone smashed by the accident. What was lost was a picture that would disappear someday anyway. I myself am very strong, reanimated, and ask you to fight and live for the good of all of us.

Dad, listen to my scream. I did not die! Work, my father, keep your vitality of a man of integrity. Do not wish to die to be with me because I am still living to be with you, each day more encouraged to fight in favor of good. Don't go looking and asking for me in tears in that corner of the earth where my picture has been filed away! I thank you for your kind affection, my dear father, your prayers and manifestation of love. I pray to God that He will reward you for your unselfishness, but do not look for your son asking with such pain for the necessary grief to disappear. With God's blessings time will help us. I beg you to live and create happiness and progress for all of us.

The train from Mogi on June 8 last year did not bring all the young men here. You wanted me to remain to accomplish your dreams. However, I am not dead, father! I am alive! And I will work with your hands.

I still remember what you told me as you recalled the days of your childhood. You wanted a son working in a hospital to assist the needy children and to satisfy the needs of the ill that are afflicted without resources. And who said I am not going to help?

From conversations, now I know more about our Maquiné cave, and even Father João de Santo Antonio, who our family always honored with devotion, came to see me and hug me in the name of the affection of our ancestors. The same ones, Dad, who put into your heart a mission of good and the generous heart that you have in your soul.

Grandpa lanez received me as soon as I needed support. I am saying as soon as because after the fall from the train it was as if I had taken a strong tranquilizer. I slept deeply. ... In my dreams I was in the railroad car, joyfully talking to my friends about the things we were planning for the next vacation. I continued to sleep, as the trip seemed to never end, until it became a nightmare from which I woke up in a bed at a peaceful hospital, with a band around my head. I woke up with pain and I thought I had had an accident, but I was not sure.

Medication came from friendly hands, and I fell asleep again to wake up later, much calmer. ... However, deep inside of me I saw our house, with you and Mom sobbing and lamenting and I could not respond. ... Our relatives came to aid me and little by little I am recovering my life.

What really happened? I do not know the details yet. I have the appearance of someone who has suffered a long process of anesthesia, without memory to remember details. Grandpa lanez and Grandpa Leite and the nuns, who were friends of my grandmother since her days of devotion to Saint Anthony, help me with affection and blessings which gives me more strength.

I implore you, Dad, my father and my friend, support Mom and Sandrinha with your efforts and courage.

God does not abandon us; life goes on and we are together even though in another form.

Remember, Dad and Mom, that since my early days at school the idea of a train was with me and my preoccupation with time would make me write dates on everything. Something inside of me told me my days on earth would be short and that a train was waiting for me for a final trip. It is the last stop but not the end of the line, dear Dad, the tracks go on. ...

For me it is like the train of Mogi had entered a tunnel. On one side, you stayed, my loved ones, and on the other side I continued in a new form. ...

I ask you one more time to help me. The longing we have for each other must be for us a prayer of hope; with this prayer working for the good of our brothers along the way, we will follow the light to meet again. ...

Dear mother, do not cry anymore. Help me with your faith. I ask my dear grandparents to help me.

Last year, it was terrible for me on August 6! If you can, on my next birthday celebrate our spiritual communion by offering a cake to the children of "Lar de Jesus," who were unable to have their own homes, I will be there with you and we will find much joy. Do not let our home become a retreat of shadows and tears.

Life is a treasure from God, and we are all rich in work and hope, faith and knowledge.

Now I am being asked to finish. I can't write any longer. My strength is not very secure. I feel like I have been through a difficult task: to write almost without the ability to do so.

Dear father, dear mother, dear Sandrinha, dear grandparents and dear friends, here with all my confidence, I send you a hug from my grateful heart.

Beto