

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Spiritualism and Psychology in Argentina: The Inception of Parapsychology in the Scientific Mainstream (1948–1955)

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## ABSTRACT

In the mid-1940s, Argentine spiritualism faced a crisis in the context of cultural changes where they sought to install parapsychology as a valid area of inquiry within the emerging psychology as a science. The 1950s represented a transformation of the intellectual field for the so-called “conjectural sciences” and a form of *psychologization* of spiritualism. In fact, the appropriation of J.B. Rhine's test results in the United States proved useful to spiritualists. However, in the late 1940s, enthusiasm emerged among mathematicians to learn about Rhine's statistical procedures and tests. The aims are to analyze the emergence of parapsychology and the controversies surrounding its acceptance/rejection, to examine the emphasis of parapsychology on distancing itself from spiritualism to integrate into the Argentine psychological community, and to evaluate the strategies of Argentine spiritualists to validate their theories based on the works of J.B. Rhine. A historiographic analysis will be conducted through the compilation of relevant documents, books, magazines, and correspondence with authors and researchers from the period between 1945 and 1953. A process of demarcation between psychology and spiritualism in Argentina sought to purify parapsychology towards a position less contaminated by belief systems, in favor of the application of statistical and mathematical procedures of Rhinean orientation.

## 1 | Introduction

Argentine spiritualism has been addressed by a number of authors over the last 20 years within a range of social, anthropological, cultural, medical, psychological and historical interpretations, so that interest in this field has grown substantially. Although the tension between spiritualists and doctors began to decrease in inverse proportion to the conflicts over introducing parapsychology to the psychological mainstream despite its belligerent nature (inclusion despite its controversy), spiritualism and parapsychology mutually disputed a “double border” in various historical moments in pursuit of gaining recognition, but at the same time distancing and reciprocal exclusion.

The objective of this study is twofold: first, to analyse the emergence of parapsychology and the controversies surrounding its

acceptance or rejection; and secondly, to examine the emphasis of parapsychology on distancing itself from spiritualism to integrate into the Argentine psychological community, which at that time was struggling to be recognized as a science in terms of the validation of its procedures. A further objective is to evaluate the strategies employed by Argentine spiritualists to validate their theories. This will be based on the works of J.B. Rhine, who gained academic recognition from a number of Argentine mathematicians who showed interest in the statistical procedures applied by representatives of the parapsychological movement. As a consequence of this state of affairs, a divergence of opinion emerged between psychological theorists and spiritualists, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Argentine Institute of Parapsychology. Representatives of the aforementioned institute subsequently contested the legitimacy of Rhinean procedures. In their attempts to establish a legitimate claim to authority over the study

of the mind, psychologists, psychoanalysts and spiritualists (as well as numerous representatives of the esoteric community) resorted to the pathologisation of their opponents.

## 2 | Culture, Society and “Conjectural Sciences”

After the fall of the Peronist government in 1955, marked particularly by two key movements, modernization and development that characterized a model of national and class society, society was “rationalized” to achieve progress (Blanco 2006; Terán 1993). From such modernization, in fact, a more critical intellectuality emerged that tended to occupy the media system, mainly graphic media, through columns in popular newspapers and magazines and the emergence of television. Basically, the 1950s represented a transformation of the intellectual field that involved critical thinkers who displaced the figures of a strong literary and enlightened tradition of the 1930s (Acha 2011; Capdevila and Avaro 2004). The post-Peronist university, in the mid-fifties, was also characterized by an institutionalization of the social sciences (mainly sociology, psychoanalysis and anthropology), in a framework defined by an accelerated process of cultural modernization, political instability and ideological radicalization (Pujol 2002; Terán 2015). Furthermore, the effect of this opening left its mark among reformist intellectual elites and young university students under the protection of relative political stability, where a process of scientific, technical and cultural renewal took place until the mid-1960s.

The publishing world has recently undergone an expansion in terms of specialization and concentration of topics. As a consequence of the aforementioned process, Argentina—one of the three most prolific countries in publishing seals and copyright, along with Mexico and Spain—had thirteen publishers specializing in law, seven in technology, seven in school textbooks, five in medicine, four in religion, two in children's literature and one in esotericism (Rivera 1986). A distinctive feature of this period of cultural rejuvenation was the ability to avoid conventional knowledge and embrace novel religious ideas. This expansion of knowledge and popularity had been steadily growing since 1945, driven by the sustained growth of book printing and enhanced distribution and export capabilities (Sorá 2001; De Diego 2006). For instance, between the 1940s and the late 1950s, the catalog of the Kier publishing house—the only publisher on esotericism and alternative spirituality—had printed approximately three hundred titles of its own on the so-called “conjectural sciences,” which were occupying an increasing space in its catalog.

From this “conjectural” culture—whose expression was also used by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Arroyo and Guillaumon 2022) to qualify psychoanalysis (but in a different sense from esoteric knowledge, see von Stuckrad 2005)—a large number of themes emerged, for example, characterology, a branch related to psychotechnics that complemented graphology, astrology, chirography or chirolgy with the interpretation of dreams. Other similar topics included dowsing (which was an object of interest among pharmacists and engineers), Yoga (which was introduced in Argentina in 1910, see D'Angelo 2018), natural medicine and childcare or child rearing - name that still continues in some Latin American countries—“physical culture” (Western self-defense,

gymnastics, athletics and martial arts, which became popular since the sixties), homeopathy (which was still administered in pharmacies, in parallel to traditional pharmacopoeia) and sexualism or sexual culture (an advance of modern sexology). Another form of psychologization that anticipated the modern self-help literature that emerged in the 1950s was “personal counseling,” which included columns on popular psychology and psychoanalysis in popular and women's magazines (e.g., *El Hogar*, *Idilio*, or *Para Ti*) (Bontempo 2011; Savio 2017a, 2017b), clinical hypnosis (which was under the arc of medical and dental interest) connected with the “domain of the will” that included a menu of ramifications, from mnemonics, manuals to perform “efficient” tasks such as secretarial, public speaking, shorthand, typing, social relations to tips for success in business and sales.

Esotericism also influenced a specific form of religious and para-religious secularity, as well as various traditions and practices that were established in metropolitan culture through the revival of educational offerings, including face-to-face and correspondence courses, thereby transforming its readers into significant cultural actors. In summary, the manner in which these conjectural sciences were inscribed in popular culture began to take root in a context of incipient intellectual activity among the middle class, who had greater access to education. However, it should be noted that this phenomenon also pertained to the materiality of culture (in this case, publishers and their publications) as a constituent factor of profane knowledge.

Until the 1920s and 1930s, the growth of spiritualist societies in Argentina was favored mainly by internal and external immigration, but in the 1940s and 1950s a change in their “intellectual capital” was evident with the incipient participation of self-taught people. Middle class, in contrast to those authority figures of the dominant academic and social elite of the generation of the eighties of the 19th century. Furthermore, post-war Europe largely silenced the interest in scientific research of mediums in contrast to the dominant North American perspective, with attention paid to the procedures of experimental psychology and the application of statistics, which paid attention to a new interpretation of mediumistic phenomena: the parapsychological movement.

On the one hand, the constitution of neologisms that were more psychological than occult or esoteric, such as extrasensory perception instead of “cryptesthesia” or “metagnosia” or psychokinesis instead of “telekinesis” did not only have a purely semantic influence. In essence, it engendered an epistemic transformation in the formulation of concepts, theories, inferences, and interpretive frameworks, thereby profoundly altering the mystical or religious character of the phenomena of mediumship. This shift towards a greater influence of psychology contributed to the partial normalization of the purported extraordinary abilities of a select group of exceptional mediums. The focus on the “medium as a producing subject” (and on the doctor as the examiner) shifted towards individuals for whom such abilities, although more ephemeral, democratized the extraordinary among non-mediums. This process of democratization produced the same effect as in other social and cultural spheres, where the so-called “gifted”—a subject possessing spiritual or mental power—became extinct until it was found more widely distributed among those willing to read literature

or take a drink course to reveal its secrets. The socializing effect of mediumship has been demonstrated to engender a decline in criticism from scientific communities, magicians, illusionists and the Church on the grounds of mental illness, scandalous accusations of deception and fraud or diabolical practices (respectively). Furthermore, the production of less dramatic narratives, more conventional and above all better adapted to a society that accelerated the pace of communication, such as the expansion of telephone and radio communication, has been observed (Luckhurst 2002). To summarize, the predominant role of mediums in the domain of the supernatural underwent a shift, wherein they relinquished their status as the primary figure and ceded the spotlight to the ‘unconventional’ experience of the general populace. This transition can be attributed to a paradigm shift in perspective, wherein individuals sought to psychologize the extraordinary, marking a departure from the conventional understanding of the paranormal.

In fact, starting in the 1930s, there was an increase in interest in spiritualism characterized by conducting studies by “sponsoring” mediums, which were examined by eminent scientists, as was the case in Spain and France. But unlike their English-speaking counterparts (British and American) that were supported by renowned entities, such as the Society for Psychical Research or the American Society for Psychical Research, most of these studies were carried out in their own homes, with electromechanical devices to control fraud or measure “fluids” with the cooperation of technicians for the design of such devices, as occurred with the duo Eugene and Marcel Osty (father and son) in Paris (Osty and Osty 1932). It was unusual for such studies to be carried out in an academic or university context, for example in a physics or chemistry laboratory. Although these “domestic” models, more qualitative in nature, were replaced by better controlled procedures in appropriate spaces, they were conducted in academic settings and bore the strong imprint of the protocol of experimental spiritualism (initially recommended by Kardec and other post-Kardecist authors), which was later displaced by a more quantitative model, with the application of mathematics and the calculation of probabilities (Amadou 1964).

### 3 | The Emergence of Parapsychology and Its Influence in Argentina

At the end of the 1920s, the American biologist J.B. Rhine (1895–1980) obtained a position in the Department of Psychology at Duke University to design and conduct experimental studies on the extrasensory perception hypothesis. His research program had a number of advantages over most of these previous efforts: first, his studies carried the imprimatur of the university; Second, Rhine designed experimental procedures replicable for conventional science and applied this knowledge in the emerging science of mathematical probability as a basis for objectively evaluating his hypothesis. Rhine is recognized as the “father” of modern parapsychology, a discipline that seeks to understand the psi phenomenon, an unobservable entity suggested to explain experiences such as extrasensory perception, which includes telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and mental influence on matter (psychokinesis). Parapsychology itself has a long history that begins in 1882 with the founding of

the Society for Psychical Research in London, related to experimental spiritualism. However, this field has been the object of belligerence for decades due to its alleged scientific status, although it still continues under other less controversial names but close to its epistemic purposes, such as *psychotronics*, *paranormology*, *parapsychobiophysics*, *conscientiology*, *anomalous psychology* and *paranormal psychology*, among other equivalences.

In his inaugural publication, *Extra-Sensory Perception* (1934), Rhine sought to demonstrate the capacity for scientific interpretation of this hypothesis, thereby encouraging psychologists to undertake analogous research. In the early stages of his research, the scientist sought to establish the authenticity of extrasensory perception. In addition, he sought to demonstrate that there were individuals who might be able to systematically guess cards more often than would be expected by chance. This led him to conclude that an experimental research program was therefore required. Furthermore, Rhine sought to demonstrate that this line of research could be pursued with methodological rigor, without recourse to “esoteric” nuances or those linked to occultism. Initially, his book was met with considerable interest by some American psychologists, with the majority acknowledging its legitimacy as a research topic (McClenon 1994). However, there were those who believed that the notion of extrasensory communication should be disregarded on the grounds of its lack of scientific interest, as the topic began to attract the attention of the general public. Indeed, his work *Extra-Sensory Perception* not only met with a high level of acceptance in the United States, but also prompted a number of comments in the popular press that established ESP symbols (or “Zener” cards) as a recreational activity in which American families could engage at home.

Only part of the American psychological community became actively involved in debating the issue because some psychologists were antagonistically critical of Rhine’s work. This reaction was due (1) to the fact that this type of research was being conducted at a university, (2) to exaggerations in the mainstream media, and (3) to the fact that ESP seemed incompatible with the accepted tenets of the behavioral sciences, especially the dominant Watsonian behaviorist school (for more analysis, see Beloff 1993; Mauskopf and McVaugh 1980; Rhine 1983). Controversies about Rhine’s conclusions—not his statistical analyses—dominated the debate for some time, but in the face of the declared support of eminent mathematicians and statisticians for the legitimacy of his analyses, it soon became apparent that psychologists were simply annoyed by this legitimization (Hess 1993; McClenon 1982). Although this debate continued for several years, its intensity diminished after the 1940s. Rhine had difficulty getting his experimental findings accepted for publication in the major psychological journals so he finally decided to found his own media outlet: *The Journal of Parapsychology* (Allison 1979).

### 4 | Conflicts Between Spiritualism and Parapsychology

The utilization of Rhine’s test results by spiritualists was multifaceted, owing to several factors. Disillusioned by the unreliability of the controls, and confronted with the disconcerting revelations

of frauds in the media, Kardecists and other spiritualists rapidly discerned a commonality of purpose with the conclusions of Rhine. They were drawn to Rhine's challenge to the materialism of the physical-chemical sciences, and to what Rhine broadly termed a "nonphysical interpretation of the nature of man". This was due to their interest in demonstrating a nonmechanistic version of extrasensory perception. Spiritualists adopted a tolerant stance, yet simultaneously distanced themselves from the conclusions of Rhine, who, despite his role as a critic of experimental spiritualism and his public denunciation of numerous inconsistencies among mediums, concurrently maintained his hope for evidence of survival after death (Ensrud and Rhine Feather 2021).

When Rhine's work began to become better known, the engineer José S. Fernández (1893–1967), together with the kinesiologist Luis di Cristóforo Postiglioni (1909–1979), interpreted Rhine's experimental findings as evidence in favor of spiritualism. In 1941, Fernández decided to make these findings public in academic forums. Invited and presented by engineer Jorge Dobronich, dean of the faculty of exact, physical and natural sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, he read a conference at the Argentine Scientific Society attended by a heterogeneous number of scientists: naturalists, physicists, mathematicians and engineers which also synthesized the work of J.B. Rhine at Duke University and where he presented an overview of the field and its conflicts. Fighting against critics in classical science was not his biggest problem, but rather the scientific study of mediumship had generated suspicion in the spiritualist community that did not view favorably the reductionist criterion of the statistical method. Because of this, in 1946, he ended up renouncing his membership in the Constancia Spiritualist Society and accepted in exchange the presidency of the recently created Pan-American Spiritualist Confederation (CEPA), an organization that sought to integrate spiritualism into various scientific societies in the countries from Latin America, which enjoyed a more pluralistic perspective and brought together doctors, physicists and other academics who were sympathetic to the doctrine.

On December 14, 1948, Fernández and Cristóforo-Postiglioni created the Sociedad Argentina de Parapsicología (SAP) [Argentine Society of Parapsychology]. There was great enthusiasm among mathematicians to learn about Rhine's statistical procedures and test his hypotheses, such as the engineer Juan Bautista Kervor, professor at the Faculty of Physical-Mathematical Sciences of La Plata city and founder of the Argentine Mathematical Union, the physicist Carlos Biggeri (1908–1965), who worked in the General Directorate of Military Manufacturing, the National Academy of Sciences and the National Commission of Culture, and the mathematician Mischa Cotlar (1913–2007), a Ukrainian native, who had also started in Spiritualism and other esoteric orders, such as Martinism and theosophy. Others members also were the mathematician and surveyor Mario Boló and the physical and mathematical engineer León Logegaray, theosophist and member of the Krishnamurti Foundation (Logegaray 1955), the lawyer Oscar R. Vicchi; two doctors, Enib Bercetche and Alberto Maceiras Rocha and two kinesiologists, José Rinaldi and Miguel Lillo. Other came from abroad, such as the case of the Hungarian lawyer János Toronyi (1885–1952) who, due to the advance of Nazism, came to Argentina. Toronyi had been

president of the Hungarian Metapsychical Society and editor of *Metapsyhhikai Folyoirat* [Metapsychic Magazine] in 1932, with vast experience in researching the mediums of his time, such as the case of the medium Lajos Pap.

This awakening of interest among physicists and mathematicians, for the most part, in parapsychology was due not only to the adoption of the statistical model proposed by Rhine but also because it was an elegant way through which the spiritualist convictions of several of them could enter in convergence thanks to the light of the recognition that parapsychology was gaining in the scientific field. In fact, the creation of the SAP can be seen as a way out of the "persecution" against spiritualism, which became evident when the legitimacy of its explicit objective was disputed, for example, its first president was the doctor Juan Antonio Schroeder, head of the Hemodynamics service at the Muñiz Hospital, who headed its board of directors. His imprint as an authority in an environment in which doctors showed hostility towards spiritualists was also useful because his figure warded off criticism of the philo-spiritualist tendency of society.

Since its inception, the SAP had gained adherents with European and American researchers, among them, J.B. Rhine and J. Gaither Pratt. In addition, the SAP initiated extensive monthly conferences and cultural activities, with topics such as the calculation of probabilities (applied statistics) applied to extrasensory perception trials and healing mediumship, among others. One might assume that these presentations were quite technical in nature but "they were enthusiastically followed by an audience that filled the conference hall" (Fernández 1951, 2). The association brought together more than a dozen active members and a large although undetermined number of adherents, including the biologist Eduardo del Ponte (1897–1969), the entomologist Adalberto Ibarra Grasso (1898–1985), an international expert on arachnids, the Polish-French doctor Hélian Jaworski (1880–1955), creator of "hebeplasmotherapy," doctor Carlos Obedman, expert in naturopathic medicine, and Pedro Baldassarre, professor at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires.

The social and statutory organization of the SAP also showed a way to resolve potential conflicts. It was subdivided into three areas, coordinated according to the specialties of its members, for example, a "Physical-Mathematical" Department, one "Medical-Biological" and another "Philosophical-Interpretive," the latter undoubtedly exposed the main ideological problem in the interpretation of parapsychological phenomena, as will be examined later. A "Certification of Mediumship" commission was also created to offer a service to legitimize those mediums who were willing to voluntarily serve in the SAP research protocols whose obligation was: "To establish standards for the examination of metagomic subjects or mediums and create an aptitude certification office under the control or sponsorship of competent entities." However, the SAP quickly revealed a strong tendency towards ideas that favored spiritualism and it was very evident that the promotion of parapsychology was nothing more than moral support for the doctrine (Musso 1954). For example, they incorporated the Italian doctor Ferdinando Cazzamalli and the Greek Admiral Alfredo Tanagras, both representatives of an experimentalist current,



“mixed” with the spiritist leaders of Brazil, such as the psychiatrist Levindo Gonçalves de Mello, who was President of the Sociedade de Medicina e Espiritismo do Rio de Janeiro (created in 1941), and André Dumas, editor of the French spiritist magazine *Evolution*.

Another less visible but older spiritualist entity combined a “very liberal” teaching of the Kardecist and less conservative doctrine, with an interest in research and experimentation: the Lúmen Society (of Psychic Research and Philosophical Studies, as its subtitle states), had It was founded in 1886 according to its statute under the name “Luz del Desierto” with a long tradition of spiritual issues and history, reading workshops and social activity that brought together freethinkers and positivists with tendencies towards experimental spiritualism. In 1940, Juan Ricardo Musso (1917–1989) actively participated in his social and cultural life. With a membership in the communist party that he abandoned due to a “philosophical crisis” with Marxist literature, Musso joined the ranks of Lumen invited by the spiritualist Manuel Caro, at that time its president (Granero 1990; Parra 1994).

On 30 April 1953, a significant shift in the field occurred when the Lumen Society and the Argentine Society of Parapsychology, both of which shared similar objectives and scope, decided to act in unison. This decision resulted in a “merger” under a new name, leading to the establishment of the Instituto Argentino de Parapsychology (IAP) [Argentine Institute for Parapsychology]. The new founders of the organization have stated that a more cooperative declaration of principles “away from doctrinal biases” was the result of their efforts. This has led to the establishment of a civil association that has been statutorily constituted by those interested in the new science of parapsychology, firmly following Rhine’s guidelines. This change in perspective provided a significant advantage, namely the capacity to offer courses and conferences in a larger venue. During Fernández’s presidency, the recently established institute assimilated numerous members from both institutions, including the physician Orlando Canavesio (1915–1957) and Julio César Di Liscia (1912–1989), amongst others. The IAP headquarters were located in a property owned by the Lumen Society, which was managed by Benjamín Odell. The secretariat was situated at the residence of Fernández, who was appointed as its inaugural president. The organization combined spiritualism and parapsychology, perceiving these as two more complementary disciplines than antagonistic ones. The IAP operated in an antiquated yet diminutive theater, which had a capacity of one hundred and twenty, where meetings of the board of directors, courses (which took place on Wednesday evenings) and monthly meetings for members of the spiritualist community were held (Feola 2008). In the early 1950s, Ronald Warburton (1897–1993), the father-in-law of Fernández, participated in a series of trials involving standard ESP [Zener] cards. Notably, Warburton did not consider himself to be a medium in a spiritualist sense; rather, he was a dentist and a university professor. He conducted a series of trials that entailed the evaluation of the probabilities of guess cards (Fernández 1957a, 1957b, 1957c; Fernández 1958).

IAP found economic and moral support: they managed to raise \$20,000 for maintenance and renovation tasks at the premises through parties, events and conferences or

“scientific cooperation.” For those with specific skills, the design and construction of mediumistic research devices and electromechanical apparatus (e.g., card mixers and motorized dice cups) was commissioned. In short, according to its Statutes, the IAP was established as an entity “with the purpose of scientifically studying parapsychology, metapsychology or metapsychology, in various aspects through (1) research [studies with “gifted” a euphemism to define the mediums and psychics], (2) training and improvement [courses and study groups], (3) dissemination [books, bulletins and magazines] and (4) conferences and symposiums [national and international],” in addition to managing a library for affiliates Fernández 1950a, 1950b).

However, the central problem here was the interpretations or explanations about mediumship, since some understood that there was a “necessary collaboration of disembodied spirits in the experiments” while others considered that this argument was merely ideological or doctrinal. In other words, while for this first group the purpose was to concentrate efforts on proving the spiritual nature of mediumship, for the second it was premature to pronounce categorically in favor of spiritualism. For example, Logegaray and Isaiah Rotbard wrote favorably about extrasensory perception as a criterion for legitimizing mediumship and spiritist phenomena in general (Rotbard 1955; Logegaray 1955). But because of this dissent, in mid-1954, first Musso, Odell and Di Liscia and then Héctor Mesón, a dentist, resigned their membership. Naturally, this resignation generated a break in the pillars of the recently reopened Institute. Although SAP spiritualists succumbed to the charm of the medium by avoiding a repetitive routine of laboratory tests and experimental protocols, there was a tacit recognition of the lack of understanding of the etiology and functioning of mediumship and its spiritualistic interpretation that reduced conflict. to (1) accept spiritualism as the “only model” hastily seeking scientific confirmation of spiritualist beliefs or (2) accept parapsychology that was described as “materialistic and cerebrocentric.” (Musso 1955a). However, these aspirations once again generated controversies within the IAP, in other words, certainly the arguments surrounding the disputes, both of Fernández and Musso, differ a little from each other due to scarce details, but Musso points out that they ended up expelled in a assembly called by Fernández due to ideological differences (Musso 1973).

So in 1955, Musso and Odell created a new nucleus of sympathizers calling themselves the Friends of Parapsychology Association and inaugurated a publication: the Revista de Parapsicología, a critical response given to the philo-spiritualist direction of the IAP led by Fernández. Only four copies of this magazine appeared between 1955 and 1956. They translated and published articles from other magazines but the economic problems of supporting it and gaining subscribers failed and limited their resources. The magazine also showed a strong adherence to the Rhinean orientation, as can be read in its apologetics against the criticism of the American biologist and geneticist George Price (1922–1975) in the American magazine *Science*, to which Musso dedicated a monograph to expose the debate. about the legitimacy of parapsychology in the face of science with an article he authored because Price considered parapsychology a pseudoscience (Price 1955).

The pressure of criticism and a turbulent climate finally induced Fernández to leave his position as president in 1956. So did Warburton and his spiritist colleague, the kinesiologist di Cristóforo. Fernández stated that:

*[...] at the Argentine Institute of Parapsychology we work and organize a lot; But finally, we withdrew from all management positions because we ideologically disagreed with those who are now in charge. We disagree, above all for not accepting limitations in the phenomenal field studied. In science there is no room for dogmatization or sectarianism; although sometimes, as happened to obtain the official recognition of parapsychology, the area of the focused phenomenal field must be temporarily restricted... the ideological position of those who believe that there is no need to say yes or no about such a primordial matter is no longer adequate problem. Such behavior was fashionable among metapsychists 40 years ago... although it was admissible then, today it is an anachronism... those who proceed in this way are, strictly speaking, shameful dogmatists, who, by not confessing themselves to be materialists and cerebrocentric, leave their dogma behind. in the unconscious, which they use in their nominative hypotheses.*

(Fernández 1963, 16)

At the end of 1956, after Fernández's resignation, they quickly reorganized and after several internal discussions regarding the potential threat of dissolving the entity, by decision of its Board of Directors, the IAP reinstated Musso and Di Liscia, who co-existed with the Friends of Parapsychology Association. This period of conflict naturally reinforced his position, especially because Musso was beginning to occupy a prominent place in the academic field of psychology, which could explain Fernández's somewhat weakened position under the accusation of spiritualizing the IAP.

In 1957, far from demoralizing Fernández, together with Warburton and the cooperation of Di Cristóforo and Logegaray, among others, they established the Argentine College of Psychic Studies (CADEP), a new entity without legal status that continued active in research and dissemination tasks until Fernández's death, in 1967. In fact, emphasis was placed here on the investigation of other topics, such as reincarnation (Fernández and Di Cristóforo Postiglioni 1957) and healing mediumship (particularly of Brazilian spiritualists). Notably, neither Fernández nor Musso encouraged conflicts in later years, in fact, some members of the new IAP continued at the same time cooperating or being part of CADEP although ideological and objective divergences were a characteristic sign between the two. Indeed, the parapsychological movement—both in the academic environment and in its publications—was linked to Musso or his management. A characteristic of the new IAP was that it brought together a diversity of scientists, intellectuals and professionals in different areas with an interest in parapsychology since the “hard core” of its members belonged to various occupations. For example, in the mid-forties, the AMMA led by Canavesio had been made up—

primarily and exclusively—of doctors with specializations in psychiatry and neurology; instead, the IAP incorporated physicists, mathematicians, biologists, philosophers, among other professions and disciplines. The CADEP, for its part, was made up of a faction of philo-spiritualists (in opposition to the IAP, but which, strictly speaking, it would be unfair to classify as anti-spiritualists). This new “melting pot” of sciences and disciplines gathered in the IAP now found in parapsychology a common problem to be solved that began in the very intestine of the constitution of other dominant psychological currents, to the extent that these were crystallizing in an increasingly different format more academic.

A methodology employed by the constituents of the recently established IAP to circumvent potential future disruptions within their organization was the establishment of two distinct categories of membership. Adherents were a type of sympathizer who were permitted to attend conferences, courses and public experiments, and who were eligible for complimentary benefits such as newsletters and conferences. However, they did not possess the right to vote.

Actives were granted the right to vote and were able to constitute part of the Commissions according to their knowledge and scientific competence. However, they were required to be professionals, that is, individuals in possession of a university diploma or proof of knowledge and interest in the problems of parapsychology. The following assertion is made: In other words, the objective is to gain territory in the scientific field, with a particular focus on psychology, with the aim of being seen in terms of methodological equity and the principles of scientific objectivity. This distinction enabled the resolution of conflicts concerning the distinction between those who could exercise control of the Institute and the more effective detection of members whose ideas could divert their purposes towards spiritualist beliefs.

An example that highlights the distinction between spiritualists and parapsychologists was the attempt to hold a “congress” of experts in parapsychology. In fact, regarding the first international conference held successfully in Utrecht (Holland), emulating the first congress of psychologists in Tucumán in 1954, the members of the IAP made efforts to organize without success what would have been the first congress of parapsychology in Latin America., presumably due to the social and political tensions that shook Argentina that year. Only the spiritist press anticipated the news of the event scheduled for the first half of April 1955. Although the speakers were not yet assigned, according to the news, the titles would be grouped into eight sections: (1) the relationship between parapsychology and psychology, (2) parapsychology and medicine, (3) parapsychology and biology, (4) parapsychology and mathematics, (5) “Transcendental problems” of parapsychology (with obvious implications for spiritualists), (6) parapsychology and art, (7) parapsychology and social problems (including the topic “social justice and parapsychology”), and a closing titled (8) “Evolution and parapsychology, about the possible future of parapsychology.” It seems evident that the organization had some political support, although the end of the Peronist government was celebrated by a British spiritualist newspaper possibly alerted by a news report published by the Argentine Spiritualist Confederation itself (News 1955, March 12).

The IAP's activity was fruitful at various levels and gradually expanded in academic circles, especially in the context of the nascent psychology. Although the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association was much earlier, in 1942, psychoanalysis was part of the current of the time where, in an atmosphere of experimentalism, the new institution acquired a marked legitimacy. For example, those who were more sympathetic to parapsychology cooperated, such as the pedagogue Jaime Bernstein (1917–1988), who not only showed a favorable attitude but even defended its incorporation into the academic sphere.<sup>1</sup> Alongside Bernstein, the epistemologist Armando Asti Vera (1914–1972) and the pedagogue Enrique Butelman (1917–1990)<sup>2</sup> were key contributors to the beginnings of parapsychology. In addition, Butelman and Bernstein, together with the sociologist Gino Germani (1911–1979), played a decisive role for a wider public where curricula were developed and the recruitment of professors was promoted. Bernstein, who created the Paidós publishing house in 1945, translated foreign authors who placed psychology and psychoanalysis in the corpus of human and social sciences (Klappenbach 2001, 2007). Paidós was a specialized Spanish-language publishing house and a unique case in Latin America whose literary production laid the foundations of basic education for understanding psychology as a discipline of meaning and not as a natural science. The work of these pioneers of the humanistic sciences, as they were called at the time, was decisive in shaping the traits that characterized the Argentine psychologist throughout the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

Other figures who showed a tacit adherence to parapsychology were academics who participated in the cultural activities of the IAP, who articulated their speciality with the new discipline, for example, the psychiatrists Aniceto Figueras and Enrique Pichón Riviére (1907–1977) were invited to lecture,<sup>4</sup> sociologist Gino Germani,<sup>5</sup> philosopher and writer Oscar Andrieu (Andrieu 1956) and epistemologist and mathematician Gregorio Klimovsky (1922–2009) (Klimovsky 2009) at the University of Buenos Aires, who was as sympathetic to psychoanalysis as he was to parapsychology, in contrast to his colleague Mario Bunge who denounced both as *pseudosciences*. Musso recalls that although most of these people “were absorbed in their professional work, they played an important role in the diffusion and institutionalization of parapsychology in the academy” (Musso 1973, 147). Several Argentine psychoanalysts also showed interest in extrasensory experiences and spiritism, some of whom openly studied them in their own clinical practice, such as Arnaldo Rascovsky, Enrique Raker and Fidas Cesio. Sociological pioneer Gino Germani, who was then lecturing at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores (a refuge for many intellectuals opposed to Peronism), also answered a “emotional orientacion” for women in the magazine *Idilio* under a pseudonym. Germani had also been a member of some spiritualist and anarchist groups while living in Italy in the turbulent 1930s and was keenly interested in parapsychology but left no more than personal accounts and anecdotes without much interest in systematic research (Germani [A.] 2004).

Musso advocated that parapsychology serve to refute the basic principles of materialism, differentiating them from the “sociological ideals of constructing a better world based on a change in the personality of man through its social stimulants, which are generally ascribed to this philosophy” (Musso 1970a, 245)

According to Musso, “parapsychology comes to demonstrate the existence of a dimension that transcends the limitations of space and time [...] It seems evident—he points out—that the materialist hypothesis cannot provide an answer to these questions. The sensory pathways are the normal forms of knowledge, but extrasensory perception shows that it [man] cannot be reduced. A philosophy that is structured on a hypothesis that does not contemplate all the aspects or ways of being of the reality that it seeks to describe cannot be valid. (Musso 1970b, 237–238). He also describes several experiments of extrasensory perception with individuals who served as collaborators (psychics and mediums) and his model known as “stages of the process of extrasensory perception” (capture, information and interpretation) (Musso 1955b). In fact, his own story is a refutation of spiritualism through parapsychology, which he considers an “overcoming” stage, emphasizing a boundary dispute between spiritualism and parapsychology. This dispute continued in the spiritist press, for example, the spiritist leader Natalio Ceccarini stated that “parapsychology and spiritualism can arrive, loyally, to great conclusions for the spiritual benefit of humanity; if they collaborate with each other in the field of scientific research; If they are unknown, they will delay the advent of the truth [...]” (Ceccarini 1962).

However, this position was intolerable for the doctor Bartolomé Bosio, who wrote a harsh criticism of Musso's work, according to which, “if one intends, within the limits of psychology, to start from spiritualism to reach parapsychology, it was “an elementary and fundamental duty to demonstrate that one has a complete knowledge of spiritualism” (74). The replies and counterreplies were the subject of an intense controversy between the two throughout several issues of the magazine *La Idea*, where even Fernández added his opinion in support of Bosio (Bosio 1955a; Bosio 1955b; Musso 1955c; Musso 1955d; Fernández 1955). However, Musso participated in philosophical groups, such as the Grupo La Plata (GLP), a typical home circle formed exclusively by those interested in the phenomena of spiritualism, between 1950 and 1955, but without doctrinal adhesion. The GLP carried out a series of experimental “talking table” sessions, some members having obtained levitations from a table without contact, shocks, vibrations among other phenomena. Musso visited the LPG on several occasions equipped with electromechanical equipment to check if the four legs of the table were raised off the ground at the same time. Together with Canavesio, both witnessed the movements around the medium Fernando del Mármol, a style of practice that had its peak in the mid-19th century.

This period was also characterized by a number of individuals who began to become popular in the press, from card readers to astrologers and seers, but avoided calling themselves mediums or spiritualists. Some lent their names in good faith (others remained anonymous) cooperating in these experiments. For example, the dowsers Armando King and Federico Poletti and the psychics “Mr. Luck,” Rosita de la Torre, Irma Maggi, Iris Cazaux, Carlos Alonso and Ana Gryn, all of them said they often cooperate with the police to help solve some crimes popular in the press. For example, in 1938, Enrique Marchesini provided data to clarify the case of the girl Marta Ofelia Stutz, who disappeared in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, which shocked the general public and the journalists who followed the



case in the newspaper *La Voz del Interior* (Jiménez de Asúa 1942). Anne de la Motte Carrell, a dowser from Córdoba of French origin who worked as a nurse and healer in La Cumbrecita city, Córdoba, collaborated with the local police in cases of kidnappings and other episodes (Gimeno 2013).

Along the same lines, another quite popular psychic on the radio and in the print press, who was nicknamed “Nos-tradamus” (pseudonym of Germán Corrado Castiglioni, 1912–1956) for his statements and successes, collaborated in numerous essays for the researchers who were members of the IAP. Following a design similar to that used by the Dutch researcher W.C.H. Tenhaeff with Gerard Croiset (1909–1980) (Pollack 1980), a famous Dutch clairvoyant, Castiglioni practiced the “empty chair test” (chair test), which consisted of randomly selecting a seat in a theater before the show to that Castiglioni “knew” who the spectator who will sit there will be. Other experiences were carried out in the core of spiritist communities, for example, Musso conducted a study to evaluate whether the personality characteristics of spiritist identifications of mediums in trance using Jung’s Directed Associations Test, differed from the personality of the spiritist. mediums in a normal state, without trance (Musso 1956b). His conclusion, after finding 15 mediums willing to cooperate, was that the responses of the mediumistic “guides” were no different from the responses of those tested in a normal state.

In favor of experimental spiritualism and the subsequent adoption of Rhinean parapsychology, the case of Naúm Kreiman (1919–2003) is particularly relevant and functions as an example of the transition from spiritualism to parapsychology. Between 1941 and 1948, Kreiman first actively participated in the Victor Hugo Society and later, between 1955 and 1956, he was appointed editor of the magazine *La Idea*, published by the Argentine Spiritist Confederation, where he wrote several articles and proposals calling for spiritualists to rigorously investigate mediumship. Rather than pathologizing mediumship, this style of essay was intended to determine the “psychological” nature of the medium and the presumably unconscious source of the “spirit,” an idea that comes from the influence of the theory of psychoanalysis that took hold among some doctors who interpreted the performances of the mediums (Cesio 1954/2019). However, this orientation of Kreiman generated discomfort among some readers of the magazine, who perceived that his direction was diverted towards a vector that viewed mediums with greater distrust or that “experimental” spiritualism was reduced to controlled trials against the fraud. Kreiman tried to encourage spiritualists to perceive a more constructive and optimistic outlook toward parapsychology and in 1955 he adopted the expression “paranormal psychology.” Kreiman presented a program (or course) for the Spiritist Culture Institute (ICE) of the Argentine Spiritist Confederation with orientation towards statistical procedures in parapsychology. The ICE was in charge of cultural tasks among spiritualist leaders and mediums created at the initiative of Hugo Nale and other Kardecists who sought a “redemption” from the State that viewed their practices with suspicion. However, his search to build bridges between parapsychology and spiritualism failed, added to the tensions generated by his editorials in the heart of the spiritist press, which ended with Kreiman’s resignation. Three years later, in 1958, Kreiman

emigrated to the IAP and joined its Board of Directors, in Canavesio’s place. Kreiman where he adopted a position definitively in favor of parapsychology, prioritizing experimental trials with non-mediums rather than mediums who were often quite reluctant to such tests.

## 5 | Further Remarks

This stage of demarcation of spiritualism, which sought to purify itself towards a stance less tainted by the prevailing religious devotion, began to gain more and more adherents within the emerging parapsychological movement.<sup>6</sup> A moment of “sanitization,” spiritualists sought to dissociate themselves from the quacks, the mediums from the mediums, parapsychology from spiritualism; from an institutional point of view, members of the Instituto Argentino de Parapsicología opposed the Kardecist tendency of the Sociedad Argentina de Parapsicología (Argentinean Society of Parapsychology). For example, parapsychology can be seen as a hybrid between science and spiritualism, spiritualism as a hybrid between science and religion, and magnetology or hypnosis as a hybrid between psychology and medicine.

Psychology thus sought to distance itself from spiritism by accusing its adherents of fraud, excessive credulity, or deception as the most plausible explanation for these mysterious phenomena. Consequently, conventional explanations were more of a “guardian of science” than a strategy designed to differentiate psychology from spiritism. Finally, Argentine parapsychology will contest its territory by disassociating itself from Kardecist spiritualism. However, it encounters resistance to being incorporated into the academy unless it renounces its theories. To summarize, the process of dissociation manifests not only in the ongoing discourse between science and non-science, but also within individual disciplines that were initially regarded as pseudosciences. A notable example of this is the perception of parapsychology as a potential threat to psychology, and of spiritualism as a threat to parapsychology.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Instituto de Psicología Paranormal at <https://www.alipsi.com.ar/articulos-de-investigaciones/>.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bernstein was a professor of General Psychology and Educational Psychology and had organized and directed the first psychology course at the Faculty of Philosophy and Education Sciences of the



National University of Litoral (the first faculty in the country) and the first University Department of Vocational Guidance at the University of Buenos Aires. Bernstein's work, together with the pedagogue Gilda Romero Brest, is recognized for the introduction of psychometry in pedagogy and later in psychology. Bernstein is recognized for the design of psychometric instruments, the so-called "behavioral clinic," child intelligence ("school for the gifted") and the first school for parents.

<sup>2</sup> Enrique Butelman studied philosophy at the National University of Buenos Aires. He received support from the Ford Foundation for research in social psychology at Columbia University in 1962. At the University of Buenos Aires he was Professor of History of Psychology, Social Psychology and Contemporary Psychology.

<sup>3</sup> Rhine prefaced by Musso and translated from English by Dora Ivnisky, Robert Amadou's *Parapsychology: History and Criticism* (1954), Yvonne Castellan's *The Metapsychic* (1955) and other authors with an interest in the relationship between parapsychology and psychoanalysis. In the 1960s, they added titles such as *Telepathy and Interpersonal Relationships* by Jan Ehrenwald (1961), *The Personality of Man in the light of Parapsychology* (1965) and *Apparitions* (1965) both by G.N.M. Tyrrell.

<sup>4</sup> Enrique Pichon-Rivière (1907–1977) was a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and creator of an orientation in social psychology, who worked as a journalist and art critic. In 1942 he was one of the founding members of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA), from which he distanced himself while retaining many friendships, and was a pioneer in the creation of a theoretical model in psychoanalytically oriented psychology. In 1947, Pichon-Rivière created a specific service for psychotic adolescents in which he had begun to use group techniques (Dagfal 2006, 2015; Vezzetti 1996, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> During 1956 a series of free lectures was organized with a heterogeneous cultural perspective, for example, Oscar E. Andrieu (Philosophy and Parapsychology), Aniceto Figueras (Test of Corporate Projection and Parapsychology), Enrique Butelman (C. G. Jung and Parapsychology), Carlos Duval (Parapsychology and the Critique of Human Testimony), Orlando Canavesio (Parapsychology and Cerebral Physiology, Adolphophobia, Parapsychology and Brain Physiology), Jung and Parapsychology), Carlos Duval (Parapsychology and the Critique of Human Testimony), Orlando Canavesio (Parapsychology and Brain Physiology), Adolfo Likerman (Parapsychology and Contemporaneity), Gino Germani (Sociological Projections of Parapsychology), Jaime Bernstein (Alfred Adler and Parapsychology), Gregorio Klimovsky (Epistemology and Parapsychology), Nuria Cortada (Introduction to Psychodiagnosis) and Enrique Pichón Rivière (Sigmund Freud and Parapsychology).

<sup>6</sup> From the early 1960s to the late 1990s, Kreiman examined the relationship between (Skinnerian) behavioral psychology and ESP. Together with his wife Dora Ivnisky (1927–2016), they conducted numerous studies with the purpose of observing whether the participants of these trials could eventually obtain a significant average success rate in the divination of "zener" cards. In 1963, the two inaugurated a new regular journal, *Cuadernos de Parapsicología*, which ran until 2004 (then changed to *Comunicaciones en Parapsicología* until 2016).

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