

Alejandro Parra

Argentina



Psychologist Alejandro Parra received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the Universidad Abierta Interamericana (American Open University), where he is now a teacher and associated researcher. He received his PhD in psychology from the Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales (University of Business and Social Sciences). He serves as a psychotherapist in general clinical psychological practice in the Clinical Area of the Institute of Paranormal Psychology. He conducts therapy groups and uses an historical approach in his ongoing research into parapsychology, dreamwork, and mediumship. In a counselling setting he also conducts workshops with psychics and mediums about their paranormal/spiritual experiences. His clinical research is based on cognitive-experiential and humanistic/Rogerian-oriented approaches with groups of people who have had paranormal experiences and dreams. Parra has been President (2011-2013), a full member and International Liaison of the Parapsychology Association; an International Affiliate and International Liaison of the Parapsychology Foundation; and an associate member of the Society for Scientific Exploration for Argentina. He is also a member and adherent of a dozen other institutes of parapsychology in Europe and such Latin American countries as Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Parra has authored a number of books, including *Historia de la parapsicología en la Argentina* (History of Parapsychology in Argentina) (Author, 1990), *Fenómenos paranormales* (Paranormal Phenomena) (Kier, 2003), and *Qué es ... la sensibilidad psíquica?* (What is ... Psychic Sensibility) (Deva's, 2010). Together with Juan Manuel Corbetta, he co-edited the e-book *Imágenes de lo oculto* (Images of the Occult), a free e-book published by the Institute of Paranormal Psychology as part of the exhibition of spirit photography in Argentina. In addition, Parra has published a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals and also published in several non-parapsychological journals.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE IPP TO THE HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND TO PRESERVE THE PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL LEGACY IN ARGENTINA

INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of information about the history of the Parapsychology in Argentina. A summary research could be found in the Parra's (1990) pioneer work, and most recently in Gimeno (2014), who developed a great historical research about the old mediums, psychics and psi researchers in Argentina.

The Institute of Paranormal Psychology (IPP) was established in 1994 as an educational center dedicated to the scientific study of paranormal/anomalous events. Its fo-

cus is on experimental, clinical and empirical research, plus the collection and publication of case reports dealing with parapsychological experiences. As a non-profit research and educational institute, the IPP has been recognized as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) (for further information, see Parra, 2011).

The aim of this brief presentation is to describe three projects carried out by the Institute to preserve the historical legacy of the parapsychology in Argentina: (1) Library and bibliometry research, (2) the Argentine pho-



tographic paranormal exhibition, and (3) the research project on the Spiritualism in Argentina.

THE PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL LIBRARY OF THE IPP

The IPP's main source of pride is its parapsychological library, which contains around 3500 books, 12,000 issues of academic journals and popular magazines, and thousands of files of articles in non-parapsychological journals in the scientific mainstream, which is the most important collection of its kind in Argentina and even in Latin America. The IPP also hosts about two thousands hours' worth of VHS and DVD tapes on parapsychological and related topics. The Latin American Agency of Psi Information Center [Agencia Latinoamericana de Información Psi, or ALIPsi] is an internet-based database of parapsychology references and on-line information related to the Spanish-speaking literature (see free downloadable catalogs in www.alipsi.com.ar). The data reside in a computer, because ALIPsi covers the bulk of parapsychology articles in Spanish-language journals from 1900 to-date. It also offers advisory service in bibliographical investigations to undergraduate students and journalists.

We designed SIPsi® v.3.0, which is a collection of computerized bibliographic databases that emphasize parapsychology and related consciousness disciplines. The aim is to include a bibliographic citation and/or an abstract, of any book or article (scholarly or popular), thesis, chapter, conference proceedings paper, and monograph on parapsychology and Spiritualism, or related consciousness studies. Non-English languages included are Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. SIPsi® also includes relevant articles published in subject specialty journals in such fields as psychology, physics, engineering, education, philosophy, religion, psychiatry, medicine, literature, folklore, mathematics, anthropology; general science magazines in relation with parapsychology and consciousness studies. We also to include books and articles on parapsychology from 1900 to date and some of the most relevant books from other disciplines up to 2013.

In 2010, we received a grant from BIAL Foundation for support and preserve the Library and to charge all entries in the database.

"IMAGES OF THE OCCULT": AN ARGENTINE PHOTOGRAPHIC PARANORMAL EXHIBITION

From November 8th to 20th, 2006, the Roca Museum –National Institute for History Research, in Buenos Aires, was the stage of the *Images of the Occult: Spiritism and Paranormal Photographic Exhibition* organized by the Paranormal Psychology Institute (IPP). The paranormal photographic exhibition was also supported by Ministry of Culture of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, The Latinoamerican Psi Information Agency (ALIPsi), and two of the oldest Kardecian spiritualist society, La Fraternidad and *Constancia*, established in 1877 and 1880, respectively.

Approximately 2,600 visitors attended the exhibition. As the Museum is an institution supported by the Argentine Government, the entry was free of charge and open to all. Psychologists Alejandro Parra and Juan Manuel Corbetta authored and edited a two hundred-pages CD-catalog including 160 images ready for print (Parra & Corbetta, 2006). Some of the main thematic areas included engravings, classic illustrations, photos from the end of the 19th and 20th century showing typical physical phenomena (i.e. tables and mediums levitations, apparitions, physical effect mediums and ectoplasms). The case of the most impressive Argentine medium Osvaldo Fianza, in whose séances stones and other objects had appeared, and other internationally well-known mediums. Thirty old and rare psychical research books and magazines and a number of ancient instruments collection used to contact with spirits, besides other curiosities provided by the IPP archives and by two spiritualist societies La Fraternidad and Constancia, which joined together all Argentine Spiritist societies. The most controversial proofs of materialization are the series of photographs taken by Spiritist societies at Buenos Aires, showing the successive phases of the phenomenon; and the hollow moulds of hands

and feet, taken in paraffin wax. A reproduction of these phenomena was also be shown. Curious objects, such as three-legged tables utilized when one could still find physical-effect mediums capable of moving them or a Ouija-boards collection also was exhibited for visitors. The same for the slates used to produce the so called direct writing. Surely some of the shown may have been the one utilized by American medium Henry Slade when he visited Buenos Aires (circa 1887).

A RESEARCH PROJECT ON SPIRITUALISM IN ARGENTINA

Historical researchers Juan Gimeno and Juan Manuel Corbetta, together with A. Fabiana Savall, a Museum curator, authored the book *Cuando Hablan los Espiritus: Historias del Movimiento Kardeciano en la Argentina* [When the Spirits Speak: A History of the Kardecian Movement in Argentina], which it is a well-documented academic book, which focused on the idea of life after death connected with Spiritism and Modern Spiritualism in Buenos Aires (Gimeno, Corbetta, & Savall, 2013).

There are few well known references to Spiritualism in Argentina. The first one was written by the Argentinean politician and journalist Cosme Mariño, who was an active participant in the political and social life of Buenos Aires. He was also the President of *Constancia*, one of the first spiritualist associations in Buenos Aires, for nearly 20 years. The second one was written by César Bogo. Spiritualism in Argentina was introduced by Spanish Justo de Espada, one of thousands of immigrants, in 1857, only few months after the edition of *The Spirits Book* by Allan Kardec. He founded the first group together with Torcuato Zubiría, who was the first medium in Argentina.

Spiritualism in Argentina began in 1877, when the first centre, the Sociedad Espiritista Constancia [Spiritualism Society "Constancia"], was founded. It attracted numerous Argentinean free-thinkers and scientists. Among others, the American medium Henry Slade was invited to participate in spiritualist séances. In 1888, the physical medium Camilo Brediff produced

materialisations, ectoplasm and other impressive phenomena. Osvaldo Fidanza was one of the well-documented physical effects medium who lived in Buenos Aires. An attempt on his life interrupted a series of sessions that had been planned to show these phenomena to the scientific community in Buenos Aires. From that moment on he lost his abilities, although he continued promoting his ideas and providing an example of a healthy critical attitude toward these types of phenomena.

These studies were taken as a challenge by the Argentinean chemist Ovidio Rebaudi, who founded the Sociedad Magnetológica Argentina [Argentine Mesmerism Society] in 1896. The French physiologist and Nobel Prize laureate Charles Richet was greatly interested in the experimental results obtained by Argentinean psychical researchers. Rebaudi published the *Revista de Magnetología* [Journal of Mesmerism], of which a few issues were issued between 1896 and 1910; the Society's name was then changed into the Instituto Metapsíquico, which published the *Revista de Meta Psíquica Experimental* [Argentine Journal of Psychical Research] over a period of about ten years. Ovidio Rebaudi, together with several collaborators, operated within the spiritualist context, but emulated the (British) Society for Psychical Research. Although they went through many economic difficulties, spiritualists respected Rebaudi for his work, because he maintained an 'animist' (and not spiritualist) approach when confronting mediumistic phenomena.

The authors also examine the rise of Spiritualism, taking the reader from Spiritualism to psychical research. Gimeno, Corbetta and Savall visited many Spiritist societies in Buenos Aires and other places, where they interviewed sitters, mediums and directors, and they attended public and private meetings and carried out a catalog of books, photographs, articles and administrative records never consulted before by *outsiders*. Kardecian spiritism and parapsychology, which share the same research aims, show a healthy tolerance for each other's viewpoints, and a complementary interest in research.

FURTHER REMARKS

During the last twenty years the IPP has achieved much to preserve the historical legacy of parapsychology. For instance, Alejandro Parra introduced parapsychology into the university –slowly but increasingly– by using other names such as “paranormal psychology.” Indeed there is no difference between paranormal psychology and parapsychology, but the change of terms was introduced because of the increased confusion between proper parapsychology and the activities of people who have abused the term by approaching it as ‘pop’ parapsychology. In Argentina, many people believe that the term parapsychologist is equivalent to psychic.

Finally, between 1990 and 2004, the IPP published fifty-four issues of a peer-reviewed quarterly journal, the *Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal* [Argentine Journal of Paranormal Psychology]. The journal's impact on many young parapsychologists in several Spanish-speaking countries was impressive. However, the *RAPP* was discontinued for financial reasons. Subsequently, in 2006, the IPP inaugurated a new on-line publication, the *E-Bulletin Psi*, of which twenty five issues have been published to-date. We publish many research articles on history of parapsychology in Argentina and its pioneers.

LITERATURE

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Mediumistic received drawing on April 10th, 1933, between midnight and 2 AM.

Title: 'Jesus using the cross to reach the Lord'. At the back of this drawing are the signatures of ten persons who witnessed the medium Mr. Verwaal.