

PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN ARGENTINA:
BRIEF HISTORY AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the past, Argentina has made great progress in parapsychology, placing itself as the second country in the Americas, after the USA, with antecedents in psychical research (Beloff, 1990). Now the pioneers are gone. They were the ones who contributed a great number of experimental research and theoretical essays, cited frequently by prestigious American and European parapsychologists. In this article the most important antecedents will be summarized and present perspectives shown that may be useful to those who wish to know the development of parapsychology in Argentina. The early interest for these studies peaked—at the academic level—about 1930, with exploratory studies of the physiological states of good psychics. Parapsychology in Argentina is divided into four chronological phases: (1) spiritist (or spiritualist), between 1870 and 1896; (2) mesmerism, between 1896 and 1924; (3) the early psychical research, which is called 'metapsychic' in the Latin-American countries, between 1924 and 1953; and (4) Rhinean parapsychology. In this paper, these two last stages are divided and analysed in three phases: (a) private institutionalization, (b) university expansion, and (c) an analysis of the present situation concerning the quality of parapsychological information and some common difficulties (Parra, 1990).

INTRODUCTION

There are various aspects that can be considered concerning parapsychology in Argentina. For several years I have been collecting information that was widely dispersed, and have put it together in a book I have written (Parra, 1990). The history of parapsychology in every Latin-American country has developed in a manner similar to that in Argentina. The surge of spiritualism marks, at least in part, the urge for research on paranormal phenomena. The first signs of spiritualism appeared in 1877, when the first centre was founded, the *Sociedad Espiritista Constancia* (Constancia Society), which attracted numerous Argentine intellectuals and scientists. Among others, the American medium Henry Slade was invited to participate in spiritualist séances and, in 1888, the physical medium, Camilo Brediff, produced materializations, ectoplasm and other notable phenomena. Another medium of note was Osvaldo Fidanza; records of his séances are still preserved (Serie, 1910). His feats were closely followed in Europe, and Charles Richet was greatly interested in the experimental results obtained by Argentine psychical researchers with Fidanza. Around 1905 and 1918, Fidanza became the most closely studied medium of the beginning of the century (Parra, 1990).

These studies were taken as a challenge by the prestigious Argentine chemist Ovidio Rebaudi, who founded the *Sociedad Magnetológica Argentina* (Argentine Mesmerism Society) in 1896, with the aim of repeating the experiments of Mesmer's animal magnetism, a subject of great interest in Europe. Rebaudi published the *Revista de Magnetología* (*Journal of Mesmerism*), of which a

few issues were published between 1896 and 1910, until the Society was changed into the *Instituto Metapsíquico* (Psychical Research Institute), which published the *Revista de Meta-Psíquica Experimental* (*Argentine Journal of Psychical Research*), which survived for 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 felt a profound respect for his work, because Rebaudi kept an 'animist' (and not spiritualist) position when confronting mediumistic phenomena (Rebaudi, 1899).

Some years after, the creation of the *Instituto de Psicología* (Institute of Psychology), at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires, took place on 24th November 1931. This important event was the work of the psychiatrist, Enrique Mouchet, who had been greatly impressed by the work of the French investigator Eugene Osty. The direction of the Department of the so-called *Psicología Paranormal* (Paranormal Psychology) was assigned to Dr Mouchet himself, and his work on behalf of early psychical research was important. He stimulated other psychiatrists to investigate this field considered 'occult', and was the first university professor to integrate these studies in Argentine universities. In 1932, Dr Efrom and several colleagues performed a series of experiments with Miss Irma Maggi (1964) (Villanueva, 1992). Starting on 7th April 1932, a number of sessions devoted to psychical research were conducted mainly under the direction of Dr Gonzalo Bosch, (director of the Hospicio de las Mercedes, now Neuropsychiatric Hospital José Tomás Borda). Professors of the *Facultad de Medicina* (Faculty of Medicine) were invited to observe research with one of Argentina's best-known psychics, such as Enrique Marchesini from the city of Córdoba. Marchesini was a psychic, and was purportedly infallible in the diagnosis of disease by just touching an object belonging to the sick owner.

Another group of spiritualists founded the *Círculo Espiritualista ATMAN* (ATMAN Spiritualist Circle) in 1933, whose objective was experimentation with mediums from the spiritualist community. This centre, founded and directed by Engineer José Salvador Fernández, developed the study of spiritualist phenomena relevant to ESP research (but still within a spiritualist context). That same year, Professor Eduardo del Ponte gave two historic lectures attended by numerous personalities from the *Facultad de Ciencias Naturales* (Faculty of Natural Sciences). Experiments based on the 'psychic reading of an object' were done by Dr Luis María Ravagnan, an odontologist who, surprised by his own results, dedicated the rest of his life to the study of psychology (Fernández, 1963). Among the members of the ATMAN Circle was María Amanda Ravagnan (sister of Dr Luis María Ravagnan, and wife of Engineer Fernández), who demonstrated ESP of amazing precision. From 1934, Fernández did numerous studies on healing by laying-on of hands with the medium María de Meyrelles in trance, controlled by Fernández's physician friends. On one occasion, this medium 'diagnosed' a generalized eczema of a physician who indeed had the disease.

When J. B. Rhine came to the fore in this field in 1930 (Mouchet had already incorporated these scientific studies at the university level), he kept up an active correspondence with Fernández, to find out about parapsychological

studies in progress in Argentina. This notable engineer also experimented with good results with his wife, and on one occasion, in front of Dr Juan Antonio Schroeder (at the time, director of an important medical centre), María Amanda saw in one of the doctor's patients a problem in the kidneys. "Perform some clinical analysis," said the psychic, "because she has some albumen, a product of her disease." In fact the analysis gave a positive reading for the presence of albumen (Fernández, 1963). However, Fernández's results would not have been acceptable from a scientific point of view. The sessions from which data were gathered lacked elementary critical precautions: possible sensory cues were not eliminated and blind controls were not used in the evaluation of his ESP research. Nevertheless, Engineer Fernández's studies have an important significance within the historical context because they were the first attempt to apply statistical methods to the study of ESP in Argentina.

In 1946, another group of physicians arose under the leadership of Dr Orlando Canavesio, who founded the *Asociación Médica de Metapsíquica Argentina* (Argentine Association for Medical and Psychical Research). Among his correspondents, Canavesio included several scientists connected with the field of parapsychology, such as J. B. Rhine and Ferdinando Cazzamalli. Canavesio was a profound scholar, not only in his field, but also in psychical research, since psychology in our country was not yet an academic subject. Psychiatry was for him a way of being closer to the sciences of conduct than was possible in any other discipline. For this, Canavesio utilized a powerful new auxiliary: the newly-arrived electroencephalography equipment (invented by Hans Berger in 1929), in the use of which he was one of the few experts, knowing its importance for the development of diagnosis in mental disease. The specific application of these techniques in psychical research was aimed, according to Canavesio's hypothesis, at discovering the variable that could determine whether the supposed psychic state was normal or paranormal. His orientation was towards the field of spiritualist practices. Orlando Canavesio performed notable experiments with the clairvoyant Enrique Marchessini, the dowser Luis Acquavella (also a physician and Canavesio's collaborator), Anne de Carrell (wife of the distinguished Nobel Laureate, Alexis Carrell) and also Federico Poletti and Conrado Castiglione (nicknamed *Nostradamus*).

In January 1948, the Department of Public Health, under Dr Ramón Carrillo and Dr Augusto Robles Gorriti, created the *Instituto de Psicopatología Aplicada* (IPA) (Institute of Applied Psychopathology (or Abnormal Psychology)) (Estatutos del Instituto de Psicopatología Aplicada, 1948). The plan of action was simple, similar to those of other centres of psychical research. During the period called *Extraoficial* or *Scientific Support*, divided into five stages, the Institute obtained optimal conditions, technical, legal, location, etc. Also, as an institution, they had clear objectives: library, archives, publications, and exchange of information, not only in metapsychic, but also medical as well as interrelations between both fields. In the period of *Social Consolidation* and *Scientific Support*, divided into two phases, the interests leaned towards the incorporation of metapsychic in the universities, mainly in the faculties of medicine across the country. On the other hand, the IPA had to control, with some energy, the garrulous activities of spiritism, quackery, and their possible influence on mental disease. The *Confereración Espiritista*

Argentina (Argentine Spiritualist Confederation), as representative of all the spiritualist centres of the country, made an agreement with representatives of the IPA concerning mutual assistance.

Orlando Canavesio's doctoral dissertation, *Electroencefalografía en los Estados Metapsíquicos* (Electroencephalography in the Psychic States), was done at the parapsychology section of the Department of Public Health. The thesis was completed in 1951 and approved by the National University of Córdoba (Canavesio, 1951). After this notable psychiatrist obtained his doctorate, his interest in psychical research increased, resulting in a number of lectures and interviews with psychics, healers, dowzers, and others. Several EEG recordings were made, notably that taken from Eric Couternay Luck (known as Mr Luck), one of the first to allow a study of his EEG when acting 'parapsychically'.

According to Canavesio (1948):—

... the metapsychical state (ESP) is a physiological state produced by specific causes acting on the predisposition, characterized by a psychosomatic manifestation in which, or because of which, the faculty works. Mr Luck, who was not conditioned by any belief, proceeded to achieve the metapsychical state, as the electrodes of the EEG were connected, and the suggestion was made that he should not think, and instead try to relax and achieve a state of psychophysical relaxation. In the graphical recording of the EEG, alpha waves disappeared to make it more or less regular, and decrease about 60% of the amplitude. The duration of such a state was about three to six seconds, after which information began to come in. A second experiment was performed with the help of Armando King, a dowser from the city of Cordoba.

Canavesio thought that the dowsing phenomenon was better suited for EEG registration, and he argued for the use of dowzers by the national government. Armando King seemed to be a good dowser, very practical and potent in his perceptions, localizing underground water for numerous geological, hydraulic and mining companies. In San Juan, he had collaborated with the Ministerio de Obras Públicas (Ministry of Public Works) and the Directorate of Aeronautic Infrastructures since 1947. He also was hired to solve an emergency problem in obtaining water at El Tostado city (Santa Fe). Canavesio always welcomed critics, especially if they were physicians or other health science specialists. Brief articles were published in which a critical view was expressed of orthodox medicine dealing with the challenge implied by considering psychological subjects in an area where psychology was still trying to enter the academic world in Argentina. He published a report about the EEG records of Alfredo Parodi, a psychometrist of Rosario city. The report comes to the conclusion that under the state A-B it is possible to observe the alpha rhythm, but under psychic state B-C the frequency could not be determined exactly, although in some records it is possible to observe that it reaches 11-13 cycles per second. Evident changes in the electric rhythm of the cortex are registered. It becomes irregular, and the voltage decreases by 50-70%.

Canavesio participated in numerous conferences, being one of the most active scientists of his time. He lectured at the Chair of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine on psychical research, and at a conference held at the Institute of Applied Psychopathology on "The Parapsychological Science", in which he presented psychics such as Mr Luck and Dr Luis Acquavella, also a dowser,

both of whom gave practical demonstrations. In 1953, Canavesio was invited to participate in the First International Conference of Parapsychological Studies in Utrecht (The Netherlands) with his dissertation topic, and for the first time Argentina was represented in one of the most decisive events in the history of world parapsychology (Canavesio, 1954). He also participated in the congress of metapsychic in Bologna (Italy) held by the Italian Scientific Association of Metapsychic.

Unfortunately, all these efforts had little outcome, particularly after the fall of the democratic government of General Juan Domingo Perón in 1955 and the political crisis of the moment (in other English-speaking countries, many people tend to think of the late Perón as just another 'South American dictator', rather than as the leader of a democratic government, but this notion is incorrect because Perón was elected three times by the Argentinians). It must be pointed out that psychologists (and not physicians) were the ones most interested in parapsychology, because it studied anomalous psychological processes (ESP) and not organic paranormal processes, the object of study by neurophysiology or psychosomatic medicine. Also, Dr Canavesio made EEG records, but no parapsychological investigations of scientific value emerged; this was because the work lacked an adequate methodology, for it had used the qualitative approach that was typical of the older psychical research.

Consequently, as the result of a discussion on both counts, Fernández and Canavesio founded the *Sociedad Argentina de Parapsicología* (SAP) (Argentine Parapsychology Society), with Fernández as President. This group included all those interested in parapsychology. The by-laws and objects of the SAP show the interest that Argentinians showed very early for parapsychological research. In the beginning, articles, papers and other activities of the society were unduly influenced by spiritualist thinking, but this was somewhat corrected by the influence of the foreign members, who included J. B. Rhine, Gardner Murphy, S. G. Soal and Ferdinando Cazzamalli. One of Fernández's best subjects was his son-in-law, Dr Ronald Warburton, an odontologist, who several times obtained 22 out of 25 hits with the standard deck of ESP cards and, on one occasion, all 25 of them. Musso (1954) also performed experiments with Warburton.

The experiments of the *Grupo La Plata* (La Plata Group), between the years 1950 and 1955, no doubt constitute an interesting aspect in the history of parapsychology in Argentina about which not much has been written. This group was formed by José María Feola and other young intellectuals interested in the psychical phenomena of spiritualism. The group produced numerous phenomena, such as table levitations without contact and in full light, raps, luminous phenomena, and messages with intelligent statements, including telepathic communications. Because of the reproducibility of the phenomena, the group was able to convince well-known university professors of the reality of PK, especially through the clean table levitations in full light. Drs Canavesio and Musso participated in numerous experiments, and Armando King also visited the group once, since he had never seen such clear-cut phenomena (Feola, 1975; 1993).

FIRST STAGE *Private Institutionalization*

In our country there was an old institution, the *Asociación LUMEN de Investigaciones Psíquicas y Estudios Filosóficos* (LUMEN Association for Psychological Research and Philosophical Studies), founded in 1886. To this group belonged a large number of people who studied spiritualist phenomena, among them its Director, Benjamín Odell. They had good facilities, including a large auditorium, and a considerable number of members. In a joint session in April 1953, la *Sociedad Argentina de Parapsicología* (SAP) and the *Asociación LUMEN* decided to join forces and start the new *Instituto Argentino de Parapsicología* (IAP) (Argentine Institute of Parapsychology), amalgamating the membership of both institutions.

Unfortunately, differences within the newly-formed IAP soon became evident. On one side were the spiritists of the ex-SAP, who reincorporated authorities of the spiritist movement with parapsychologists, and on the other side members of the ex-LUMEN, who, in disagreement with the 'spiritualist' posture, created a new institution, the *Asociación Amigos de la Parapsicología* (AAP) (Friends of Parapsychology Association), under the leadership of Odell and Musso. The new AAP published four numbers of a quarterly journal, the *Revista de Parapsicología* (*Parapsychology Review*), which ended in 1956. Then, Musso (1956) designed an experiment with mediums of various spiritist groups with a double purpose: (a) psychological, to see whether the spirit personalities manifested differed from those of the mediums in their normal state, and (b) parapsychological, to see whether through these experiments paranormal knowledge could be proved. He used C.G. Jung's Word Association test, using 50 stimulus words from 200 that Jung himself used, which reveals certain personality traits. Parapsychologically, the idea was to obtain data about their identity as living persons from the personalities manifested. Musso also performed experiments with schoolchildren (302 students) with ESP cards in opaque envelopes, relating the psychological attitudes between students and teachers, confirming the results of Gertrude Schmeidler (Musso, 1965).

In the meantime, Engineer Fernández, with Luis María Di Cristóforo Postiglioni, developed a thesis entitled *Fundamentos Científicos y Filosóficos de la Supervivencia con Reencarnación* (Scientific and Philosophical Foundations of Survival with Reincarnation), which was presented in Buenos Aires. In this paper, the value and contribution of the parapsychological hypothesis in favour of survival was discussed (Fernández & Di Cristóforo Postiglioni, 1957). That same year, Musso published a note about Extrasensory Perception in the *Revista de Educación* (*Journal of Education*), official organ of the Ministry of Education of the Province of Buenos Aires. This paper was the first to appear in an official journal of the National Government, analysing the recognition of the existence of ESP (Musso, 1957).

A great loss to Argentine parapsychology then took place. Travelling from Buenos Aires to Mar del Plata in his car, Orlando Canavesio had an accident, as a consequence of which his left leg had to be amputated. When he seemed to be on his way to recovery, Dr Musso visited him to express his relief. But Canavesio looked Musso in the eye and said, "No, Ricardo, I am going to die." He died in the early hours of the next day. He was only 38 years old.

SECOND STAGE *Expansion through the University*

In this stage, which we have called "Expansion through the University", the difference from the one before is the increasing parapsychological activity throughout university teaching. The most active at this stage were J. Ricardo Musso and his wife, psychologist Mirta Granero, both in research as well as in university-level teaching. An important goal was the methodological grounding in parapsychology of students in pursuit of psychology degrees. The first step was a course of parapsychology offered at the University of Litoral for fourth-year psychology students given by Dr Musso. One of the problems that made it difficult to integrate this course with the existing curriculum was the fact that clinical psychology (i.e. psychoanalysis) had no links with the statistical methodology which is indispensable in parapsychology. To circumvent this problem, Musso was named professor of the chair of psychostatistics, obtaining a more active participation of the students, who gained a clearer and more precise understanding of scientific methodology in parapsychology. One year later, Mirta Granero was designated professor of psychostatistics and parapsychology at the same university. In 1963, Bruno A. L. Fantoni, a lawyer, gave parapsychology courses at the Free Faculty of the city of Córdoba, and, when this Faculty was integrated with the Argentine Catholic University (in 1970), the subject and its teacher continued as before (Fantoni, 1974).

Among numerous studies completed at this time, we can mention the work of Musso (1967) with the medium Ofelia B. Scheaffer in Rosario. Several objects were presented to the subject, and her responses were analysed with the Pratt-Birge technique, giving significant results. Other reports were those published by Musso and Granero (1965) on the ESP tests with children; a long-distance ESP experiment with subjects at a military base in Antarctica with the collaboration of 20 countries (Musso, 1968); a review published by the University of Buenos Aires, *Contribución de la Parapsicología al Conocimiento del Hombre* (Contribution of parapsychology to the knowledge of man) (Musso, 1963); and finally, in 1969, an investigation in which a subject with notable psychic ability, the psychiatrist José Baldomero Muratti, participated. He did a test of ESP with drawings placed in opaque envelopes, from one room to an adjacent one. Apparently, the subject identified the drawings correctly under three different conditions or situations. This experiment was published in the *Revista Argentina de Psicología (Argentine Journal of Psychology)* (Musso & Granero, 1972).

In 1966, the board of directors of the Department of Psychology decided to include parapsychology as one of the elective subjects, and some private universities felt motivated to include parapsychology in their curricula. For example, the *Universidad del Museo Social Argentino* (University of the Argentine Social Museum) asked the IAP to name a professor to give a course of parapsychology. This was done by a physician, Dr Harold Elgan Horwitz, and later on by Engineer Draier, who were the only ones well-versed in the methodology of parapsychology. The same year, Ana María Perrota (trained in parapsychology at the University of Rosario) was designated professor of parapsychology at the *Universidad Argentina John F. Kennedy*. This has continued to the present day under María Elena Pereyra Valtier for fifth-

year psychology students. Also in this year, General Juan Carlos Onganía took over the government. The military intervened in the universities, introducing changes that left parapsychology as a non-required subject, which led to its elimination. Professors who were teaching courses and organizing conferences were forced to resign, among them Dr Emilio Servadio, who had been invited to talk about parapsychology and psychoanalysis. In the end, parapsychology remained only at the University John F. Kennedy and the Institute of Parapsychology of the Catholic University of Córdoba, both private universities (Musso, 1973).

By then, only two persons were devoted full-time to parapsychology: Dr Bruno A. L. Fantoni and Mirta Granero. We should point out that those who enlisted for regular courses offered by the IAP did not attend because of a scientific interest in the subject-matter, but rather out of curiosity or to find a scientific answer to their beliefs. Others, realizing that these studies did not offer work or professional security, requiring instead specialized studies, promptly abandoned the Institute. The same thing happened with the parapsychological subjects, but not the experimental, which required the use of stringent statistical methods. With the passing of time, parapsychology was discarded from the national universities, and slowly from the private ones as well. The Catholic University of Córdoba moved the Institute of Parapsychology, under the direction of Enrique Novillo Paulí, to the *Universidad del Salvador* (University of Salvador) in Buenos Aires, until his death in 1989.

THIRD STAGE *Present Stage*

This period lacks initiatives at university level, contrary to what had happened the previous decade. In March 1970 the Jesuit priest Enrique Novillo Paulí obtained a fellowship from the Organization of American States to work at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man (FRNM) in Durham, where he stayed for two years under the direction of J. B. Rhine and his research team to participate in some parapsychological research. Some years later, Novillo Paulí reported bio-PK experiments carried out by the author on the growth of plants, using unselected persons of both sexes as subjects. In less than three years, there were 33 experiments. The author considers that his experiments prove that, under certain conditions of competition between the groups, differences in the magnitude of the PK effect as a function of the sex of the subjects were produced. At about the same time, Professor Naúm Kreiman and Dora Ivinsky published the quarterly *Cuadernos de Parapsicología* (*Notebooks of Parapsychology*), which still appears regularly. The work of Kreiman and Ivinsky was concerned with experimental research in ESP under various psychological conditions and with the emphasis on statistical evaluation (Kreiman, 1975; 1978; 1982; 1984).

In 1971, J. Ricardo Musso was invited by the Parapsychology Foundation of New York to give a talk on *Parapsychology in Argentina: From 1930-1971*, as part of the International Conference held in Saint Paul de Vence (France). Musso went through historical successes and significant activities of Argentine parapsychology during these four decades (Musso, 1973). Novillo Paulí participated in the 24th Annual Conference of Parapsychology, organized by the Parapsychology Foundation in 1975, where he presented a paper on

Parapsychology and Education, in which he analysed the situation of parapsychology up to that year, its didactic level, the degree of preparation of the students and the teaching at the national universities (Novillo Paulí, 1975).

At about this time, a legislative debate became a national topic, when Deputy Luis Alberto Sobrino Aranda presented a project to modify the penal code, which was approved by the Penal Legislation Committee. Deputy Sobrino then carried on with an initiative to help parapsychological research. After long discussions, the government agreed to give twenty thousand dollars to the IAP to carry on research in this field (Parra, 1990). As a consequence, Sobrino Aranda gave a report to the then President of Argentina, General Juan Domingo Perón, detailing all the basic aspects developed in the course of parliamentary discussions. At the initiative of Julio Cesar Di Liscia, the *Sociedad de Estudios Parapsicológicos* (Society for Parapsychological Studies) was founded in Córdoba, where experimental research and theoretical studies were done by Di Liscia and a team of collaborators (MEMORIA, 1962-1965). Di Liscia was an important contributor to Argentine parapsychology, not only because of his great interest but also because of his research capability.

Other activities carried the parapsychological concept to more popular levels, but were limited to general information and the theoretical developments in this field. Such was the *Primer Congreso Argentino de Parapsicología* (First Argentine Congress of Parapsychology) in 1981, attended by several academic personalities and a large crowd of the public. During the congress an agreement was signed, *Documento de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires Document), in which an attempt was made to unify conflicting concepts in parapsychology. Similar activities can be mentioned, such as the *Jornadas Científicas Interdisciplinarias* (Interdisciplinary Scientific Workshop), concerning psychology, medicine and parapsychology in the academic context; and *Primer Encuentro de Parapsicología* (First Encounter with Parapsychology), sponsored by Enrique Novillo Paulí's *Institute of Parapsychology* of the Universidad del Salvador (Parra, 1990).

However, little can be said about the scientific development of parapsychology in Argentina. Nevertheless, it is of interest to obtain information about some of the work of Latin-American parapsychologists, who are practically unknown to the rest of the world (see Rueda, 1991). They are even unknown to some among us as some of them were never published in specialized journals and some professionals from other areas of science are afraid to get involved in parapsychology. Frankly, I doubt whether I would possess the cool detachment that a historian would need to describe an aspect of Argentine parapsychology which has become, at least for the last ten years, a part of my own personal history. However, as we have shown in this article, this interest has stimulated communications between Argentine and foreign parapsychologists (Alvarado, 1989; Beloff, 1990; Krippner, 1992; Parra, 1990; Villaneuva, 1990). To appreciate more thoroughly the present situation I will classify some sources of access to the information in the field, in the hope that this will help it to be understood more clearly. Four aspects of it can be discussed:—

a) *Information and Misinformation in Parapsychology*

For several decades, parapsychology in Argentina developed with a parallel background to the other behavioural sciences, which stimulated the analytical interest (i.e. psychoanalysis, social psychology, etc.), and on this basis important therapists found a fertile terrain for theoretical innovations, in spite of frequent opposition from certain social or political sectors. In a sense, parapsychology was born in the middle of this group of new theories, and the present popularization of the word parapsychology in the communication media, daily conversation, and university classroom, is not surprising in the same way as had happened with psychoanalysis. The difference has its roots in the social and cultural situation in which they developed. In the sixties, psychoanalysis became not only a psychotherapeutic popular attraction, but it also polarized the interest of intellectuals and professionals. As a well-known journalist commented (Horvath, 1974, p.12):—

... psychoanalysis invaded the mind and heart of Argentinians. There is not in this city a porteño who has not lain down on a couch: from neurotic bus driver to the most cultivated writer. Everybody agrees unconditionally to relate his intimacies to the mysterious magician with beard and pipe.

Is there any difference between that psychoanalyst and the 'parapsychologist' who offers his services of clairvoyance during office hours? The popularization of parapsychology, and what perhaps is worse, the absolute absence of knowledge of the basic objectives of this discipline, forces us to face with rigour the procedure for providing information about, not only the scientific scope, but also the social influences of this subject. One does not need more evidence than that provided by the media to exemplify the misinformation that causes the paradoxical presence of healers, clairvoyants, tarot experts, quacks, mentalists, among innumerable other denominations, which invoke for themselves the title of 'parapsychologist'. This position is shared by an ample spectrum of scholars of this social problem (Villanueva, 1990) and it has been noted by American parapsychologists (Krippner, 1992), who have described Argentine parapsychology as being confronted by two problems: first, that the few parapsychologists who work seriously are separated; second, that the popular and the academic images of parapsychology are so mixed up that it is hard to distinguish where one begins and where the other ends. Internationally, these two causes do not escape parapsychological observers from other countries, and it is a common crisis. Hence, pseudo-parapsychological activity is not an exclusive characteristic of the 'third world', although other countries may disguise it better.

b) *Pseudo-Science and Pseudo-Parapsychology*

Historically, our country has shown this trend since the seventies, although this kind of situation has roots in the spiritualist stage. Yesterday, the ideological enemies of the parapsychologists were the spiritualists; now the *sceptics* are. In spite of that, parapsychology shares with the other sciences a cultural crisis. One aspect of this is the proliferation of congresses of parapsychology, a socio-cultural phenomenon that reveals the degree of public interest in the possible therapeutic aspects that parapsychology may offer. These sorts of activities are promoted by single individuals or by small groups, supported

by strong publicity, operating by co-ordination and grouping of professional and non-professional activity or with therapy they want to publicize. These activities, usually annual and taking place at weekends, have been closely pursued for the last thirteen years, with significant increases during these last years (in 1981-1987 there were nearly 45 congresses) (Parra, 1995). This level of propagation has reached saturation during the last five years, but still they keep on organizing them, albeit at a lower level.

Unfortunately, the term 'parapsychology' is indiscriminately abused, and there is a massive commercialization of various divination arts, alternative medicine systems, pseudo-religious groups, esoteric literature and other activities. Obviously, in such an environment it would be difficult to attract a scientist, when there is no respectability in parapsychology. The popularization we are referring to exercises a deterrent influence on those for whom parapsychology could become an activity of great scientific interest. At the same time, it is a fundamental reason why university authorities oppose, sometimes energetically, the inclusion of this subject as part of the curriculum. As a consequence, the vicious circle closes up, the snake bites its tail: negative resources are generated in the supply of able professionals to cover the scientific deficit, the interest in parapsychology decreases, and this discourages those who are misinformed about a field whose revenues are practically non-existent. Then, the possibility of attracting funding, as in those countries with great scientific and technological development (i.e. USA and Europe), is remote.

In contrast, going back to the example already cited, psychoanalysis in Argentina came out the stronger because it made clinical activity in psychology more professional and cultivated at a higher level. This came about at a critical stage when psychologists exerted political pressure to the point of almost becoming independent of philosophy and medicine. Independently, it made its activities regular, and overcame the therapeutic and legal limitations in the psychological community as in the case of medicine, neurology and psychiatry. Besides, it enjoyed the collaboration of prestigious foreign psychoanalysts who contributed to the theoretical development and increased literature, which made our country the most important bibliographic source in Ibero-America. Parapsychology in Argentina (if we consider it as a psychological subject, even if it tends to be independent of psychology) does not enjoy the same benefits that helped establish psychoanalysis (Parra, 1992). Recently, there have been attempts to professionalize the work of this kind of 'parapsychologist', but at the moment there is no official response to such request.

c) *The Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal (Argentine Journal of Paranormal Psychology)*

The sources available for scientific advances and educational resources in parapsychology are few. As we related our history, we saw that our country was rather prolific in scientific bibliography, going back to the beginning of this century with Fernández's *Boletín de Experimentación (Research Bulletin)*, Canavesio's *Revista Médica de Metapsíquica (Medical Metapsychic Journal)*, Musso's *Revista de Parapsicología (Parapsychology Review)*, and other publications which, for various reasons, especially economical, have ceased to exist.

Fortunately, the *Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal (RAPP)* coordinates the publication of reports written in Spanish about parapsychology and original papers by recognized American, European and Ibero-American authors (Editorial, 1990). The *RAPP* is distributed to about four hundred universities, public libraries, institutes and centres of psychology and parapsychology in Argentina, and internationally it exchanges with over fifty journals around the world. Reports of experimental research, theoretical papers, historical and philosophical essays, book reviews and details of activities are published. In our country we have very few professionals who have devoted their time to psi activities, but some of them collaborate impartially with the *RAPP*, including José María Feola, Mirta Granero, Anibal Pedroza, Victor Wasserman, Samuel Tarnopolsky, and the valuable contribution of Jorge Villanueva, a distinguished writer on the historical and philosophical implications of parapsychology.

d) *Difficulties of Access to Information and Ways for Better Relationships*

This problem is not unique to parapsychology. Science in Latin America suffers a similar process. However, there has been an important growth in the second part of this century, several times greater than during the first half. To mention all the impediments encountered by Spanish-speaking parapsychologists compared with those of their colleagues in Europe or the US would not necessarily reflect a common difficulty, because of the lack of unity of criteria and goals pursued by some Hispanic parapsychologists. However, lack of funds is a common difficulty. Some of those working in this field have been forced to offer regular courses to the general public in order to obtain support for their studies. Others have had to use whatever free time they had available as they supported themselves through professional or other activities. As a consequence, due to scarce resources for full-time research, there is a limitation of access to the scientific information which is abundantly produced in developed countries. In the case of third-world countries, where fluctuations in economic policy on top of social conflicts and cultural prejudices are the secondary effects of a society in crisis, there are special difficulties, besides those that are universal, when it comes to gaining access to sources of information in parapsychology.

e) *Correct Perspective*

Put together, the scenario of parapsychology in Argentina is not very encouraging. The field has a rich history in this country (Parra, 1990), but it does not have academic recognition. The *Universidad del Salvador* (University of Salvador) gave it up after Enrique Novillo Paulí died in 1989. Now it survives only in a private university, *Universidad John F. Kennedy*, as a fifth-year subject in psychology, and in the *Universidad Nacional del Mar del Plata*, where the topic of 'Paranormal Psychology' has been included as part of psychology.

There are many popular institutes of parapsychology, although only a few do serious work. Examples are the *Centro de Estudios Modernos* (Centre of Modern Studies), the *Instituto de Psicología Paranormal* (Institute of Paranormal Psychology) and the *Instituto Argentino de Parapsicología* (Argentine

Institute of Parapsychology). There are only two research laboratories, the *Laboratorio de Investigaciones Sensoriales y Parasensoriales* (Laboratory of Sensory and Parasensory Research) and the *Instituto Argentino de Psicobiología* (Argentine Institute of Psychobiophysics) in Rafaela, province of Santa Fé. The latter emphasizes psychic healing.

In 1981 we held the *Primer Congreso Argentino de Parapsicología* (First Argentine Congress of Parapsychology) and in 1987 the *Encuentro de Parapsicología* (Encounter with Parapsychology), organized by the Universidad del Salvador. Towards the end of 1994 there took place the *Primer Encuentro Psi 1994: Nuevas Dimensiones de Parapsicología* (First Encounter Psi 1994: New Dimensions of Parapsychology), which brought together many independent experimental researchers. There is only one sceptical organization, which publishes a magazine and has had access to TV programmes.

Argentina has only three specialized journals. These are *Cuadernos de Parapsicología* (published by Naúm Kreiman), *Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal* (from 1990) and *Ciencias del Espíritu* (from 1993). The latter focuses on medical and psychological aspects. There is also an information centre, *ALIPsi*, or the *Agencia Latinoamericana de Información Psi* (Latin-American Agency of Psi Information), which publishes periodical bibliographies.

On the popular level there are many charlatans and much ignorance. As a consequence, most academics are afraid to associate themselves with the field. The term 'paranormal psychology' is less 'violent' and has been used to separate us from the belief that parapsychology is a quasi-psychological and pseudo-religious therapy with some clinical content used for monetary means. The problem is not unique to our country, but can be found all over Latin America and in other parts of the world.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

How could some of these difficulties be resolved? A possible occasional strategy in this direction could be the publication, annually or bianually, of a bibliographical guide in Spanish that would give the researcher in any sub-field of parapsychology access to a net of bibliographical references useful at the moment of professional consultation. *Parapsychology Sources of Information Center*, directed by Rhea A. White, publishes twice a year *Exceptional Human Experience*, reproducing abstracts of articles from almost all publications specializing in parapsychology. On the other hand, as Villanueva (1990) has pointed out, the absence of specialized bibliographical information is a consequence of lack of funds or grants, which could be overcome if important American parapsychological institutions (within the limitations of their funding and economic commitments) would provide materials published by them. This should not necessarily be considered a 'gift' without a minimum effort on the part of the recipient. Frequently, an exchange (as determined freely by the parties) would greatly stimulate future communications, from which the party with fewer resources would benefit the most. English-speaking countries do not know much about foreign parapsychological developments. However, even if only occasionally, it is important to mention the work done in any Spanish-speaking country through journals or newsletters. Certainly, when other colleagues understand the importance—and obviously are agreed

with this position—we will not be far from removing some of the imperfections in our own communications as well as improving our sources of information. Recently, we have been working on a Hispanic-speaking psi information centre which is called *Agencia Latinoamericana de Información Psi (ALIPsi)* (Latin-American Agency of Psi Information). It is a computerized database of the literature of parapsychology published in the Spanish-speaking countries. The data resides in a computer because *ALIPsi* contains the bulk of the parapsychology in the Spanish-language journal literature from 1900 to date—several hundred articles—and the best books about the field. The record of each document in *ALIPsi* consists of bibliographical information. There is also an *Annual Guide*, which is in press, plus Bibliographical Searcher Services, audio/video tapes on parapsychology, translation from English to Spanish language, and an index of selected institutes and associations in this field.

A possible future project may be the formation of a national centre of parapsychological research, or an institute to regulate the experiments to be done, staffed with a team of researchers or professionals well trained in methodology. This centre would also be provided with advanced instrumentation. Another possible future scenario would be to restart Chairs of Parapsychology at various universities; first at the private ones, and later the public ones. Parapsychology is a social science which gains with study and research. It will only bear fruit by opening new vistas in the young minds of university professionals, challenging them to learn a new discipline, linked with psychology, medicine, anthropology, philosophy or religion.

We, the Spanish-speaking parapsychologists, are not a special phenomenon, even if there are particular differences in the objectives we pursue. There can be no doubt that the field that is opening up to research may prove to be a great deal more important than it now appears, and the great majority of unknown researchers, who at present are not yet satisfactorily utilized, may produce important surprises in the not-too-distant future.

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