



**The therapeutic north and south:
Towards new conceptualisations of
therapeutic cultures**

Conference programme

Organising institution

Centro de Investigaciones Sociales (CIS) CONICET-IDES. Buenos Aires, Argentina

Organisers

Mariano Plotkin, CIS (CONICET/IDES) and Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero Buenos Aires,
mplotkin@ides.org.ar

Piroska Csuri, Universidad Nacional de Lanús and Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires,
piroska.csuri@gmail.com

Nicolás Viotti, FLACSO and Universidad Nacional de San Martín, nicolas.viotti@gmail.com

Daniel Nehring, East China University of Science and Technology, dfnehring@hotmail.co.uk

Dates

April 22 and 23, 2021

Venue

Zoom (details TBC):

April 22 – 9-14.30hs:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82379678917?pwd=UHdNNEdhQ3BmNWxINXd4U2xBbXdWQT09>

April 23 – 9-14.30hs:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86466803940?pwd=UXFzNkcwU0lyZWVmSS9RRG42UGlUdz09>

The conference will also be broadcast live on YouTube, at:

www.youtube.com/idesargentina

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcfpYpN-QcenbryucoALPcA>

Programme overview

Note: All times given are Buenos Aires (GMT-3) times.

Day 1		
April 22, 2021		
Panel 1	Therapy, society and the state	
Marsilli Vargas, Xochitl (Emory University)	“What you really mean is...”: Psychoanalytic Listening as a Social Fact in Buenos Aires	9.00 - 9.30
Kristiina Brunila (University of Helsinki)	The Nordic Therapeutic Welfare State and Its Education: Looking beyond the myths of Finland’s reputation	9.30 – 10:00
Carlos Uribe (Universidad de Los Andes)	Psychological Malaise, Social Crisis, and Violence in Colombia's Therapeutic Constellations: An Exploratory Inquiry	10:00 - 10.30
Rodrigo de la Fabian (Universidad Diego Portales)	Algorithmic governmentality and the end of the psychological subject	10:30 – 11:00
Discussion		11:00-11:30
Break		11:30-12:00
Panel 2	The multiplicity of therapeutic cultures	
Edgar Cabanas (Universidad Camilo José Cela, Spain)	Positive education: A new spin towards therapeutic culture	12:00-12:30
Espirito Santo, Diana (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile)	The noise of trauma: analytical bridges between the paranormal and the memory of the political in Chilean historicity	12:30-13:00
Mauro Pasqualini (CIS/CONICET-IDES)	Between the Unconscious and the People: Latin-American Intellectuals in the Crossroads between Psychoanalysis and Politics	13:00-13:30
Mariano Plotkin (CIS/CONICET-IDES. Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero) and Nicolás Viotti (FLACSO-UNSAM) Piroska Csúri (Universidad de Lanús. Universidad de San Andrés)	Multiple ontologies and the place of psychoanalysis in therapeutic constellations in Latin America: The cases of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro	13.30 – 14:00
Discussion		14:00-14:30

Day 2		
April 23, 2021		
Panel 3	Global therapeutic cultures	
Rodrigo Toniol (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)	Minutes of the spirit: the world health organization and its forms of instituting spirituality	9.00 - 9.30
Suvi Salmenniemi (University of Turku, Finland)	Decolonizing Therapeutic Culture?	9.30 – 10:00
Daniel Nehring (ECUST Shanghai, China) and Ashley Frawley (Swansea University, UK)	Therapeutic entrepreneurs and the making of the psychological imagination	10:00-10:30
Discussion		10:30-11:00
Break		11:00-11:30
Panel 4	Gender and therapeutic cultures	
Jane Russo (State University of Rio de Janeiro)	Constructing motherhood: a path from psychoanalysis to the new era	11:30-12:00
Sebastián Benítez (CIS/CONICET-IDES)	¿How to become a man? Hygienic prostitution in the 1920's in Argentina.	12:00-12:30
Jimena Mantilla (CONICET-Instituto de Investigación Gino Germani)	'Therapeutic mothering'. Notes to think 'healing' and 'conscious' notions in Argentina	12:30-13:00
Discussion		13:00-13:30
Break		13:30-14:00
Plenary discussion		14:00-14:30

Panel 1: Therapy, society and the state

“What you really mean is...”: Psychoanalytic Listening as a Social Fact in Buenos Aires.

Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas (Assistant Professor, Emory University)

This presentation analyses how forms of addressivity originated inside the private space of psychoanalytic therapy are embedded and displayed in everyday practices outside the clinical setting, semiotically redefining the boundaries of the private and the public self (Gal 2002) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Psychoanalytic sessions are traditionally understood as a private space established between analyst and analysand, where flows of ideas, free associations, and unconscious awakenings allowed the analysand's conscious apprehension of her most private (unconscious) self. Such a reified private space contrasts with the mediated representations of psychoanalytic forms that have surpassed the clinical setting and entered everyday interactions in Buenos Aires. By analyzing casual interactions and some cultural representations of the psychoanalytic encounters in popular televised and radio shows, as well as graphic humor, I argue that these representations express and foster a *psychoanalytic listening genre* that creates unique forms of communication: one that is less rooted in the performativity associated with speaking than on a particular form of listening based on psychoanalysis. Through the circulation of these mediated forms, the listener/addressee learns to look for meanings that surpass the referential denotation of utterances, or “the real meanings” of enunciations (Benveniste 1958). This semiotic form of interaction addresses a particular kind of self that is ideologically and indexically grounded (Gal & Woolard 1995, Silverstein 1979), creating intimate/private spaces inside distant/public arenas in the course of interaction.

The Nordic Therapeutic Welfare State and Its Education: Looking beyond the myths of Finland's reputation

Kristiina Brunila (AGORA for the study of social justice and equality in education – research centre University of Helsinki)

Over the last three decades, Finland, as one of the Nordic welfare states has undergone significant changes towards a neoliberal emphasis. Therapeutic policies and practices work in accordance with neoliberalisation because they aim at producing resilient citizens who provide for their own needs and practice self-monitoring and self-discipline. In Finland, accordingly, psychologically and therapeutically oriented language has become prevalent in policies and practices including education. In my presentation, I discuss how the neoliberalisation and therapeutic vocabulary and methods have formed a joint framework in education (and beyond) towards more efficient and precise optimization and behavioural management. I argue that neoliberal welfare state reform is not only intensified by the therapeutic ethos, but that the state also acts as a powerful instrument of this reform. The talk is based on over 10 years of study related to therapization and psychologisation of education and beyond.

Psychological Malaise, Social Crisis, and Violence in Colombia's Therapeutic Constellations: An Exploratory Inquiry

Carlos Alberto Uribe (Profesor titular, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Departamento de Antropología, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, DC., Colombia)

Albeit sporadic notes in the mass media, one underrepresented dimension of the current Covid pandemic is its effects upon mental health in Colombia. This is compounded by an already delicate situation in terms of people affected by mental disorders, as official statistical and policy-planning studies have recently documented. Despite the present government disregard of these analyses, there appears to be a close relationship between violent social conflict and certain mental pathologies, not to mention the pandemic, affecting especially certain sectors of the population both in the countryside and the cities. Thus, people resort to wide panoply of therapeutic strategies, which combine them in highly heterogeneous and disparate manners to cope with this critical juncture in their lives. This paper shall endeavour to delve into this complex array of therapeutic constellations which crosscut the therapeutic field across those deemed “scientific”, to those which call upon supernatural or spiritual interventions of a very varied persuasion. This unstable and motley field directly confronts theories of “modernity”, and “modern” subjectivities coming from canonical theories posited in the Global North.

Algorithmic governmentality and the end of the psychological subject

Rodrigo De La Fabián (Department of Psychology, Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago-Chile)

In the West there is a long tradition, dating back at least to the 16th century with Étienne De La Boétie, that has shown the intimate link between power and subjectivity. As John Rajchman points out, subjection to power always need and depend on the “active collaboration” of individuals and their practices of subjectivation. From a Foucauldian perspective, the analytics of governmentality seeks to study the interplay between these two processes -of subjection and subjectivation. It is in this context that “psy knowledges” have played a decisive role in the dissemination of ways of being and conducting the everyday life aligned with contemporary cultural injunctions.

However, the new digital technologies and, more particularly, the algorithmic-mediated way of managing individuals, seem to put into question this way of understanding the link between power, alienation, and freedom. Thus, the new algorithmic ways of governing people, which magically divine our desires, enclose us in imperceptible informational bubbles, and subliminally manage our preferences and decisions, seem to have eradicated what seemed to be an irreducible gap between subjection and subjectivation. In fact, according to Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns, the algorithmic governmentality would manage individuals without the need of hailing any kind of subject, producing a molecular and machinic enslavement. Nevertheless, other scholars have criticized this point of view, showing that algorithms are not just neutral mathematical codes, but complexes assemblages of logical procedures, cultural normativity, and, as Ian Bogost says, even devotional belief. So, from this point of view, algorithmic governmentality still relies on a certain kind of psychologized subject. In this context my presentation proposal seeks to reconstruct this debate about algorithmic governmentality and to critically analyze the destiny of the psychological subject in our contemporary societies.

Panel 2: The multiplicity of therapeutic cultures

Positive education: A new spin towards therapeutic culture

Edgar Cabanas (Universidad Camilo José Cela, Spain)

Happiness has become a far-reaching epidemic phenomenon of tremendous impact in advanced capitalist societies. In the last two decades, the preoccupation with individual well-being, positive emotions, and personal development has increasingly dominated therapeutic goals, managerial strategies, technocratic policies, and educational interventions on a global scale. In this latter regard, the so-called movement of positive education is of particular importance. Promoted by positive psychologists and other happiness scientists, an increasing number of education scholars and professionals have joined around the aim of establishing student happiness as a top educational priority worldwide. The objective of the talk is twofold. First, to examine the positive education movement from a scientific perspective. The talk will focus on the conceptual, methodological, and empirical challenges that have been addressed to the movement in the last decade. Second, the talk will analyze the educational and political consequences that stem from the introduction of positive education as a priority goal in education. Psychology has progressively moved from being a scientific tool for guiding pedagogic strategies to becoming a major agent to decide on educational policies, and the strong introduction of positive psychology in the educational field entails another turn of the screw towards the progressive psychologization of education.

“The noise of trauma: analytical bridges between the paranormal and the memory of the political in Chilean historicity”

Diana Espírito Santo (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile)

In this paper I will deconstruct several levels of the concept of “noise”, by which I refer to the white noise generated by electrical machines used by paranormal investigators. But I also examine the idea of historical sound, as well as the sound of memory, for a recently traumatized and re-politicized Chile, asking how noise can be poised and unraveled as individual and social memory, memory that creates futurities. Of equal importance are silences; the stillness of an absence of spectral presence or voice, which creates its own uncanny version of existence, and the silencing of memory and information, in the case of Chilean dictatorship suffering. While the two are conspicuously different domains of social and historical understanding, I believe that both point to a reconfiguring of sound as both revealing of, and impactful to, a historical consciousness, one where occult, unacknowledged forces figure strongly. I argue, first, for a concept of “noise” that functions as an envelope that relates and connects people with their material environments, feeding into the form of a particular paranormal moment; and second, the notion of a noise that never goes away, a haunting, traumatic reverberation from the past that alters and destroys lives, but that can create the conditions for a new future.

Between the Unconscious and the People: Latin-American Intellectuals in the Crossroads between Psychoanalysis and Politics

Mauro Pasqualini (Cis-Ides, Conicet)

The paper focuses on the relationship between political theory and psychoanalysis in Latin America through three specific cases: the historian and political theorist Ernesto Laclau, the Argentinian psychoanalyst Jorge Alemán, and the Mexican philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst David Pavón Cuellar. Based on the works and political and intellectual itineraries of these authors, the paper explores three basic dimensions: the modes in which these authors combine psychoanalytic theory with other philosophical or theoretical influences –such as gender theory, post-structuralism, or Marxism, –the agenda of issues they address, and their political commitments. Focusing on these three dimensions, the paper tries to respond a series of questions: Is there a specific modality of Latin American political psychoanalysis? What is the extent of these authors' influence on their professions and political groups? What is the potential of their reflections on the field of political theory or social sciences?

Adriana or a case of therapeutic hybridization

Piroska Csúri (Universidad Nacional de Lanús); Mariano Ben Plotkin (CIS-IDES/CONICET-Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero), Nicolás Viotti (CONICET-Universidad Nacional de General San Martín)

It is generally accepted that modernity has introduced a conceptualization of reality organized around a series of polarities associated to dualistic thinking: modernity/tradition; human/non-human; nature/culture, etc. Recently, this vision has been challenged by those who think that knowledge is produced, precisely, in the “in between space” where hybridity takes place. In this paper, part of a larger book-length project on the construction of therapeutic networks in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro we shall focus on one specific therapeutic trajectory of one of our subjects, Adriana, the nature of which will allow us to discuss in depth the very notion of hybridity.

Panel 3: Global therapeutic cultures

The World Health Organization and its ways to enact spirituality

Rodrigo Toniol (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)

This paper is an attempt to advance the understanding of the statements of the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the category of spirituality and, at the same time, to reflect on the analytical force of providing visibility to the term in its capacity as a political device for population management. This text is an attempt to reduce this gap. To do so, I analyze the minutes, official texts, transcripts of speeches, resolutions, and reports, and I reflect about how spirituality was enacted in the institution and, mainly, how this category has been articulated with others, such as culture, religion, rights, and wellbeing. The paper has two main sections. First, I explain some of the questions related to the analysis of “spirituality” in the social sciences of religion and justify why this text can contribute to such debate. Secondly, I dwell on the documents analyzed, presenting them from two axes of variation: the spirituality of Others and the spirituality of All. In the conclusion I outline a set of empirical consequences associated with the “officialization of spirituality” in the WHO. Also, I point to directions that new analytical investments about this topic could follow.

Decolonizing Therapeutic Culture?

Suvi Salmenniemi (University of Turku, Finland)

This paper wishes to initiate a dialogue on decolonization of therapeutic culture. Barring few notable examples, literature on therapeutic culture has largely focused on the Global North, especially the Anglo-American sphere. As a consequence, our understanding of therapeutic culture and its historical formation tends to be rooted in a particular Western experience and context. How would our understanding of therapeutic culture, as well as our theoretical categories and methodological approaches, look like if we decentered this Eurocentric view and examined therapeutic culture, its histories, manifestations and effects from the perspective of Global South?

This paper addresses this question by engaging in dialogue with post/decolonial theories. It advances three points. First, it suggests that there is a pressing need for research on therapeutic culture and psy technologies in the Global South. Second, it argues that it is not enough just to address the world beyond the West, but also to critically interrogate the theoretical and epistemological assumptions underpinning our current conceptions of therapeutic culture. The Global South should not only be treated as a source of new data, but as offering a valuable analytical vantage point from which to rethink mainstream theorization of therapeutic culture. As sociologist Gurinder Bhambra has persuasively argued, the pluralisation of 'other' voices in fields previously dominated by particular voices is not enough, but we need to call into question the structures of knowledge. We need to question the assumption that the Euro-American experience is the self-evident foundation while other histories can only provide local colour to this foundational narrative. Thus, experiences and histories from Global South should not be squeezed to the Eurocentric theoretical models, but allow them to speak back to and reconstruct these models. Third, the paper suggests that more research is needed on the transnational movement of therapeutic culture. Therapeutic knowledges and techniques travel not only from Global North to Global South, but involve multiple different flows, trajectories and circulation, tracking of which would deserve more scholarly attention.

Therapeutic entrepreneurs and the making of the psychological imagination

Daniel Nehring (East China University of Science and Technology) and Ashley Frawley (Swansea University, UK)

Recent scholarship on therapeutic cultures has devoted considerable attention to the international expansion of a mental health and wellbeing industry. This mental health and wellbeing industry is concerned with the commercialisation and marketing of happiness discourses and attendant therapeutic, psychological, religious, and spiritual, services and products. In this context, insufficient attention has been devoted to the role which therapeutic entrepreneurs play in the popularisation and commercialisation of therapeutic discourses and practices. By therapeutic entrepreneurs we mean scholars, spiritual and religious leaders, and other public figures who engage, both as producers and disseminators, in the entrepreneurial mobilisation of therapeutic knowledge for commercial gain. Analysing the work of therapeutic entrepreneurs, we pursue two objectives in this paper: First, we ask how therapeutic entrepreneurs participate in the popularisation of therapeutic knowledge and practices across a range of non-specialist institutional domains. Second, on this basis we consider how therapeutic entrepreneurs participate in the public promotion of the 'psychological imagination' as a socio-culturally salient mode of understanding and experiencing everyday life. Addressing these questions, we draw on empirical data on the emergence and expansion of mindfulness as a popular psychological fashion in the United Kingdom.

Panel 4: Gender and therapeutic cultures

Constructing the new motherhood: a path from psychoanalysis to the new era

Jane A. Russo (Universidade do Rio de Janeiro - UERJ)

“Humanized childbirth” is a contemporary development of the natural childbirth movement that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. It shares with it the challenge of traditional obstetrics, seeking to give back to women the leading role in childbirth, based on the assertion of a previous feminine nature responsible for the natural course of childbirth. The idea is that “the woman knows how to give birth and the baby knows how to be born”. The search for this prior nature brings the humanized birth movement close to the “new era” cosmology, as some authors point out. The “new motherhood” is strongly linked to the humanized childbirth movement, combining a set of both behavioral and bodily care of the baby, demanding a high degree of attention and dedication. In this presentation I will discuss the coexistence of different theories and beliefs that support the ideal of humanized childbirth and the new motherhood, focusing especially on a certain aspect of child rearing that owes its strength to a theory produced within psychoanalysis – the attachment theory, created by John Bowlby in the 1950s.

¿How to become a man? Hygienic prostitution in the 1920's in Argentina.

Sebastián M. Benítez (Centro de Investigaciones Sociales (CONICET-IDES))

The aim of this work is to present and analyse the medical debates regarding the role of prostitution as a *hygienic practice* regarding men's sexuality in the 1920s in Argentina. From a historical-critical method we will consider the *southern* reception of the evolutionism and ideas of *mental hygiene* that had a considerable importance on this topic. On the one hand, prostitution was thought of as a “necessary evil”, in which the regulation of brothels could serve as a strategy for its hygienic regulation for preventing perversion; on the other hand, prostitution was presented as an unusual source of sexual and genetic perversions, with arguments that questioned the exercise of sexuality focused exclusively on the pleasure of the bodies.

The characterization of men as carriers of an indomitable sexual instinct, was consistent with the hegemonic visions of masculinity as they were configured, considering that the exercise of sexuality for men became practically inevitable. The social damage within the possibility of spreading venereal diseases and their moral implications for the community was the other side of this debate. Articulated with the tensions raised by the disputes regarding prostitution, some ideas also appeared concerning the exercise of sexuality with prostitutes as a form of *sexual gymnastics* that would allow to counteract the menace of homosexuality and the corruption of women before marriage.

This tension contributed to an idea of masculinity that was linked to a constant virile impulse, which was translated to a sexual drive that had to be solved throughout prostitution, even if that endangered the social order. The naturalization of sexual desire and its redirection to a biological phenomenon, derived from the very structure of the genetic cells, was a way of solidifying an image of hegemonic, heterosexual, and heroic masculinity, linked to the conquest of women. The danger of *uranism* was a long-standing topic in the discussions of expert psychological knowledge, which was responded to with a series of legal and medical intervention strategies. If at puberty the appearance of normal and involutive impulses occurred in various proportions, the prophylaxis of aberrant behaviours was given through the exaltation of seduction rituals and the sexual initiation through hygienic practices. Although the Law of Social Prophylaxis, enacted in 1936,

banned prostitution, the practice of sexual initiation in brothels continued to be common for men. The discussion even took on new force after the events that occurred with the scandal of the military cadets in 1942 and the idea of homosexuality as a destination due to the lack of premarital sexual satisfaction.

'Therapeutic mothering'. Notes to think 'healing' and 'conscious' notions in Argentina

María Jimena Mantilla (CONICET-IIGG)

This presentation focuses on how the concepts of 'healing' and 'conscious' are used to reshape the experiences of motherhood. Through childbirth supportive groups, raising children counseling and doula's emotional support among others activities women learn to build their experiences as mothers in the key of personal growth, self-development and spiritual healing.

In this work, I examine the meaning of these notions while I point out the creation of new normative ideals that liberate as well as constrain the experiences of women. The presentation is part of an ongoing qualitative research in which I analyze from a sociological perspective the experience of mothers who practices "attachment parenting" and "respectful parenting" in Buenos Aires. This style of parenting involves "full-term breastfeeding", co-sleeping, baby-led weaning, baby wearing, among the main practices. Through this reflection I hope to contribute to understanding the growing prominence of therapeutic discourses in everyday life.