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# A Psychoanalytic Tango: Recent Developments in Psychoanalysis in Argentina

## Summary

A general outline of the history of psychoanalysis in Argentina and its impact upon Argentinean culture is presented. After some introductory steps taken by local psychiatrists and immigrants who had completed their training in Europe, the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association was founded. The influence of Kleinism theoretically on contributions by leading figures is developed; a certain limiting, restrictive dogmatism is commented on, also as the basis for the overall enthusiastic reception with which Lacan's ideas were subsequently met, and further developed, by members of the several Lacanian Associations not belonging to the IPA. And, in the public sphere, the essential role of psychoanalysts in public hospitals and community centers in sustaining subjectivity in those very places where technology overwhelmingly threatens it, is presented.

An Argentinean psychoanalyst (1) invites a foreigner traveling throughout Latin America – but ending up in Buenos Aires – to perform an experiment: to ask the taxi drivers fetching him at the airports in every city whether they are familiar with Freud or Lacan.

“I don't know,” would be the likely response most everywhere. If either author is studied or mentioned in the faculties of psychology in Latin American universities, it is only fleetingly!

But not in Buenos Aires... where he will certainly encounter a strange phenomenon. A taxi driver there will promptly deliver – at no extra charge – a full lecture on the three phases of the Oedipus Complex, on the deferred action within the Unconscious, Castration (repression – disavowal – foreclosure), or on the Argentinean “minas” (= chicks) and their relationship with feminine supplementary jouissance (2.)

The cause does not lie only in the economic crisis, which has forced some professionals to drive taxis to survive. The tendency to interpret analytically is as inflated as is the number of practicing analysts. And in no university faculty of psychology does psychoanalysis play such an overwhelming role as in Buenos Aires. A good majority – if not all – of graduating students are apt to devote themselves to analytic practice. A certain neighborhood in the city has been nicknamed “Villa Freud” – as one can be sure that one apartment out of three is bound to be an analytic consulting room.

How did this come about? How did Freud attain such a firm position within Argentinean culture? And how did the passionate Argentinean devotion to Freud come to be ?

Before we consider these questions – which, in all probability, will remain forever unanswered – let us consider the history of psychoanalysis's introduction in Argentina and its consequences.

## I. The beginnings

In the 1920s, following university reforms, studying for a career usually represented a good way of improving the social status of the offspring of the middle class or immigrants, whom the land-owning

aristocracy definitely excluded. Thus, student registration continuously increased; and medicine was one of the most coveted careers. Professional associations soon became necessary to control professional standards and practice. During this process, psychiatry was one of the last specialties to appear independently. The study of psychotherapy, however, was not introduced until 1928 (a delay which might have resulted from the French influence on study programs).

In the 1930s, a small group of psychiatrists began to discuss Freud's theories, which were available in Spanish as early as 1922 thanks to the efforts of the essayist Ortega y Gasset, who had urged a Spanish publishing house to translate them (incidentally, Ortega often visited Argentina).

This group of psychiatrists gathered regularly at the outdoor cafés of Calle Florida, where many Argentinean intellectuals used to meet. There, one would inevitably see Girondo, Borges or Bioy Casares. And among the psychiatrists, Gregorio Berman, Professor at the University of Córdoba, and Jorge Thénon, who had actually corresponded with Freud.

After World War II the immigrants arrived, among whom Ángel Garma, who had completed his full analytic training at the Berlin Institute. The young pediatrician Arnaldo Raskovsky began analysis with Garma, as did Guillermo Ferrari Hardoy with Celes Ernesto Cárcamo, who had done his training in Paris (the scion of a rich land-owning family, he was expected to study in France!). Soon afterwards Marie Langer arrived from Vienna, also with full analytic training to her credits, and regularly attended the meetings.

An initial separation took place. On the one hand, there were those who acknowledged the authority of only the established medical associations and refused to submit to any "training analysis" whatsoever: psychoanalysis had to be a technique among several others, with no special guidelines of its own (Berman, Thénon). On the other hand, there were the future founding members of the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association (APA), who considered psychoanalysis an independent professional activity. Cárcamo and Garma began a correspondence with Ernest Jones, then President of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), and these letters would establish the IPA's first official acknowledgment of the Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina as a member institution.

Meanwhile, the physicians of the first group had lost any interest in psychoanalysis, or had even become its enemies (for various reasons, among which was the rejection of Freud's work by the Communist Party's ukaz as "bourgeois-reactionary").

## **II. The APA's theoretical orientation: Buenos Aires, "The Kleinian City"**

Enrique Pichon Rivière, one of the early members of the new institution, and the head of the psychiatric ward of one of the city's huge asylums, the Hospicio de las Mercedes, attempted once more to obtain the recognition of psychoanalysis by psychiatrists (3). But it was his wife, Arminda Aberastury, who would bring about a significant change in the APA's theoretical outlook. In 1945, when she began an intensive correspondence with Melanie Klein, she was unaware of the "Klein – Anna Freud Controversies" which had nearly split the British Association (4). She translated Klein's writings into Spanish and became her totally committed representative and advocate. Only later would she meet Mrs. Klein personally in London. Many Argentinean psychoanalysts followed in her steps and made the London pilgrimage. Indeed, Mrs. Klein's theories gradually became the nucleus of a strict, unshakable dogmatism.

A witness to these times spoke of "import and export": we Argentineans import English and French analytic theories, with which to colonize the remaining Latin American countries. An Argentinean analyst supposedly met Mrs. Klein and most proudly informed her that 345 analysts in Buenos Aires unconditionally embraced her theory. What is more, if ever a "trainee" ventured to voice any doubt, he was immediately expelled: obviously, insurmountable resistance would have prevented him from ever becoming an analyst (5). The study of Freud's writings gradually lost importance, with his name remaining only an empty coat-of-arms.

The accentuation of the Imaginary, of the dual relationship – the more evident characteristics of the Kleinian system – crossed all boundaries. What Lacanians would call the Symbolic register became degraded to a one-dimensional symbolism. The castration complex was forgotten, since the primacy of the Phallus was incomprehensible without a logic of the Symbolic; instead, it was (mis-)interpreted as a mere cultural sign of male domination at the turn-of-the-century (as post-Freudism usually did).

Every member was faced with the plight of having to distinguish himself by making a special “contribution” (the history of analytic development had to be thus the sum of all post-Freudian “contributions”). Ángel Garma introduced originary fantasies as the cause of the so-called psychosomatic illnesses, in particular the stomach ulcer. Arminda Aberastury postulated a new developmental stage, the “previous genital phase”, which coincided with the appearance of the first teeth. These theoretical models were related to Klein’s attempt to shift the Oedipus complex continuously further backwards. A good example of the extremes that were reached was Arnaldo Raskovsky, who ventured to describe the psychic world of the fetus (and wrote an entire book about it). Later on, he tried to establish the murder of the sons (filicide) as the universal explanation of all individual and social phenomena; he even created a Society for its prevention. Marie Langer studied the feminine psyche. Her most well-known book was *Maternity and Sex*. One of its chapters was an abridged (self-censored) version of a former paper, “The myth of the roast child and other myths on Eva Perón”, the original, complete version of which presented a thoroughly interesting attempt of a psychoanalytic interpretation of political events. Following Mrs. Klein’s idea that behind any neurosis an infantile psychosis may be found, José Bleger studied the “psychotic nucleus of the personality”. He afterwards concocted an exceptionally strange mixture of Marxism, American Behaviorism and elements of Politzer’s critique of psychoanalysis.

Last but not least, let us mention Heinrich Racker (one of the few authors to be extensively translated into English). Probably unaware of the controversy between Klein and her pupil Paula Heimann, Racker fostered a conception of counter-transference as a technical device, rather than an obstacle which should be lifted away (as much as possible) through training- or self-analysis. He thought that the moment a training analysis was concluded, the analyst would remain entirely “free” from his unconscious, so that any feelings (of Klein’s two types, either paranoid or depressive) he had during the analytic hour were nothing else but the patient’s product, which had automatically reached the analyst by means of “projective identification”. These feelings would then constitute the basis of the analyst’s interpretation; he only had to say this interpretation aloud. This technical recipe was then added to a simplified rendering of Strachey’s well-known “mutative interpretation” paper: the interpretation merits being called “analytic” only when it explains the transference “here and now”. These procedures were carried so far that, in the end, the patient’s speech became as unnecessary as Freud’s texts.

The Klein scholar Donald Meltzer visited Buenos Aires to lecture and supervise. His stay also produced a few side effects. Meltzer exposed his views on the analytic setting, and many analysts understood this to mean that the patient should not perceive even the slightest modification, the tiniest detail, from one session to another. These analysts became the setting’s obsessive-compulsive neurotics.

### **III. Psychoanalysis in the public sphere**

In 1956, the country’s first Faculty of Psychology was established in Rosario (in the province of Santa Fe). The following year saw the creation of the profession of psychologist in Buenos Aires. Many APA training analysts were asked to lecture as professors; indeed, this increased the attraction of psychoanalysis for students.

Previously however (1952), a resolution of Health Minister Ramón Carrillo – in Perón’s government – had restricted the practice of psychoanalysis to physicians. However, it was in reality impossible to control the private consulting rooms; nevertheless, the APA was allowed to accept only physicians as trainees. The training analysts who taught at the Faculty of Psychology were obliged to follow a bizarre practice: whilst teaching that psychoanalysis was the human soul’s best and most scientific explanation and therapy, they simultaneously discouraged psychologists from practicing it, since this would ruin their “professional identity as psychologists”. This admonition, which naturally produced a forbidden fruit effect as regards psychoanalysis, was, of course, wholly in vain. Although unaccepted by the “official” Association, practically all graduate psychologists underwent analysis with a training analyst, took patients in charge, and were supervised by another analyst. The proliferation of the “unofficial” analytic societies had begun! An important turning point came in 1956, as a consequence of progress made by the Mental Health Organization. An exceptional psychiatrist, Mauricio Goldenberg – himself not a psychoanalyst but an eminent friend and mentor to many young psychoanalysts – created for the first time in Argentina a

department of Psychopathology within a General Hospital (6). It was a complete and immediate success. Shortly afterwards, no hospital lacked this Department. Up until then, all mental illnesses were referred to the big psychiatric asylums; now at last, it had become possible to consider psychiatry as a specialty like any other within the General Hospital. In the course of these developments, psychologists were acknowledged as legitimate therapists or psychoanalysts in the Departments (the APA did not act until 1983, when legal recognition finally came). Psychoanalysts were thus provided the hitherto unheard-of possibility of introducing analysis in a provocative, unfamiliar and thoroughly new setting.

#### **IV. The split: politics and psychoanalysis**

The year 1973 featured much political upheaval, distress and trouble. The military government was ousted as a result of free elections which were overwhelmingly won by Peronist candidate Héctor Cámpora. By that time, two armed organizations had emerged: a Peronist leftist armed force, the “Montoneros”, and the extreme left People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP) – the latter in opposition to the Peronist party. A group of APA analysts with a Marxist orientation – their most prominent member was again Marie Langer – began criticizing the Association on account of the reactionary, closed, power-oriented character of its organization. In the end, the Association split and two groups formed, “Plataforma” and “Documento”, which appeared separately at conferences abroad (7).

With Perón’s return, the right wing faction of the Peronist Party assumed power. However, after Perón’s death, the military coup that eliminated the chaotic remainders of the constitutional government brought about a complete end to the dream of reuniting psychoanalysis with a project of Marxist society. Argentina experienced the most violent state terrorism in its history. The ensuing military dictatorship lasted over six years (including the war with Great Britain) and cost the lives of 30,000 “missing” souls, among them many analysts. Some of these managed to escape into exile – one of whom was Marie Langer – thus avoiding concentration camps, torture and murder (8).

#### **V. Return to Freud**

Another event would entirely change the history of psychoanalysis in Argentina. In 1964, Pichon Rivière handed over some papers by Lacan to his outstanding pupil, Oscar Masotta (9), commenting briefly: “Perhaps you’ll be able to do something with this...”

And something he did indeed. In the course of studying the French analyst’s methods and proposals, he read Freud’s original texts in German, and compared them with Strachey’s English rendering as well as with the Spanish edition. An ever increasing group of scholars began to gather around him, and together they established in 1974 the Freudian School of Buenos Aires. Lacan’s works enjoyed a consideration and influence seldom found outside France. The analytically oriented psychologists who had been denied entry to the APA now had impressive means with which to declare the old institution not only politically reactionary, but also invalid on theoretical issues (10).

Two essays which appeared at that time are worth mentioning. Luis Ernetta’s paper, “On the so-called theory-of-technique”, demonstrated how Freud’s technical writings had been degraded to elementary recipes in the APA seminars, and how the “training analysts” abused them as secrets to ensure their positions of power. And Juanqui Indart employed linguistic methods to analyze the mechanism of interpretation within the Kleinian system. In his paper, “... because [ why?] a cup is the breast”, he uses examples taken from Hanna Segal’s popular booklet, Introduction to the work of Melanie Klein, and unmask the interpretations as “simultaneous translations”.

Supposing that behind a text (e. g. the dream that a patient narrates during an analytic session: let’s call it T1) is concealed another, “unconscious” text (let’s call this one T2). To obtain the latter from the former, it suffices to

1. choose a word out of T1
2. change it for an allegoric term
3. change the rest of the terms in T1 maintaining the coherence with the meaning of the chosen allegoric term.

### **A model of this “interpretation-machine”:**

T1: “The President of the Republic tries to overcome the country’s serious social crisis. He hopes to accelerate the economic development and achieve national unity...” etc.

First operation of the machine: metaphoric substitution of a noun (“symbol” , or, to be more exact, “allegory”)

President = Captain

Second operation: all the remaining metaphoric substitutions within the domain “ships and the sea “, resulting in

T2: “The ship’s captain in his attempt to weather the heavy storm at sea, hopes to accelerate the ship’s speed and to reach the harbor...” etc.

### **Now let us compare the mechanism with an example of dream interpretation taken from Segal’s handbook:**

T1 : “He ate his porridge out of a nice cup... but when he started eating, he felt disgust and anxiety, as he found three things inside the porridge which cut his lips... The three objects were: a broken cross, a torn money-purse...” etc.

First operation:

Segal: “... because a cup is the breast” (italics by Indart)

The second operation delivers:

T2: “He ate out of a nice breast... but when he started to eat he felt disgust and anxiety as he found three objects inside the breast, ... The three objects were: a broken penis, a torn vagina...” etc.

The remaining examples strictly follow this procedure.

In the course of his paper, Indart refers to Borges’ essay, “The Kenningar” (“Ancient Germanic Literature”). The same mechanism, allegory, may be found in the Scandinavian poetic form, the “kenningar”. Although Borges refers to them as “forgotten flowers of language”, he also adds that they lack any aesthetic value. “They do not encourage dreaming, they elicit neither images nor passions”, i. e. , they result in a dogmatic routine of continuous impoverishment.

The consequences of forgetting Freud were brought to light: Argentine-Kleinian routines did not consider the metapsychological structure presented in the “Traumdeutung” as a grammar of the Unconscious – or, to borrow an expression of Lacan, the primacy of the signifier.

Of course, this inevitably resulted in not only a discussion of the central concepts of Kleinian psychoanalysis, but also a thorough and new working through of the entire psychoanalytic theory as such. All Lacan’s seminars, including those not yet officially edited, are available in accurate Spanish translations.

Perhaps unfortunately so, Masotta restricted himself in his subsequent writings to an exegesis of Lacan. The creative spark that shone in his first books apparently was changed into an exhausting apologetic activity. And finally, he was neither protected against nor spared by the effects of an identification with the bureaucracy of the institution that he had so severely criticized. He interpreted Lacan’s “Proposition of October, 1967” in the sense of a dictatorship. He himself bestowed the grades of A.E. (Analyste de l’Ecole) and A.M.E. (Analyste Membre de l’Ecole) on his chosen pupils, dispensing with the procedure of the passe, and thus altogether omitting the Jury that Lacan suggested (11).

Years later, Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan’s son-in-law and heir, frequently visited Buenos Aires, where he created a branch of his own international association, the School of Lacanian Orientation (E. O. L.). Recently, a psychiatric journal (Vertex) issued the transcription of the dialogue between Miller and Ricardo Horacio Etchegoyen, the first South American President in the history of the IPA. This meeting would appear to be the first “official” acknowledgment of Lacan after his expulsion from the IPA. And it had to take place in Buenos Aires...

What are the current prospects of psychoanalysis in Argentina? Following the increased diffusion of Lacanism, which now threatens to become yet another banalisation of the seminal Freudian concepts, it is

sometimes difficult to distinguish mere imitators from original thinkers. It might also be important to recover our own history, the developments and toils of our APA “ancestors”, in the sense of Goethe’s motto which Freud, too, cherished (12). If not, we shall again find ourselves on the verge of transforming transient theories into dogmatic straightjackets (13).

But the answer, perhaps, may be found in analytic clinical practice, which – according to Lacan – is nothing else but “what is said in the course of an analysis”, and in the writings which reflect this practice’s consequences. Undoubtedly, a new clinical dimension is emerging, having little in common with the rigid rules and standards of the old institution.

Public hospitals probably furnish one of the best possibilities for this practice. It is in everyday contact with many suffering subjects, with other professionals of the health sciences, and with other analysts, that the challenge of psychoanalysis may be met (14).

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## Notes:

(1 ) Jorge Zanghellini, *El psicólogo como formación* (The making of a psychologist). Contexto en *Psicoanálisis* No. 1 (La Plata: Ediciones La Campana, 1996), p. 81.

(2 ) Jacques Lacan, “Dieu et la Jouissance de la Femme” , VI. Lecture of Seminaire XX, “Encore” (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 61.

(3 ) In the initial history of the APA, Pichon Rivière succeeded entirely, through an analytic cure, to free the General Manager of Muñoz Enterprises from a severe agoraphobia. Muñoz, the wealthy owner of this enterprise, instantly became a benefactor of psychoanalysis. His grants assured the publication of the *Argentine Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 4 volumes a year, 5,000 copies each.

Pichon’s theoretical and practical behaviour was always eclectic. Oscar Masotta compared him to a physician of the Far West, who has to know and do everything: pull out a bullet, attend a delivery, operate on tonsils, bury the dead. But he gradually lost interest in psychoanalysis. Without quitting the Association, but, indeed, keeping his distance, he founded a School for Social Psychology and had several pupils.

(4) This ignorance had catastrophic consequences. In 1945, when sending her first letter to Mrs. Klein, Arminda Aberastury asked her to publish her first paper in the *International Journal*. However, she was unaware of having committed an unpardonable blunder. In the paper she had quoted both Mrs. Klein and Anna Freud alike. Mrs. Klein immediately replied that the article did not meet the international standards, and was thus unfit for publication. Arminda’s ensuing behaviour may be understood as a transference symptom. She pursued lifelong the ideal of a pure, unstained standard, and relentlessly demanded an unchanged, strict technique from all her trainees, who at times found her healthy and light-hearted, saying that she did not believe in any chronologic development, knowing 80-year old youngsters and 14-year old adults. But it was insufficient or in vain. In 1974 she committed suicide.

(5 ) Another accurate description of the Argentinian atmosphere regarding imports was accomplished many years later by Ricardo Estacolchic in his short narrative, “The misfortunes of Psychologist Antenor Pérez” (in: *Apuntes clínicos de un psicoanalista*). A scholar from the country’s remote south, having moved to the Capital to study further, attempts to lecture on his life effort’s output at a Conference. Only 4 people attend the lecture (2 friends plus 2 ladies) but these quickly shift to the other room, where a French guest at the Conference has 3,500 eager and excited spectators plus security personnel and a Moving Intensive Care Unit.

(6 ) Policlínico “Prof.Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro” (formerly – and later, ever alternating – “Eva Perón”), Lanús, Province of Buenos Aires.

(7 ) Marie Langer caused an enduring impression on her Viennese colleagues. New theories from France left her unmoved: despectively, she told me, “Lacanians are all nuts”.

(8 ) I was a Resident in the above-mentioned Policlínico Lanús, and on duty the day a psychologist was kidnapped by an illegal military group. Mauricio Goldenberg had already transferred to the Hospital Italiano, where he had created the Psychopathology Department; however, he had to escape and go abroad. As Head of the Department in Lanús he had appointed Dr. Valentín Barembliit, my unforgettable master and friend, who also escaped – after having been kidnapped and tortured – and went to Barcelona, where he now lives and works.

(9 ) Masotta wasn’t then a psychoanalyst: he had started out as a journalist, essayist and artist. He had organised “happenings” in the Instituto Di Tella, a well-known avant-garde centre for the Arts, and had written outstanding books on the Argentine writer Roberto Arlt, on Conscience and Structure, on comic strips, etc.

(10) The EFBA issued its own Journal, “Cuadernos Sigmund Freud”; soon, several publications would follow, discussing the new orientation: *Imago* (Letra Viva Editorial), *Conjetural*, etc. In turn, these were followed, subsequently, by the editions of J.A.Miller’s school: *Uno por uno*, *El caldero de la Escuela*, usw.

(11) Masotta as well was forced to go into exile (in 1976). In Spain he resumed all his activities up until his premature death from cancer. A strange phenomenon: Lacanian psychoanalysis had to cross the Atlantic Ocean twice to arrive in Spain.

(12) “Was du geerbt von deinen Vätern hast, erwirb es, um es zu besitzen” (What you have inherited from thy fathers, strive to acquire it in order to possess it).

(13 ) Examples of the two possibilities: Mr. X’s analysis by the American analyst Heinz Kohut appeared in the French edition with a Prologue by Serge Cottet, in which he cannibalistically ravaged Kohut’s sad lines. Otherwise was the case of Kohut’s coountryman John Muller, who re-interprets the analysis in a propiciatory, pacifying way.

In 1933 the Argentine analyst and member to the EFBA, Silvia Fendrik, issued her book Misfortunes of Psychoanalysis in which she interprets Aberastury’s “previous genital phase” as an attempt to reestablish the phallic reference.

In this context, the book by Ricardo Estacolchic and Sergio Rodríguez Pollerudos: destinos de la sexualidad masculina is a delightful and hilarious analysis of the (ruinous remainders of the) Argentine male’s classical macho position.

(14) In this context we shall mention a new Journal, “Psicoanálisis y el Hospital” (2 vols. a year, until now 15 volumes) edited by the young psychoanalyst Mario Pujó, issuing papers by analysts actively practising in all the city’s Public Hospitals, those throughout the country and abroad. Pujó has been able to create an intense discussion forum, which we hope may keep its activity and deliver good results.