

# “MIND, MAGIC, AND MENTAL DISORDER: WAYS OF KNOWING IN MEXICAN *CURANDERISMO*”



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April 11, 2018, 5:30-7:00

Building 50, Room 51A

This paper offers a comprehensive, epistemological reading of the ways of knowing regarding mental disorders that are characteristic of the traditional healers (*curanderas* and *curanderos*) of an indigenous group in Mexico – together with some consideration of similarities and differences when compared with contemporary Western psychology and psychiatry. The study is based on numerous ethnographic interviews with traditional *P’urepecha* healers in rural Michoacán, interviews focused on local conceptions of emotional and mental disorder, especially *nervios*, *susto*, and *locura* (nerves, fright, and madness). The highly metaphorical, often magical modes of understanding characteristic of these healers have affinities with the Renaissance episteme described in Michel Foucault’s classic study of modes of knowing in Western thought, *The Order of Things*. Also discussed is what cultural and psychological anthropologists term the “rationality debate”: the precise nature of native peoples’ belief in supernatural phenomena, and the role of epistemological skepticism in their accounts. The paper raises several classic issues in cultural anthropology, issues also central to the current “ontological turn” in the field.

## Cultures, Minds and Medicines

The Cultures, Minds and Medicines workshop series meets four to five times each term on Wednesdays from 5:30-7 for dinner and talks about culture and healing. We hear from artists, scientists, ethnographers, literature scholars and more, with the goal of understanding not only what they say, but also what counts as data for them and how they understand their task in communicating to their primary audience. Talks take place in Anthropology, Building 50, room 51A (the conference room).

The workshop is associated with a certificate program for graduate students. Students must attend the biweekly workshops in Cultures, Minds and Medicines over the course of a year, and take at least one relevant course outside of their degree-granting program, as approved by the faculty certificate committee. In most cases, non-anthropologists should enroll in a graduate level anthropology course, and anthropologists should enroll in a course in medicine, psychology or some other discipline.

For students enrolled in the class each quarter, the requirement is to attend the workshops.

### Spring 2018 Seminars:

**April 18:** Joel Robbins  
(Cambridge University)

**May 9:** Amrapali Maitra (Stanford University)

**May 16:** Philippe Descola (Collège de France)

**May 30:** Courtney Handman (The University of Texas at Austin)