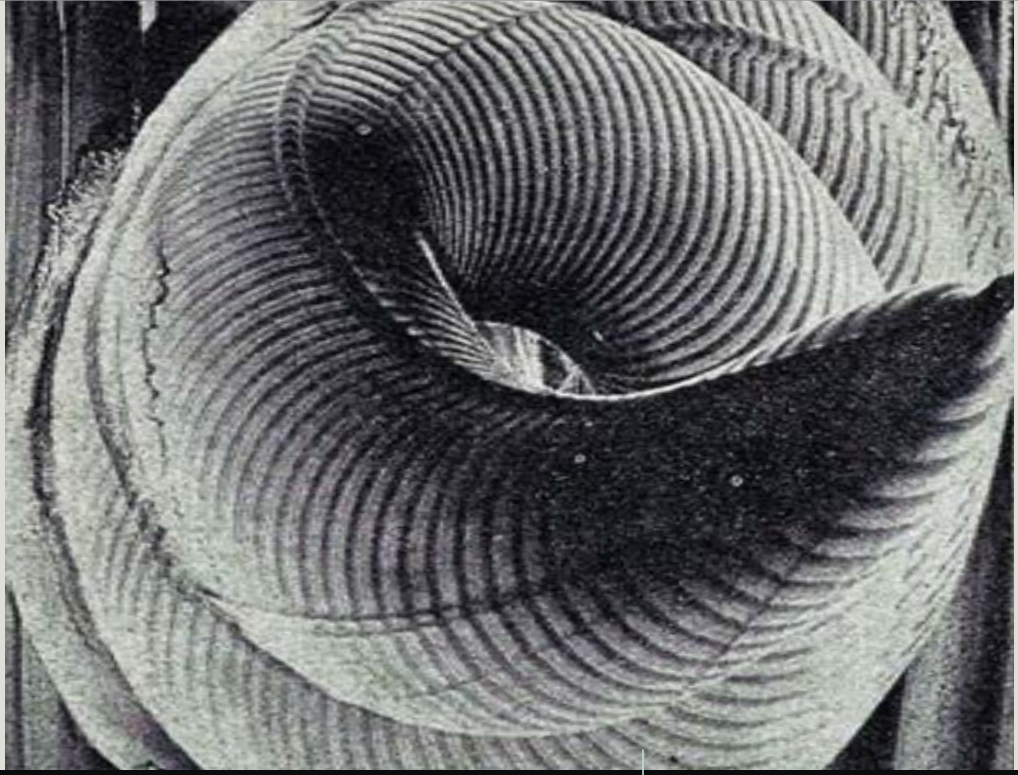
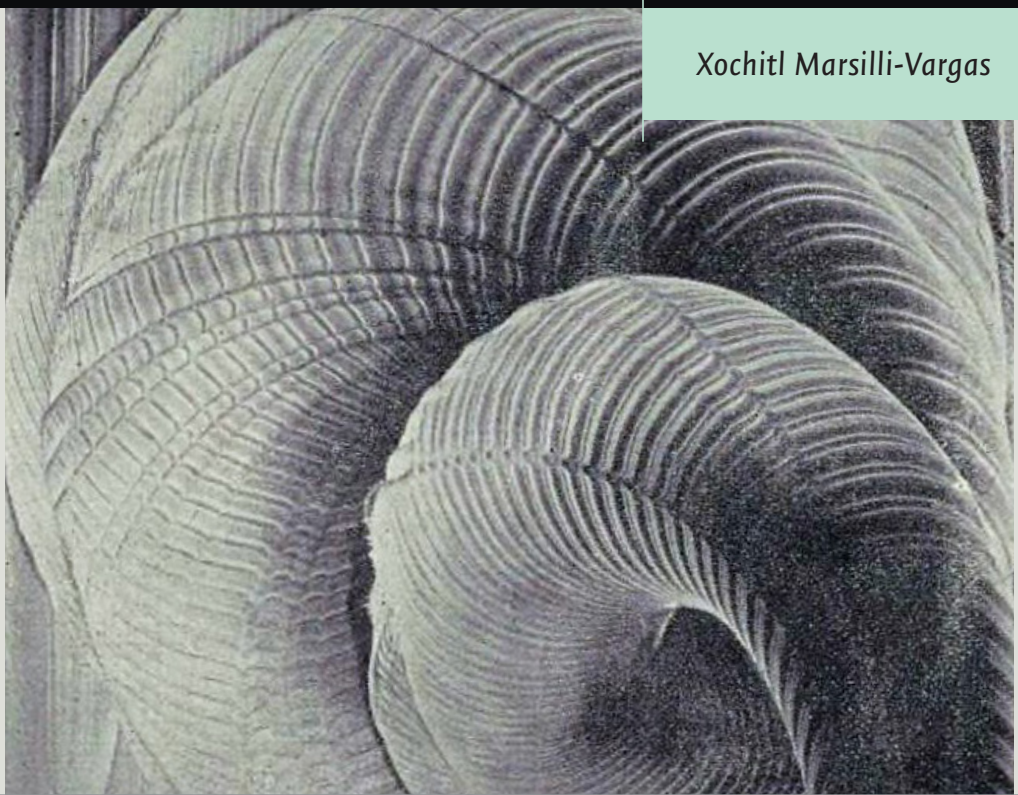


GENRES OF LISTENING

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN BUENOS AIRES

Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas



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To Oskar

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

All names are pseudonyms unless they appear with a last name.

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Introduction

A City of Listeners

Anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without this kind of openness for one another there is no genuine human relationship. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1989)

"That doesn't sound right." (No me suena bien.)

Popular saying

Buenos Aires is a city of listeners. *Porteños,* as its inhabitants are called, listen carefully to each other's stories, declarations, silences, and testimonies. In some cases, they listen only to the words and their established meanings; in others, they try to *resonate* with their interlocutors by listening to "that which is not said," offering an interpretation—or translation—of the unspoken words latent in the speaker's speech. This particular way of listening is learned and is based on the idea of the unconscious proposed by psychoanalysis. In the clinic, a psychoanalyst would attempt to achieve a "state of resonance," meaning that the analyst would listen to the words of the analysand (i.e., patient), trying to go beyond the mere denotations of the words to grasp the "real" motives and possible intentions behind the uttered statements. The proposition is that words have hidden meanings that are discernible only to the listener who, much like a radio frequency,

tunes in with the unconscious of the speaker and is able to listen, not only with the ears but with the body as a whole. Listening to the unconscious is thus an embodied experience where sensations, affective states, "gut feelings," and intuitions roam freely to connect with the hidden meaning of the words expressed by the analysand. Although *resonating* with someone else's speech might seem to belong to the realm of the unexpected, the sensible, or the uncanny, it is highly structured. Psychoanalysts are skilled listeners who have developed a variety of listening methodologies to find the undisclosed in speech (see Akhtar 2013; Freud [1912] 1958; Isakower 1939; Lacan [1966] 2006; Reik 1948, 1964). In other words, psychoanalysts learn how to deploy what I call a psychoanalytic *genre of listening*.

In Buenos Aires, a form of listening based on these ideas—unconscious practices and resonances—circulates outside of the clinic. *Porteños* have developed a sort of "psychoanalytic ear" that they deploy freely in different settings and that emerges through the responses during dialogic encounters in everyday interactions. After a statement has been made, in many cases *porteños* offer different "readings" or interpretations of the hidden meaning of the words, trying to go beyond the denotation to find the unknown in speech. Consequently, it is not uncommon to hear statements such as "I think you mean something else," "I don't hear your voice in what you are saying," "What you said sounds strange," and "Your words are betraying you" during everyday conversations. Accordingly, in Buenos Aires there is a culture of listeners whose personal identities, conceptions of citizenship, and constructions of the political are rooted less in the performativity associated with speaking than in a particular form of listening based on psychoanalysis. I found that in Buenos Aires, this listening is social, produced by a collectivity of individuals and performed in all sorts of interactions surpassing class, age, and gender classifications. The ubiquitous nature of psychoanalytic listening in Buenos Aires prompted me to analyze this phenomenon as a genre. Based on this research and analysis, I argue that, as an interpretive framework, psychoanalysis has permeated a variety of discursive arenas, generating a particular form of listening that organizes the city dwellers' social interactions.

The concept of *genres of listening* emerged from over thirty months of fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina, over the course of six years. When I first arrived in the city, I was interested in conducting an ethnography of what Argentines call *el mundo psi* or psy-world: the web of interrelationships between psychotherapeutic experiences (including psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and psychology), institutions, knowledge, and commonsensical

awareness of the self in relation to the psyche that is shared by vast swaths of the Buenos Aires population. My hope was to understand how the quintessentially modern language of psychoanalysis, which lost its prestige in the United States with the rise of other epistemologies of the mind, the self, and individual behavior, has remained so lively in Argentina. But observing psychoanalysis in the clinical setting was a methodological impossibility, due to the private nature of the psychoanalytic session and the contract between analyst and analysand. This prompted me to look for other sites of inquiry where I could have at least an indirect glimpse of the clinical encounter. I began to undergo psychoanalysis myself to understand, firsthand, the psychoanalytic interaction. But the impossibility of recording my own analytic sessions (my analyst was adamant that a recorder would hinder the free flow of unconscious impulses) left me without "data" to analyze.

Unexpectedly, I stumbled onto a fascinating, and to me unknown, psychoanalytic practice: the Multi-Family Structured Psychoanalytical Therapeutic communities (MFSPT), a group that was meeting at the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA) when I began my research in 2010 (see chapter 2). Depending on the session, the group gathered from sixty to eighty analysands and from five to fifteen analysts. During sessions that were open to the public, analysands would share their emotional states and feelings with the other attendees and tell stories about specific personal events. Some of these sessions were extremely moving, to the point of creating a "refracting of affective states" (Collu 2019), a sort of emotional cloud that hovered above the room and "touched" (Derrida 2005) everyone present during the verbal performance. One example occurred when a grandmother declared that she did not want to live anymore after a car crash killed two of her three grandsons and her daughter. As she told her story, the affective atmosphere was so charged that even one of the most experienced analysts said, with evident sorrow, "I don't have words. I don't have anything to say." The rest of us sat there in silence. Tragic stories of loss and desperation abounded in these meetings; on certain occasions, such stories produced particular effects in the group, leaving everyone in reflective silence or "touching" people individually. "There was something in her voice," an analyst told me after the session where the grandmother spoke. "The rhythm of her words told a story beyond the content of her words."

I found this idea that words *sound* in a specific way to listeners, carrying a meaning beyond (or parallel to) their denotation, to be an important feature of psychoanalytic listening as a genre. Words, through the way they sound, interpellate listeners beyond their denotation. And although this

may seem a specific trait of therapeutic encounters, the second epigraph of this text indicates that there are everyday interactions in which words "don't sound right," either because the referential meaning does not match the information we have or because the *sounding* produces a gut feeling, a bodily manifestation of distrust or skepticism that we often do not have the language to explain.[1]

In psychoanalytic therapy, this gut feeling, which can sometimes be qualified as uncanny (*unheimlich*), is experienced through the unconscious by the *resonance* that some words create in our psyche. Sigmund Freud and especially Jacques Lacan dedicated extensive attention to this idea. For Lacan, the clinical encounter is oriented precisely toward the moment where interpretation fails and our attention moves away from the semantics of language to *la langue* through a chain of signifiers, prioritizing listening as a way to connect with the unconscious (see Lacan 1988, 237–60). My time observing the MFSPT helped me see how this mode of listening, in which attention to the hidden sense in words generates a resonant state among listener(s), might extend to spheres beyond the private encounter between analyst and analysand. I began to notice parallel interactions between MFSPT sessions and casual interactions outside the center, where people focused on what words invoke in the listener. Suddenly, by overhearing conversations and in my everyday interactions in Buenos Aires, I started to notice a form of listening that replicated the MFSPT setting, where people were constantly trying to resonate with their interlocutor's statement.

The first claim this book makes is that psychoanalytic listening (inside and outside of the clinic) can be understood as a genre of listening. At the most basic level, what I identify as the genre of psychoanalytic listening follows a particular structure and differs from other forms of listening (such as denotational listening, for example). At the same time, the material explored here opens up wider theoretical vistas: if we can begin to elucidate the specificities of psychoanalytic listening as a genre, for instance, could it become possible to imagine other forms of listening that are similarly patterned? To give one example, the idea of *ethical listening* has been explored by anthropologists and philosophers who have tried to understand what it means to "listen through the heart" (Hirschkind 2006), find "attunement with others" (Lipari 2014), and embrace the "ethical responsibility of listening" (Stauffer 2015). In all these works, the presumption is that there is something that can be categorized as ethical listening that differs significantly from other modes of engaging with sound. Can we conceptualize such

listening as generic (that is, as belonging to a distinctive genre of listening)? I think we can. To do so, we would need to focus on the particularities of this form of listening. What are its main characteristics (e.g., attention to the interlocutor, neutrality, openness)? What other bodily dispositions does it trigger? When does it emerge? How does it differ from (or complement) empathetic listening? These and other questions could lead us to a possible identification of the broader features of what I call a *genre of listening*.

Other forms of listening that may be categorized as genres could include specialized types of listening generated inside institutional settings. To take an example from a different ethnographic site, I encountered distinctive forms of listening during my work as a translator between unaccompanied minors and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officers. One officer declared that "in this job, you learn to *listen* to lies." When I asked if she could explain what she meant, she told me that the intonation of voice, the number of hesitations, and other cues were the key clues pointing to dishonesty. Yet she quickly added, "But not always, so I can't really point to a specific thing; *you just know*." Many issues arise from what the officer said. People studying the relationship between language and culture know very well that people do not all respond or react the same way to questions, that questions are not objective artifacts where one can measure credibility (Briggs 1986), and that cultural patterns of communication differ greatly (Gumperz 1982; Jacquemet 1996). This is especially true in the USCIS institutional setting, where there is a cultural distance between interviewers and interviewees—often rural and sometimes Indigenous minors who lack a full understanding of what is going on in an interaction controlled by immigration officers. By "listening to lies," the officer seems to be performing a very concrete and ideological form of listening based on a set of cultural assumptions about communication (Gibb and Good 2014; Kirmayer 2002, 2003).

This form of *suspicious listening* is learned and, as is evident from this case, has concrete material consequences. Listening plays only one part in these interactions, where the officer seeks above all to monitor the accuracy of the asylum seeker's testimony (Park and Bucholtz 2009). But listening is key because, as the officer stated, pitch, intonation, and hesitancies are cues intrinsically related to listening and to how we position ourselves vis-à-vis sound. By listening with a "suspicious ear," the officer contextualizes the interaction and allows the "That doesn't sound right" feeling to emerge, which she was unable to describe accurately ("You just know"). Similar to Freud's motivation to "unmask" the "real" from the "apparent,"

the USCIS officer is performing an embodied form of listening that I call *generic*. The referential content of language is, of course, key, but in this example the officer is going beyond the denotation, letting herself resonate with the asylee's story.

In this book I focus on listening among the multiple interactional components of communication in order to tease out the listener's role as an active agent of value. I am thus focusing on a genre of practice (Hanks 1996), the embodiment of listening, through the concept of resonance. When we listen, the first thing we hear is sound—not a text but a stream of sound and motion—and these sounds in many cases accumulate and reach a referent at a later time (or not, as the case may be). As anthropologists, for example, we listen to our informants through an *anthropological genre of listening*. Some informants do not know that they are informants, but "we" (anthropologists) know it because we are listening as such. Our listening positions individuals—and ourselves—as occupying a particular social space. Sometimes we listen with a purpose, focusing on what we know is relevant for our research. But at other times, we engage with our informants (and the "data" obtained) by listening through a sort of "free-floating attention" mindset until the "data" finally "speak" to us (an embodied practice). Both anthropological listening and psychoanalytic listening are cumulative. In other words, sounds and words sometimes find a referent—if they find one at all—only after an aural accumulation that can take days, or even years. Thus, anthropological listening is performative in that, by listening "as an anthropologist," we position ourselves as social actors presumably different from others (Marsilli-Vargas 2015).

To understand the embodied nature of psychoanalytic listening, it is useful to look at how musicologist Nicholas Cook, in his influential book *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (1992), distinguishes between two different forms of listening. One he calls *musicological listening*, following Eduard Hanslick's and Heinrich Schenker's formalist view of musical structure. Cook (1992, 166) refers to this form of listening as a metaphorical way of representing music through the analytical, historical, and contextual knowledge of any musical piece, which emphasizes the structure and location of the *Urlinie* (the fundamental line of a musical composition). The other form he conceptualizes simply as *musical listening*, in which the physiological and psychological bodily experience of music happens and where the self-monitoring of music pauses. This second form of listening relates closely to the concept of resonance described earlier. It is experienced rather than analyzed. As happens during shamanic chanting, when the music can get

far too quick and elusive for the performer to be able to simultaneously render it and carry out a rich musical analysis, musicians can suspend their attention while playing, experiencing the music with their bodies (Hanks 1990). Cook's work is a good example of why it is productive to distinguish between listening practices. By analytically separating what I would call particular *genres of listening*, Cook is able to understand each form separately, arguing that the perceptual/sensuous field is as important as the analytic component. Hence, discriminating listening from other interactional modalities (although some, such as gaze and bodily disposition, are part of the listening experience) helps in understanding how we listen in different contexts and how listening creates social positioning.[2]

Going back to the psychoanalytic encounter, when copresence between analyst and analysand happens, the analysand may very well bring to the conversation different speech genres and registers. But the analyst's listening is constant, regardless of the speech form being reproduced. The analyst is listening as an expert trying to find the "signifying chain" that organizes the analysand's unconscious. Psychoanalysis, famously referred to as "the talking cure," is also a "listening cure." What ultimately helps analysands is to listen to themselves and to the resonance that certain signifiers (Lacan calls these *nodes*) create in their psyche. The role of the analyst is to suspend attention and reverberate with the analysand's story. Psychoanalysis and phenomenology converge in that understanding is not just a mental activity but rather a pervasive dimension of "being in the world," including what is going on in its *pre-predicative* encounter with the world.[3]

The second claim this book makes is that, in Buenos Aires, psychoanalytic listening as a genre has left the clinical setting to circulate throughout many different arenas, becoming a social way of listening and a mode of organizing social interactions. It is through this form of listening that psychoanalysis travels, reproducing itself in many different settings.

I experienced this firsthand during the summer months in 2012 in Buenos Aires, when I attended a party with some friends. After I casually mentioned that I usually don't dance, a friend said, "You didn't have enough affection [growing up]. Well, that's how *what you said sounded to me*. You missed the embrace, and I identify with that too."[4]

My friend's response took me by surprise, as it conveyed the message that there are specific reasons why someone might dislike performing a particular activity, reasons which may or may not be conscious to the performer. Furthermore, she implied that I somehow transmitted the message of being bereft of physical affection when I *said* that I don't dance. My

words *sounded like* (transmitted) a coded message that she was able to *listen to*, even though my denotation did not include any words that could point to a "lack of embrace."

Throughout my fieldwork, I discovered that these interactions, where someone says something and another person "translates" the "real" motives or feelings that words convey, are extremely common in Buenos Aires. Moreover, they are not mere personal interpretations. By focusing on how words *sound* in a particular way, how they *resonate* with the listener, my friend was inadvertently replicating psychoanalytic listening as a genre.

The concept of resonance—a concept that Lacan developed, where sounds reverberate between the signifier and the signified without ever becoming completely reified or fixed—compelled me to understand these interactions as a form of listening. Similarly, in the sessions inside the MFSPT and in such interactions as the one between my friend and me, interpretations coexist with denotation, but the focus is on what the words invoke in the listener.[5] It is, of course, through the dialogic exchange of words that the lay listener is able to bring to light these resonances, but it is overall a listening practice based on how words produce an echo within the psyche of the listener.

The idea that someone can "hear" something other than the denotation in the words uttered by someone else seemed unfathomable to some of my colleagues and associates back in the United States. I remember a conversation with a senior male professor who, after hearing about these recurrent interactions in Buenos Aires, expressed concern: "How could someone know more about my own intentions? No one has the right—or knowledge—to tell someone else what their real motives or intentions are." He continued by classifying these interactions as "intrusions and impositions." This reaction was common among my US colleagues, and it reflects a common conception of the intimate self, rooted in classical liberal theory, which sees the self as authentic, autonomous, and unconnected to others. This concept of the rational, detached individual is implicit, for example, in John Locke's view of language as a vehicle for expressing the thoughts of an independent self (Bauman and Briggs 2003). In Locke's own account, words are said to "excite" ideas in hearers, which suggests an automatic reaction unmediated by any kind of inference (Gauker 1992, 304; Locke [1690] 1975)—that is, language transmits verbatim the unmediated intentions of the speaker. This proposition echoes the views on language articulated by the senior professor. In Buenos Aires, a sociability challenges this conceptualization of the self and understands language not as a transparent

vehicle but as containing different voices and communicating beyond the intentions of the speaker.[6] Although on some occasions *porteños* would not accept the interpellation, the majority of people I encountered believe that words have meanings beyond their denotation and are open to a "symbolic exchange," to use Marcel Mauss's (1966) famous conceptualization, where meanings and words are traded, creating reciprocal bonds. Often *porteños* accept that others' interpretations of themselves have value. Thus, in this book, rather than view these interactions as personal intrusions or as technologies of power, as a Foucauldian analysis would suggest, I invite the reader to move away from a framework that conceptualizes social and intersubjective relations as exclusively (or mainly) embedded in a relation of power and instead to focus on the productive exchanges that emerge throughout these encounters.

My fieldwork shows that the lay listener in Buenos Aires who translates the words of others into new interpretations is helping those people *listen to themselves*. Thus, I conceptualize these interpretations as acts of generosity. When the lay listener resonates with the chain of signifiers, or when listeners understand their role as a translator—as an ethical duty or concern—there is no violence or interference but a symbolic exchange.

The recurrence of occasions where listeners imagine it is their right or prerogative to provide a particular interpretation is obvious to Buenos Aires scholars and psychoanalysts: "Lo llamamos psicoanálisis salvaje" (We call it wild psychoanalysis), in the words of a male psychoanalyst wary of conflating the real exchange that happens inside the clinical setting and this "wild" form of analysis. During my time in Buenos Aires, I witnessed people accepting being interpellated and often watched them ask follow-up questions of their interlocutors. On the rare occasion that the person being interpreted felt uncomfortable, the lay listener would not press on a particular meaning, and the conversation moved to a different topic.

Throughout this book, the reader will find many examples of the dissemination of the psychoanalytic listening genre "in the wild." And although I do not claim that these generic forms of listening are indeed a performance of psychoanalysis, they show that in Buenos Aires, on many occasions, people listen to the words as an embodied practice rather than focus only on the denotation. They focus on how words *sound*, on what they invoke in them. (The ethics of listening to the "real" intentions of the speaker is analyzed in chapter 3.)

The idea that psychoanalysis is critical to the Argentine cultural field is part of the doxa. At the University of California, Berkeley, I once had

the opportunity to meet prominent anthropologist Philippe Descola, chair of anthropology at the Collège de France, a position previously held by his mentor Claude Lévi-Strauss. When I told Descola that I was interested in doing research on why psychoanalysis is so prevalent in Buenos Aires, a question that guided my overall interest in anthropology and mental health at the time, he looked at me with a big smile and said emphatically, "Well, then you are going to help resolve a big mystery!"

Is this book the answer to the "mystery"? First, it is important to state that many Argentine scholars from different fields have produced rigorous work explaining how psychoanalysis became part of the cultural milieu of Buenos Aires in particular and Argentina in general. By the time I started my research, it was not a mystery anymore. Maybe it has never been a "mystery," at least not to ordinary Argentines; for them, the ubiquity of psychoanalysis is just common sense. More recently, however, two Argentine scholars began to question the doxic idea that Argentines resort to analysts on a regular basis. Instead, historian Mariano Ben Plotkin and anthropologist Nicolás Viotti (2020) argue that there are "different therapeutic constellations," meaning that some Argentines recur to psychoanalysis or psychology but that there are many other practices of self-care, such as popular religiosity, magic, praying, and yoga. Against the idea of psychoanalysis as the dominant practice of self-care in Argentina, and of the modern and secular nature of Argentina that the prevalence of psychoanalysis would reflect, they emphasize instead the heterogeneity of these therapeutic constellations, which include cases of people who resort to praying before going to therapy—a fact that aligns with the declining, but still dominant, religiosity (above all, Catholicism) of the population as a whole. But the examples they provide, through snowball sampling and interviews, consistently show psychotherapy (psychoanalysis or psychology) as part of these therapeutic constellations, even when its presence seems "peripheral" (such as the case of a woman who does not go to therapy herself, but her close relatives do). This approach opens a productive debate about Argentina's modernity and the role of psychotherapies within wider epistemic repertoires. But it does not affect the fact that the *psi-* disciplines are overwhelmingly present in Argentina, which is apparent when situating this country in a comparative perspective.

That Argentina, and more specifically Buenos Aires, has the highest number of psychologists per capita in the world shows that there is still a high demand for psychoanalysts-psychologists in the country. Also, as chapter 5 of this book discusses in detail, psychoanalysis is ubiquitous: in

television and radio shows, podcasts, books, magazines, and even graphic humor. The presence of psychoanalysis in the cultural production of the city is immense, suggesting there is a big professional market for it. In her ethnographic analysis of psychoanalytic practices in the poorest neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, anthropologist María E. Epele (2015) follows psychoanalysts to understand how they work with this vulnerable population. Focusing on listening as a "therapeutic technology" that allows one to connect with unprivileged patients, Epele shows that the "talking cure" also exists in the low-income neighborhoods in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, via the public health system. The ubiquity of psychoanalysis even in poor neighborhoods underlines the fact that psychoanalysis-psychology is still a strong practice in Buenos Aires.

If we compare the number of practicing psychologists and psychoanalysts in Buenos Aires with other cities around the world, Buenos Aires *ganaría por goleada* (a soccer metaphor: it would win by many goals), as a psychoanalyst told me. Statistician and psychoanalyst Modesto Alonso (2010), who has attempted to produce reliable statistics on psychologists in Argentina, explained the difficulty of coming up with exact numbers. The main problem is that the several psychological associations in Buenos Aires are not obliged to grant a registration (*matrícula*) to its members to practice (unlike in the provinces, where psychologists need to be registered). Also, the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires contains both the city and a large set of counties (*partidos*), and psychologists often live in one jurisdiction but work in another. Anyone seeking to make an accurate count of practicing psychologists and psychoanalysts would need to sift through multiple and incomplete data sources. It is thus impossible to know exactly how many practicing psychologists there are.

Still, Alonso (2010) has an estimate. By calculating the total number of professionals who have graduated as psychologists throughout Argentine history, minus the number registered in the provinces and a reasonable rate of people who died, graduated, or retired, he estimates that in 2015 there were ninety-eight thousand psychologists in Argentina, of whom forty-eight thousand were in the city of Buenos Aires. In other words, the city had 1,572 psychologists for every 100,000 inhabitants or 64 inhabitants per psychologist. As Alonso suggested, even cutting the estimate in half (if we assume an enormous statistical mistake of 100 percent) would give Buenos Aires "around 150 inhabitants per psychologist" or over 700 psychologists per 100,000 inhabitants and 100 psychologists per 100,000 inhabitants in Argentina as a whole. These numbers are

TABLE I.1 Psychologists in the Mental Health Sector (per 100,000 Inhabitants)

Rank	Country	No. of psychologists	Year
1	Argentina	222.6	2016
2	Costa Rica	142	2016
3	Netherlands	123.5	2015
4	Finland	109.5	2017
5	Australia	103	2015
6	Israel	88.09	2016
7	Switzerland	84.14	2015
8	Norway	73.52	2016
9	Germany	49.55	2015
10	Canada	48.74	2017
11	France	48.7	2017
12	Guatemala	46.15	2016
13	Cuba	31.06	2016
14	United States	29.86	2016
15	Poland	16.35	2016

Source: World Health Organization, "Psychologists Working in Mental Health Sector (per 100,000)." Accessed April 25, 2019. https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/psychologists-working-in-mental-health-sector-(per-100-000).

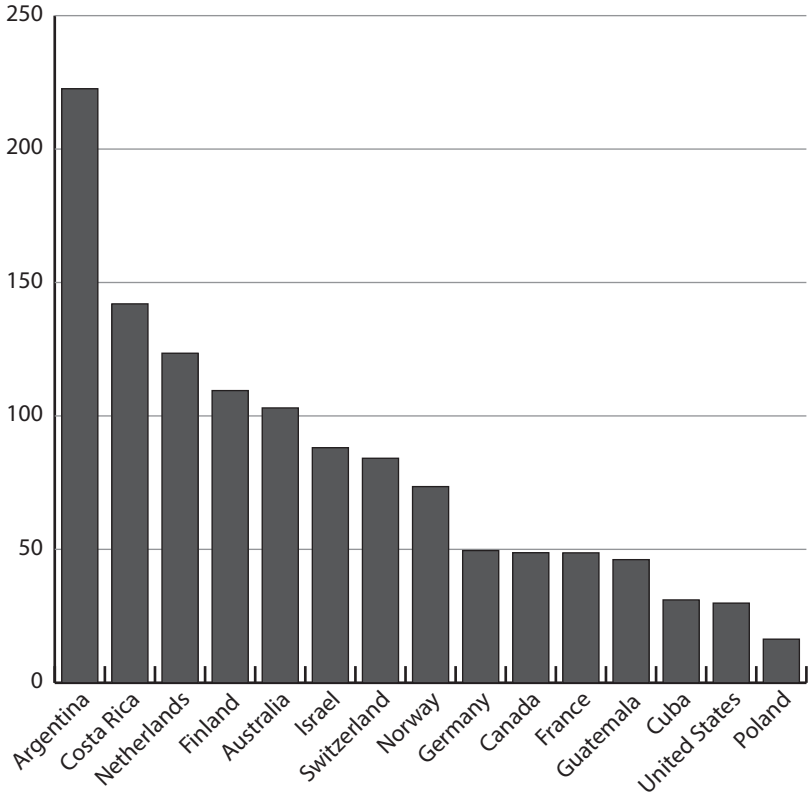

FIGURE I.1 Psychologists in mental health sector, per 100,000 inhabitants. Source: WHO 2015–17.

extremely high, especially when compared with other countries. According to statistics elaborated by the World Health Organization (2021), Argentina is by far the country with the highest number of psychologists working in the mental health sector: 222 per 100,000 inhabitants, far ahead of the next four countries (Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Finland, and Australia), with between 100 and 150 per 100,000. And if we include the city of Buenos Aires in the list of countries (Table 1.2), the numbers are even more astonishing:

The purpose of mentioning these numbers and graphics is not to fetishize data—thanks to the work of many anthropologists and historians, we know that statistics are interpretive constructions (see Adams 2016; Anders 2008; Porter 1996; Tichenor 2020). Instead, I wish to show why, in the imaginary of people around the world, Argentina's (and especially Buenos Aires's) "exceptionality" has been defined by its high number of psychologists (see,

TABLE I.2 International Comparison: City of Buenos Aires, Top Ten Countries, and USA

Rank	Countries	Psychologists per 100K inhabitants	Inhabitants per psychologist	Sources
	Buenos Aires	1,572	63.61	(Alonso, Gago, and Klinar 2015)
	Buenos Aires (conservative est.)	786	127.22	
1	Argentina	222.6	449	(WHO, 2016)
2	Costa Rica	142	704	(WHO 2016)
3	Netherlands	123.5	809	(WHO 2015)
4	Finland	109.5	913	(WHO 2017)
5	Australia	103	970	(WHO 2015)
6	Israel	88.09	1136	(WHO 2016)
7	Switzerland	84.14	1188	(WHO 2015)
8	Norway	73.52	1360	(WHO 2016)
9	Germany	49.55	2018	(WHO 2015)
10	Canada	48.74	2052	(WHO 2017)
11	USA	29.86	3349	(WHO 2016)

among others, Alonso 2010; Balán 1991; Dagfal 2008, 2009; Germán García 2005; Plotkin 2001; Plotkin and Visacovsky 2008; Vezzetti 1983, 1996, 2009; Visacovsky 2002). This number is distinctively, indisputably high, and the presence of so many psychologists affects how people conceptualize the self and understand mental health.

According to a study by Modesto Alonso, Paula Gago, and Doménica Klinar (2018), the predominant theoretical framework for mental health in

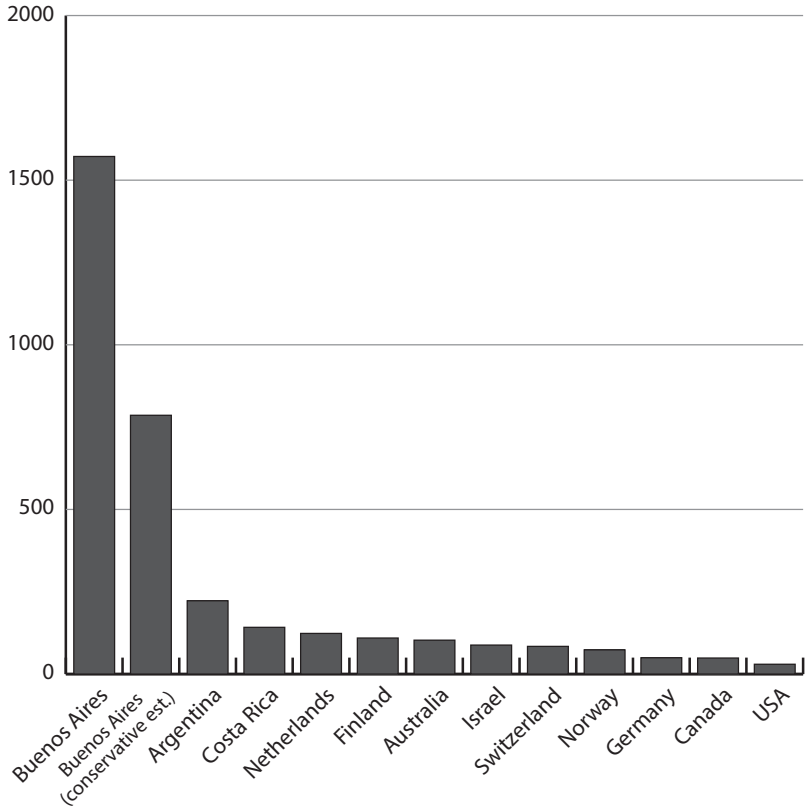

FIGURE I.2 Psychologists per 100,000 inhabitants in City of Buenos Aires, top ten countries, and the United States. Sources: WHO 2021; Alonso, Gago, and Klinar 2015.

Argentina is still psychoanalysis, adopted by 44 percent of psychologists. This is closely followed by cognitive-behavioral practices, employed by 30 percent; integrative approaches by 24 percent; and systemic and "other" approaches by 20 percent. (These percentages add up to more than one hundred because some practitioners adopt more than one framework.)

For a long time, studying psychology in Argentina was synonymous with being a clinical psychologist, and being a psychologist meant being an analyst. As Plotkin and Viotti (2020) argue, things are not static. New social circumstances and processes—fewer people with the time and resources to attend a daily, hour-long psychoanalytic session, as well as the development of rival ideas about mental well-being—are loosening the hegemonic position of psychoanalysis as the most disseminated mental health

practice. In my fieldwork I found that neuroscience is the most noticeable emerging trend in Buenos Aires (although this may be different in the provinces). Bookstores are full of neuroscience texts, and authors such as Estanislao Bachrach, a neuroscientist with a doctorate in molecular biology, appear on television to discuss, "from the perspective of the brain," how to be happier and combat stress. But psychotherapies are still very much part of the social life of Buenos Aires, a sort of epistemic filter with which new practices have to coexist. For example, in 2014, Bachrach participated in an hour-long show alongside Gabriel Rolón, arguably the most famous disseminator of psychoanalysis in Argentina today (see chapter 5), in which they discussed how each discipline addresses dissatisfaction. Bachrach's model mirrors neoliberal conceptualizations of the individual self, suggesting that, through discipline, individuals can control environments that people might assume are beyond their control. He explained the "well-established research" on breathing and the brain, insisting that an act as simple as taking three long breaths could generate "thousands of new neurons" capable of helping to resolve the problems at hand. For his part, Rolón insisted on the importance of understanding individuals' personal histories, as well as their connections with others, to begin to understand why suffering occurs. For example, if we get angry in traffic, Rolón believes the most important question is *why*. What causes someone to become angry in certain circumstances? From the other side, Bachrach advocated the search for organic causes and pragmatic solutions, focusing especially on exercises, like taking frequent long breaths, to alleviate discomfort.

I asked Alonso how many people actually seek psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires. His response was blunt: "There is no such figure, because private institutions do not give data. A great deal of the population in treatment is treated privately, in the private practice of a psychologist, or a doctor, or psychotherapist/psychoanalyst, and none of them gives data."[7] There are many possible reasons why practitioners do not report this information. Corroborating what other analysts have told me, Alonso suggested that the most common explanation is that many work *en negro*, informally or under the table, to avoid taxes. But Alonso also described other reasons, from the secretive nature of the therapeutic encounter to more pedestrian ones, such as "rivalries and envies."

Yet the most interesting question regarding *porteños*' relationship to psychoanalysis is why psychoanalytic *listening* came to pervade their cultural practices. Even those who do not go to orthodox analysts get secondhand exposure to psychoanalytic theories by seeing psychologists and

psychiatrists at public hospitals and private practices. Psychoanalytic approaches often coexist with other types of treatment within the national health system (see chapter 4). For example, a psychiatrist who works at the Hospital Borda—the public psychiatric hospital for male patients in Buenos Aires—told me, "When you are dealing with a patient that walks like a spider, grunts instead of speaking, and has an untreated skin condition, the first and imminent thing to do is to medicate. Now, once you have stabilized the patient, talk is absolutely key to the patient's treatment. And that's when you go back to thinking about displacement, infancy, trauma, and those things. I think that as a physician you have to work with the story of the patient. We also cure through talking."[8]

For many students of psychology, psychoanalysis is regarded as hegemonic. Yamil, a psychologist trained at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) who is finishing a PhD in neuroscience in Italy, explained with evident frustration that there were very few elective courses on any branch of psychology other than psychoanalysis (for a discussion of how psychoanalysis has influenced the core curriculum of different mental health specialties, see chapter 4). Sofía, a clinical psychologist who does not consider herself to be a trained analyst and who has worked in private practice since 2015, explained that most of the readings assigned during her training were psychoanalytic texts. She said, "Honestly I cannot understand that someone would doubt the existence of the unconscious. For me, it is as real as water."

This book is about how psychoanalysis permeated different fields and created a culture of psychoanalytic listening. I find this trait unique to Buenos Aires, at least in comparison with Mexico City, my hometown, and the several cities of the United States where I have lived for the past fifteen years (from Manhattan and Philadelphia to the San Francisco Bay area and Atlanta). Undoubtedly, other forms of self-awareness, such as meditation, yoga, and the new religiosity (New Age, evangelicalism), are changing the cartography of practices of self-care, self-knowledge, and self-monitoring (Korman, Viotti, and Garay 2015). Only time will tell whether neuroscience or other methods of self-monitoring and introspection will take the place of psychoanalysis. What is certain is that psychoanalysis has had—and still has—a tremendous influence in Argentina and more broadly in Western cultures of self-reflectiveness. Regardless of one's knowledge of psychoanalytic theory, psychoanalytic notions have become commonsensical. Even people who have not experienced formal analysis believe that events that occurred during infancy have an impact on the later development to adulthood or that human behavior is sometimes the result of unconscious

drives and therefore requires sophisticated interpretation. Such ideas, often emerging out of psychoanalysis, have become so ingrained in the doxa that we seldom realize their origins and the remarkable impact that psychoanalytic concepts have had on the way we conceptualize the self. In Argentina, these ideas continue to circulate and are widely accepted.

The decline or outright rejection of psychoanalysis in many scientific fields around the world, particularly in the United States, may obscure the important fact that, historically, psychoanalysis has shared the attention to unconscious practices with other epistemological frameworks. In anthropology, for example, the idea of the unconscious has also proven influential. Independently of Freud's development of his theory of the unconscious, Franz Boas developed, in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911 [1938]), a theory of the mind in which customs have unconscious origins that disappear from consciousness.

Boas used the term *secondary rationalizations* to describe the reasons behind an action as ways in which ethnological phenomena become objects of thought (Verdon 2007, 444). This resembles the Freudian use of the term *rationalization* to describe an operation that fulfills functions in the mental life independently of its degree of truth (Freud [1912] 1958). Whereas, for Boas, customs are unconscious in the sense that people misperceive their own behavior, Karl Marx's concept of "false consciousness" describes the systematic misrepresentation of dominant social relations in the consciousness of subordinate classes. Through concepts such as *ideology* and *fetishism*, Marx argues that members of an oppressed class suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically conceal or obscure the realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination. Much later, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992, 118) coined the concept of "misrecognition," defined as "the refusal to distinguish the 'objective' truth of 'economic' practices, that is, the law of 'naked self-interest' and egoistic calculation." In his view, social actors fail to recognize social processes because they do not possess the range of dispositions of the habitus of the subjects confronting them. Other epistemes discuss the "concealment" of truth, such as structural analysis, the Frankfurt School, and Louis Althusser's (1996, 125) presentation of the necessity of finding the "structure of the unconscious." Hence, from a variety of perspectives, these models posit that social actors attribute meanings to social phenomena, obscuring the truth behind them. For these theorists, the world hides something deeper behind its representations, something that needs to be discovered.

What is unique to psychoanalysis is its focus on individual subjects as such. While those other frameworks seek to unveil the structures that allow for the reproduction of the practices that mask the truth, psychoanalysis focuses on individuals as unique and irreplaceable beings that have in common their own particular history. This is a very *modern* idea, if we understand modernity as being defined by intersubjectivity as an ontological condition—what Dipankar Gupta (2005, 4) calls iso-ontology, the recognition that other people exist and have different goals and ambitions from our own, differences in turn founded on the "sameness" of human condition, in an ontological sense. This book proposes that by reproducing psychoanalytic listening as a genre, *porteños* perform a modern ideology—that is, one that focuses on intersubjectivity as its point of departure. This ethnography thus shows that the kinds of subjective experiences and linguistic, sonic, and epistemological productions that we usually consider "modern" are not necessarily a colonial import or imposition but a vernacular creation in dialogue with Western traditions.[9]

In the analytic encounter, the analyst anticipates peeling off the *secondary rationalizations* that the analysand brings to the encounter. As a senior female analyst told me, "Not all words, but some, create a form of noise that the analysand brings to the sessions. Especially when they repeat the same story over and over, [the words of the analysand] get in the way of expressing what is really going on; they become the symptom." The analyst's work is thus to look for the *real* significance of the analysand's words by dismantling the secondary rationalizations that the analysand brings to the encounter. Listening plays a crucial role in that the resonance certain words produce serves to anchor the exchange and create the signifying chain that would help to grasp unconscious desires and repressions. In the "wild" form of psychoanalysis that circulates outside of the clinic in Buenos Aires, a similar phenomenon happens. By dismantling the ideas that subjects have about their own actions, everyday practitioners of wild psychoanalysis try to enact exposure of the "real" self and intentions of their subjects. What legitimizes these pedestrian interpretations is that they are inserted into a broader discourse derived from psychoanalysis.

To explore the concept of genres of listening and the circulation of psychoanalytic listening in Buenos Aires, the book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter delves into the theoretical underpinnings of the idea of genres of listening, showing that listening is a structuring and structured act that is therefore capable of assuming discreet forms or *genres*. The next four

chapters detail different aspects of the *psychoanalytic* genre of listening in Buenos Aires, explaining how each was constituted and how it circulates.

Chapter 1 presents a conceptual exploration of the different ideas, philosophies, and models that inform the theorization of listening as a genre. Since I am proposing a new concept, this theoretically grounded chapter explains this process in detail. While the book is about the particular genre of psychoanalytic listening, this theoretical examination helps the reader understand, step by step, how genres of listening are constituted in the hopes that the model explored here can be applied to other generic forms of listening. The chapter opens by exploring listening as a semiotic and performative practice. These sections show how, through listening, a process of ordering emerges (listeners always assign a referent, regardless of whether or not they decoded the sound) that facilitates the development of genres capable of framing sound in a particular context at the moment of reception. In this chapter I also discuss the active character of listening by focusing on how listening creates social positions that endow the listener with a social identity (e.g., a doctor listening through the stethoscope, a music expert listening to music), thus generating value.

While showing that listening is a process of ordering, this chapter simultaneously explains why the concept of *genre* is the most useful in describing the form such ordering takes. Engaging with theorists of genre from an array of fields, this chapter enables the reader to understand how my theory of genres of listening differs from and expands upon other theoretical frameworks. Finally, the chapter closes by homing in on the specific case of psychoanalytic listening, exploring how psychoanalysts, including Freud and Lacan, have conceptualized listening inside the clinic, developing what I call the signature formula of the psychoanalytic genre: *When you say X, I hear Y*.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Multi-Family Structured Psychoanalytical Therapeutic (MFSPT) communities, a particular kind of psychoanalysis that includes the participation of entire families, supervised by many psychoanalysts who also participate in the role of analysands. It explains the therapeutic process of this method, in which the stories of the analysands resonate with other participants, thereby creating the structure that organizes each session. While in chapter 1 I explain how forms of listening can be conceptualized as generic, in this chapter I go deeper into psychoanalytic listening; using examples from the MFSPT, I explain in detail what I argue are the four characteristics of psychoanalytic listening as a genre: that it is cumulative; that it is a learned process; that listeners must listen through lived experi-

ence (*lo vivencial*); and that the prosodic enunciation—the way in which words "sound"—in many cases trumps the denotation of a statement.

The main focus of chapter 3 is on how this cultivated form of listening based on psychoanalysis trespassed the clinical setting to become a social way of listening in Buenos Aires. Through an ethnographic approach, I explore how lay people replicate psychoanalytic listening through the use of the formula *What you really mean is . . .*, thereby invoking the idea that the words of their interlocutors hide a message beyond their denotation, which is unknown to the producer of the utterance. Further, when someone seems to know more about your intimate self than you yourself do, ethical concerns emerge. I explore the ethics of listening within a framework in which the self is conceptualized as a social construct rather than as an autonomous individual.

This chapter also explores the ideological component of listening. Listening ideologies are everywhere, and sounds have different meanings, depending on the context and the historical moments in which they are heard. And just as with language, the ideologies that generate diverse sentiments toward certain sounds create hierarchies and differences that have material consequences, as the example of the immigration officer suggested.

Finally, this chapter explores the important idea that, by listening through a psychoanalytic framework, a performance of modernity is enacted. Here I borrow from Gupta's (2005, 1) conceptualization of modernity, which he understands as a specific form of social relations "modified at the most fundamental level by the quality of *intersubjectivity*. A modern society is characterized by intersubjectivity as an ontological condition." Hence, when people in Buenos Aires interpellate their interlocutors' unconscious, the relationship that they are establishing goes beyond their social persona, and they engender a radical form of alterity. The dialogical exchanges that occur during casual interactions bring about a subject position; thus, the performance of modern subjectivity is evident during these encounters.

Chapter 4 is a historical review of the psychoanalytic field in Buenos Aires. What are the specificities of psychoanalysis in this particular setting? How does it differ from, for example, psychoanalysis in the United States? The chapter begins by describing how psychoanalysis was shaped in Buenos Aires by the "mirroring" of Europe, especially France. It explains what many scholars in Argentina have termed *el mundo psi* (the psy-world), a term that relies on the semantic overlap between the three main mental health fields: psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. I focus on the role of the public

university as an important disseminator of psychoanalysis, which, according to several authors (Dagfal 2009; García 2016; Plotkin 2002), became a hegemonic bastion of psychoanalysis and a key driver of its diffusion, relegating other psychological theories and schools to secondary fields. To this day, the main focus of the psychology department at the University of Buenos Aires is psychoanalysis, with readings on Freud, Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott, Lacan, and other psychoanalysts forming the core of the literature. The public university was also the site where different leftist groups battled over imposing their interpretations of the self and society, such as the Pavlovian school of reflexology, which criticized psychoanalysis by describing it as a bourgeois practice.

The second part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the training required to become an analyst, examining two of the main psychoanalytic institutions in Buenos Aires: the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA) and the School of Lacanian Orientation (EOL in its Spanish acronym). I focus specifically on how listening is openly discussed in each program as one of the main traits of psychoanalysis.

Chapter 5 continues to focus on psychoanalysis as a listening genre but explores its circulation in its textual form as well, through different media outlets and cultural representations. The aim is to show how lay audiences in Buenos Aires are exposed to psychoanalysis as a framework of interpretation and how listening as a practice gets reproduced in these media. I center the discussion on three examples that represent psychoanalysis in different ways: graphic humor, television shows, and advertisements. The chapter begins by noting that the interpretive framework of psychoanalysis spread beyond the clinical sphere almost from its inception. A noticeable place of diffusion has been the university, where prominent analysts (and nonanalysts) have given seminars and used psychoanalysis to explain an array of social phenomena. In Argentina, as Plotkin (2002) has demonstrated, the public university played a quintessential role in the later dissemination of psychoanalysis.

My emphasis on listening does not entail a dismissal of the visual-textual paradigm. In the final part of chapter 5, two main concepts accompany my analysis of the circulation of psychoanalysis in the media: *mediatization*, the link between institutional practices and processes of communication and commoditization (Agha 2011), and *communicability*, the way in which discourses spread through ideological channels (Briggs and Hallin 2007). Mediatization serves the purpose of explaining how texts circulate and how they acquire material value. Communicability helps us understand how

producers and disseminators of texts are ideologically positioned and how these positions are not fixed; indeed, in the case of psychoanalysis, these distinctions become porous. I analyze the media representation of psychoanalysis using these two frameworks to follow the semiotic chains that permit me to trace what parts of psychoanalysis are embedded in other discourses. A good example can be found in the dissemination of gendered ideologies through psychoanalytic discourses. Specifically, I analyze the figure of "the mother" through the invocation of the Oedipus complex, as well as depictions of mother-son relationships in advertisements and graphic humor that construct a particular form of femininity that is usually accompanied by negative traits. These two concepts allow me to locate the specific moments in which psychoanalysis and its ideological components are invoked.

* * *

This book makes a contribution to anthropological theory at the intersection of linguistic and medical-psychological anthropology, sound studies, and Argentine cultural history. More specifically, it enters into conversation with a growing body of ethnographic literature that focuses on sensorial forms as a way of approaching culture beyond the "textual paradigm." This book is an ethnographic study of *the act of listening* as such, independently from its social determinations (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class relations) or technological mediations (from cassettes to new media). It thereby seeks to develop a new theoretical framework for understanding listening as a social fact.

This book demonstrates that listening creates and sustains social relations. It also suggests these social relations reproduce a form of listening that defies the here and now of sound production, a process embodied in the concept of resonance. Building upon semiotics, philosopher Mark Johnson (2007, ix) has suggested that meaning "is not just a matter of concepts and propositions, but also reaches down into the images, sensorimotor schemas, feelings, qualities, and emotions that constitute our meaningful encounter with the world." Following Johnson, listening in the psychoanalytic field creates meaning that is an embodied experience in which reason is not always involved. The fact that words *sound* in particular ways allows for a form of communication that is experienced rather than rationally discussed. Thus, genres of listening emerge through practice (Hanks 1996). This book is an attempt to describe a form of listening that is distinctive and thus generic. It is an attempt to find the normativity within aural perception, a difficult task for a sensory capacity that is individually experienced and not

always rational. I focus on the performative aspect of this generic form by analyzing interactions where people listen but also discuss listening: most important are the responses that surface in the dialogic encounters that a psychoanalytic listening produces, often expressed in the formula *When you say x, I hear y*. The latter is a form of reported speech that points to how the listeners are listening, even if such knowledge is always only a partial picture, given the limitations of studying reception. Even so, one can be "touched" by the discourse (or silence) of the other and resonate together.

As musician and cultural theorist Scott Wilson notes, "One could say that one only hears what one already knows, one always hears an echo, but at the same time the music that animates and disturbs us always hints at something else, something strange and unknown" (Dessal 2017). Sounds are impregnated with semiotic content, and the meaning we assign to them is the product of the relation of an active body encountering and structuring the world. This book is a window to a world traversed by listening, to *that which is not said* but is still known.

NOTES

Introduction. A City of Listeners

1. Martin Heidegger (1962) would call this "being-in-the-world," grounded in a body in a world ready to occupy it in different ways.

2. A rich scholarship has focused, at least since the 1960s, on listening as a site of inquiry to understand social relationships. This interest began with artists/musicians such as Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage experimenting with the phenomenology of listening. Some recent representatives of this tradition are Becker 2004; Bull 2015; Horowitz 2012; Ihde 2007; Lacey 2013; Mikutta et al. 2014.

3. Another example of listening as an embodied practice can be found in Patrick Eisenlohr's *Sounding Islam* (2018). Through his analysis of "sounding atmosphere," Eisenlohr focuses on the phenomenological experience of "energetic flows and movement in sonic events" during the appreciation of mediated Islamic sermons (4).

4. Original: "A vos te faltó afecto. Bueno, eso es lo que *a mí me sonó* lo que dijiste. Te faltó el abrazo, y yo me siento identificada con eso también."

5. Julia Kristeva (1984) refers to these two realms—what I call denotation and resonance—as the level of the geno-text or the semiotic, and the pheno-text or the symbolic. The latter refers to the language as syntax, while the semiotic refers to the bodily and affective realm of prelinguistic and drive-based primary processes. Thus, for Kristeva, Lacan's resonance belongs to the geno-text, as did my friend's embodied experience of how my words sounded.

6. Linguistic anthropologists and pragmaticians have discussed in detail the problems with the unmediated nature of language; most famously, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualizations of dialogism and heteroglossia point to the polyphony of voices and plurality of consciousness that each individual brings to every interaction. From a different epistemological perspective, Martin Heidegger (1962, 165–67) explains "they-qualities" where "everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The 'they,' which supplies the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein, is the 'nobody' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being."

7. An exploratory study in 2008 by Candelaria Escalante, then a student of psychology, and medical psychiatrist Eduardo Leiderman interviewed 1,510 people randomly on the streets of Buenos Aires's twenty-two neighborhoods and found that 15.6 percent were attending psychotherapy at the time of the interview, while 21 percent of the interviewees had attended psychotherapy in the previous year and 41.6 percent had attended psythotherapy in the previous two years (Escalante and Leiderman 2008).

8. Original: "Cuando te encontrás con un paciente que camina como araña, que gime en vez de hablar, y que tiene una enfermedad en la piel, lo primero que hay que hacer es medicar. Una vez que el paciente está estabilizado, ahí hablar empieza a ser importante. Y ahí es cuando volvés a conceptos como desplazamiento, infancia, trauma, etc. Yo creo que como médico tenés que trabajar con la historia del paciente. Nosotros también curamos con la palabra."

9. In their book *The Transnational Unconscious: Essays in the History of Psychoanalysis and Transnationalism* (2009), Joy Damousi and Mariano Plotkin explain in detail how Buenos Aires became the epicenter of the diffusion of Lacanian psychoanalysis and how representatives of European institutions journeyed to Buenos Aires to be trained by Argentine analysts.

Chapter 1. For a Theory of Genres of Listening

1. Previous to Akhtar's work, Richard D. Chessick (1982) describes the importance of listening within the clinical setting.

2. Phenomenological approaches to listening do not consider a separation between listening and hearing. Listening is considered part of the intersubjective experience (see Duranti 2015) and thus is already mediated by the intentionality of the listener.

3. According to Chion (2012), this mode of listening has been the object of linguistic research. One crucial finding is that it is purely differential. A phoneme is listened to not strictly for its acoustical properties but as a part of an entire system of oppositions and differences.

4. For a comprehensive, historical, and critical analysis of the stethoscope, see Foucault 1977, 1986; Sterne 2001. For sounds inside hospitals and clinics, see Rice 2013. In the specific case of the medical realm, auscultation situates the body as "eloquent irrespective of its owner's capacity to speak" (Rice 2013, 64). The subjective experience of the patient is relegated second to the language of the body itself. Sounds are isolated and then treated as objective diagnostic signs. Consequently, when Foucault ([1973] 2008) discusses the emergence of the "medical gaze," he recognizes the importance of listening and touching as particular technologies of power that create subjugation, hierarchies, and social identities. There is a performative transformation inside the clinic through auscultation, which is multimodal in nature, involving language, touching, listening, and external signs that range from patients' robes to machinery.