

# The Offline and Online Mediatization of Psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires

---

Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas, *University of San Francisco*

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the mediatized nature of the circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, Argentina, by focusing on psychoanalytic talk and listening practices, inside and outside the clinical setting. It shows that mediatization processes, which link institutional practices to processes of communication and commoditization (Agha 2011a), are key for understanding how psychoanalytic knowledge (including its lexical register) and its therapeutic practice get reproduced in fractionally congruent forms within everyday interactions across Buenos Aires. Specific emphasis is placed on the many uptake formulations of psychoanalytic practice that are observed today, on the scale-changing effects of mediatization, and on changes in the propinquity of interactants in psychoanalytic encounters.

This article examines psychoanalytic talk and listening practices in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from the standpoint of their organization through mediatized processes, that is, through processes that reflexively link forms of communication to forms of commoditization (Agha 2011b, 163). By considering how distinct communicative routines (e.g., face-to-face interactions, online communications) are differentially organized within distinct mediatized encounters (e.g., in fee-based clinical services, on the telephone, on Skype, in magazines, on television), this article examines a variety of practices that are derived from the psychotherapeutic encounter but that, through a range of uptake formulations, constitute a proliferating set of cultural forms in the online and offline lives of present-day Argentines.

The essay is divided into four different sections. The first section provides a general introduction to why psychoanalysis has become so pervasive in Ar-

---

Contact Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas at Communication Studies, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94117-1080 (xmarsillivargas@usfca.edu).

Signs and Society, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2016). © 2016 Semiosis Research Center at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. All rights reserved. 2326-4489/2016/0401-0006\$10.00

gentina, and especially in Buenos Aires, and focuses on the fundamental role of mediatization in its dissemination. The second analyzes uses of psychoanalytic terminology outside clinical settings, and of variants observed in everyday forms of communication. The third section focuses on the concept of uptake and its relationship to what I call “genres of listening” (Marsilli-Vargas 2014) and thus approaches listening from the point of view of mediatization. Finally, the fourth section explores the different scaling models generated by the reproduction of psychoanalysis through different settings and media both analog and digital.

### Psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires as a Mediatized Field

“In Argentina, psychoanalysis has expanded beyond the clinic, you can find it everywhere!” With these words a young psychoanalyst explained to me that for many Argentines, especially *porteños* (as the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are called), psychoanalysis, more than just a therapeutic technique, has become a way of interpreting the world. He referred to the fact that psychoanalysis occupies an important position in Argentina, one that partially symbolically structures other fields and many discursive arenas. These kinds of assertions are heard frequently in Buenos Aires and also beyond the capital.

But what exactly does it mean that psychoanalysis has expanded beyond the clinic? What parts of psychoanalysis have migrated outside the clinic? What does psychoanalysis mean in the context of its circulation? These questions can be approached by focusing on the mediatization of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, more precisely on the process of lamination between its discursive-textual and its commoditized features (Agha 2011a, 175). In order to approach these questions, we need to understand first how psychoanalysis became a commoditized practice that links specific ideologies to a larger variety of social interactions in Argentina.

In 2005 the World Health Organization estimated that in Argentina there were 154 psychologists—including psychoanalysts—for every 100,000 inhabitants, making Argentina the country with the most psychologists per capita in the world.<sup>1</sup> The second, Denmark, had 85, about half as many as Argentina. By contrast, in the United States, ranked fifth, there were 31.1 for every 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> A more recent study shows even higher numbers in Argentina, estimating 196 psychotherapists per 100,000, or one for every 510 inhabitants.

1. See [www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/atlas/profiles\\_countries\\_a\\_b.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/profiles_countries_a_b.pdf), 62–64.

2. The American Psychological Association (APA) estimated a smaller number for the United States: twenty-seven per 100,000 inhabitants (Romero 2012).

According to this study the proportion grows disproportionately to nothing less than 828.5 psychotherapists every 100,000 inhabitants in the capital city of Buenos Aires (Alonso et al. 2008).

While these numbers refer not only to psychoanalysts but also to the broader category of “psychologists,” there is in fact considerable semantic overlap in ways of talking about different mental health disciplines in Argentina. Psychoanalysis shares with other disciplines the ideas of unconscious practices, mental disorders, and of therapeutic work as a means of healing emotional distress. Accordingly, psychology and psychiatry share exchangeable semantic nuances in everyday talk that refers to the practices of psychoanalysis, or of generic psychology. Analysands and patients use the word *psychologist* when they are going to analysis, or *psychiatrist* when they are referring to a psychologist, or the colloquial expression *el loquero/la loquera* (where *loco* or *loca* means crazy, and a *loquero/a* is an expert in dealing with crazy people). Psychoanalysis is inserted in a broader field of mental health that scholars of psychoanalysis in Argentina refer to as *el mundo psi* (the psy-world).<sup>3</sup>

In most parts of the world, those three fields remain separate. However, in Argentina, these terms, and especially the duplet psychoanalysis/psychology, are to a large extent interchangeable terms. Why is that? Alejandro Dagfal, a psychologist and author of the book *Between Paris and Buenos Aires: The Invention of the Psychologist* (2009) explains this phenomenon through what he calls the “cultural French exception.” His central hypothesis points to the connection and exchange between Paris and Buenos Aires as absolutely critical to understand how in Argentina psychology did not follow the cognitive paradigm linked to the Anglo-Saxon scientific tradition. Through the French influence, Buenos Aires subtracted a big part of the biological component of psychology and inserted a subjective dimension that drew psychology closer to the humanities. Another factor behind the “humanization” of psychology was that at the moment of insertion of psychology into curricula at public universities in 1939, there were not many psychology professors. Thus, many philosophers, self-taught amateurs and some medical doctors with psychoanalytic training would teach psychology by bringing their conceptual framework to this emerging field, which as a result expanded in a different direction: in Argentina the “anti-positivist reaction” of the 1930s meant that “the experimental or naturalist modern currents from any direction didn’t have a strong resonance inside the universities” (2009, 31).<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s psychoanalysis became dominant and

3. See Balán 1991; Plotkin 2001; Visacovsky 2002; Lakoff 2006; Dagfal 2009.

4. All the quotes from Dagfal (2009) are my translation.

since then has not left its hegemonic position (unlike Brazil, and even France, where in the sixties psychoanalysis was threatened by “scientific” approaches and had to fight hard to maintain its central place). As a consequence, the “Argentine exceptionality” was born out of its counterpart, the French exception: “Buenos Aires does not only mirror Paris, but creates its own image, its own hybrid idea of the reflected image” (47).

Throughout the modernization process and social restructuring that Argentina experienced after the 1960s, psychoanalysis became simultaneously a therapeutic method, a means to channel and legitimize social anxieties, and an item of consumption that provided status to a sector of the population obsessed with the concept of “modernity.”<sup>5</sup> Above all, it became an interpretative system through mediatized forms. According to Mariano Plotkin, historian of psychoanalysis, “if neurosis was *the* modern disease, then psychoanalysis was *the* modern therapy to deal with it, and it was touted as such by numerous magazines and other publications” (2001, 73). At the same time, the middle classes reaction against president Perón, whom they perceived as authoritarian and anti-liberal, employed psychoanalytic concepts to describe the Peronist regime: they judged it “schizophrenic” and “neurotic,” creating a long tradition to this day in Argentina by which political and economic circumstances are described through a psychoanalytic frame.<sup>6</sup> The appropriation of psychoanalysis as an interpretative instrument by the intellectual left is also an important factor in the dissemination and legitimization of psychoanalysis in Argentina.<sup>7</sup>

Another important aspect of the mediatization of psychoanalysis is the circulation of psychoanalytic sections in popular magazines, journals, and periodicals of all kinds, varying in degrees of difficulty and specialization. In the late 1950s and early 1960s magazines for women, for example, developed weekly and monthly editorials directing women toward new ways of getting to know one’s self and providing new technologies of self-understanding, like psycho-tests and quizzes, through which female psychoanalysts began to become “experts” in women’s issues (Vezzetti 1983; Plotkin 2001). More recently, the proliferation of radio and television shows broadcasting live sessions between analysts and analysts, and even psychoanalysts analyzing television celebri-

5. The idea of an inner self is quintessential index of the modern subject (see Inoue 2006).

6. A great example of this is the article *Saber y autoridad: intervenciones de psicoanalistas en torno a la crisis en la Argentina* (Visacovsky and Plotkin 2008), which provides an analysis of how psychoanalysis was used as a theoretical frame to explain the devastating economic crisis in Argentina from 2001 to 2003.

7. For example, famous psychoanalyst and author Silvia Bleichmar (2002), in her best-selling book *Dolor país* (roughly, *Country pain*, a title that alludes to the economic measure “country risk”) describes the psychological dimension of the 2002 economic crisis in Argentina.

ties and sports icons, as well as diverse advertisement campaigns that use the figure of the analyst in its most iconic representation, contribute to the further mediatization of psychoanalysis in Argentina. All of these examples expand the scale of the circulation of psychoanalytic discourses in varied commoditized-communicative forms.

The connection of psychoanalysis with the social sciences and the humanities sometimes takes its most career-centric commoditized form in the clinic, as Alfonso—an established psychoanalyst who has been working for almost thirty years in his private practice and has published many articles and a book about psychoanalysis—stated when I asked him about the pervasive nature of psychoanalysis in Argentina:

I don't know the answer, but I can tell you that when I was younger I wanted to be a philosopher. I wanted to read, to think, and to have interesting political debates with people that I used to admire and thought were absolutely brilliant! But I didn't think philosophy would be economically profitable, so I needed to think on a career that provided some kind of financial security. So for me becoming a psychoanalyst was a good way to be able to read, do research and be in the discussions I wanted, but also to have a steady income.<sup>8</sup>

Alfonso's response links the process of psychoanalytic communication to a process of commoditization (Agha 2011a, 175). It thereby links communicative roles to positions within a division of labor, and therapeutic discursive interactions to fee-based services. Alfonso chooses the financial stability of a psychoanalytic career because it allows him to enter other spheres of communication as well. Yet the orthodox practice of psychoanalysis—the highly ritualized and private contract between a psychoanalyst and an analysand—takes a number of mediatized forms in Argentina, many of which involve communicative-commoditized practices that differ substantially from its orthodox forms. There is a form of psychoanalysis offered at public hospitals and small public clinics, where there is no couch but just a desk separating analyst and analysand, where sessions last twenty-five to thirty-five instead of the expected fifty minutes of Freudian psychoanalysis, and where there is minimal or

8. "No se la respuesta, pero lo que sí te puedo decir es que cuando era joven yo quería ser filósofo. Lo que quería era leer, pensar y tener discusiones políticas interesantes con la gente que yo admiraba y que pensaba que eran increíblemente brillantes. Pero jamás pensé que la filosofía era viable económicamente, así que tenía que pensar en una carrera que me pudiera dar un tipo de seguridad financiera. Así que para mi convertirme en psicoanalista fue la mejor manera de poder leer, investigar y participar de las discusiones que quería, y a la vez tener un salario fijo."

no payment, which sets it apart from the practice of traditional psychoanalysis where payment is a precondition on analysis.<sup>9</sup> There are psychoanalytical multifamily sessions (*terapia multifamiliar*) in different parts of the city as well, where several psychoanalysts and as many as eighty analysands get together inside a big auditorium, thus altering the participation framework of “privacy.” And there are television shows where people are being “analyzed” in front of the cameras for the benefit of large national audiences, where privacy gives way to theater.

Persons who practice within this type of *psy*-world, and inhabit nontraditional psychoanalytic roles, nonetheless exhibit discomfort at practices that are even less traditional than their own. For example, when I interviewed a psychoanalyst who does not consider himself an “orthodox psychoanalyst” (he rarely uses the couch, does group analysis, and works at the hospital on twenty-four-hour shifts), he made clear to me that he still finds problematic the overuse of prefixal form *psy*- in newly coined terms: “the prefix *psy* or *psycho* can be followed by anything. You can find “psychic-tarot,” or “psycho-astrology” and aberrances like that everywhere . . . in this career we don’t sign blueprints, you know, architects have to sign something.”<sup>10</sup> As mediatised practices proliferate, so do concerns about authenticity. A single communicative device (such as the prefix *psy*-) acquires many hybrid forms (such as derived words with non-technical senses) that are used by persons in varied communicative roles (such as authors and readers, television hosts and audiences) that also connect varied categories of vendors to varied categories of buyers or consumers (Agha 2011a, 175). Expression like *psy*- or *psycho*- are thus impregnated with a range of semiotic meanings, that are made widely known through processes of mediatization. At the same time, these expressions (as well as others discussed below) are also transformed into expressions with rather distinct usages and meanings in everyday life.

### Psychoanalysis outside the Clinic

Understanding the circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires as a process of mediatization is theoretically productive for various reasons. First, since what is mediatised is always a communicative form, this approach allows us to focus on specific instances of communication, where particular symbols

9. In “The Psychoanalytic Technique” ([1918] 1955) Freud introduced the necessity of payment as a precondition to analysis. According to Freud the absence of payment as a corrective force has serious consequences since it would imply that analysis is beyond the real world.

10. “El prefijo psi o psico pueden acompañarse por cualquier cosa. Puedes encontrar ‘psicotarot’ o ‘psico-astrología’ y aberraciones por el estilo en todas partes . . . en esta carrera no tenemos que firmar planos ¿sabes? los arquitectos tienen que firmar algo.”

emerge and become relevant. In the extreme case, the communicative form is a single syllable, the prefix *psy-*. In the other cases discussed below, larger interpersonal routines are recycled in fragmentary ways. In all cases, attention to what is recycled enables the identification of larger chains of communication (similar to Bakhtin's spheres of communication). Consequently, when trying to capture how one particular social relation created inside a clinical setting—the relationship between analysand and analyst—gets replicated outside the clinical setting, the concept of mediatization allows us to focus on each particular moment where this relationship gets reproduced, and to trace the semiotic chain(s) that preceded and follow it (Agha 2011b, 168). It allows us to move beyond the idea of “discourse” as an overarching and amorphous umbrella, allowing us to focus instead on discrete types of social interaction, thus making it possible to trace the sociohistorical process through which cultural forms get produced or reproduced through the text/commodity binomial.

Let us focus on how this process unfolds during face-to-face interactions. The forms *psy-* and *psycho-* are only the tip of the iceberg. In my ethnographic work in Buenos Aires I found that people use many psychoanalytic terms to talk about ordinary situations. For instance, they often use the word *hysteric* to refer to women or men who do not commit to anything (and especially to emotional relationships), *phobia* to express dislike for any situation; *psychosomatic* to talk about bodily ailments that do not have a clear traceable path, and *me psicopatió* (he/she “psychopathized” me) when someone makes you feel bad about something he or she did by putting the blame on you. Laypeople recycle psychoanalytic jargon into completely different settings. These practices transform the lexemes of the source register (in both denotation and social indexicality) and convert them into forms usable in an expanded set of everyday situations. Such usage commonly occurs in intimate one-on-one conversations but also when a public figure (e.g., a governor, a celebrity, a soccer player) uses psychoanalytic terms to describe the country, her relationships, or her neurotic behavior in a televised interview.

I also observed a number of cases where people use psychoanalytic themes to tell stories or to respond to them: the taxi driver who told me that he is going to analysis because he “likes women too much” but does not want to put at risk his long-term relationship with his wife; the woman at a convenience store who, when asked by the owner of the store why she looks so sad, responded, “I just came out from therapy,” to which the store owner replied, with absolute familiarity, “Who said knowing yourself was easy?”; and the varied, apparently random conversations that are easily overheard at the subway and at bus stations, where friends or relatives discuss their own or someone else's analytic situation.

The use of psychoanalytic terminology in personal stories transforms its significance and social reach. When using psychoanalytic jargon at home, with friends, or at a party, people expand the semiotic capacity of an otherwise institutionalized term, inserting it into new contexts and establishing semiotic links between a very particular form of knowledge (traceable all the way back to Sigmund Freud's theories) and a contemporaneous interpersonal moment that has no relation to the clinical setting. When a public figure broadcasts the term through media outlets, the scale and durability change, since the moment when the analytic term was uttered is searchable through its media imprint (record), while the term pronounced at a party is forever gone (unless there is a record of the party).

Mediatized practices become salient only as phase segments of other activities, whose genre characteristics may be entirely distinct. Thus a number of forms of communication unfold even inside the psychoanalytic clinical encounter—as when the analysand describes her morning routines, or recounts a childhood memory, or reports a hurtful remark, or bursts into tears—where the communicative genre of talk may be understood as personal narrative, or as sharing an intimacy, or as lament, or as something else. Since the economic transaction only occurs at the end of the encounter, the mediatized moments of the clinical encounter are always segregated, almost like closing brackets, from other genres of communication that both precede and follow them. Although these transactional brackets expand the social-demographic scale of psychoanalytic encounters (by linking many service providers to many clients in many clinics), the discursive features of psychotalk that are recycled from inside to outside the clinic may be recycled without salient linkage to the scale-changing mediatized practices that make such forms of talk available to many Argentines.

There is another aspect of the circulation of psychoanalysis beyond the use of clinical jargon or talking about your own or others' analytic experiences. In Buenos Aires people from different ages, gender, and professions often reproduce what I call a "psychoanalytic listening genre" by making psychoanalytic interpretations of interpersonal encounters outside the clinical setting.<sup>11</sup> Con-

11. I define a listening genre as a framework of relevance that surfaces at the moment of reception and organizes the apprehension of sound. Sound reception is not neutral. It always involves a particular type of ideological and practice-based intervention. It is never automatic. By focusing on an utterance through a particular frame, the listener creates a context, or more precisely a contextual configuration of reception that provides a unique interpretative lens. Listening genres—as speech genres—are types that are instantiated and reproduced at the moment of reception (Hanks 1989; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman 1992), and they are social in that they present a "cultural horizon" (Hanks 1996) by helping to elucidate how the listener "tunes" the ear into a particular frequency and thus, as much as ways of speaking (Hymes 1974) create structures of relevance that provide directionality. See Marsilli-Vargas 2014.



sider the following example that took place inside a taxicab. A woman (W) in her early thirties and the taxi driver (TD), a man in his early fifties, both born and raised in Buenos Aires, drove in front of a group of children dressed in white and light blue. The woman looked at the children, and the following exchange ensued:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>W: No me gusta nada esa combinación de colores, especialmente el celeste. No creo que le quede bien a nadie.</p> <p>TD: ¿Qué pasa? Escucho un montón de mala onda en tus palabras. ¿Tu vieja usa ese color seguido?</p> <p>W: ¿Qué decis?</p> <p>TD: Y yo creo que querés decir otra cosa, pero no te animás a decirlo. Nadie odia un color así sin razón.</p> <p>W: No, mi vieja no . . . pero ahora que lo decis . . . voy a tener que pensarlo.</p> | <p>W: I really dislike that combination of colors, especially light blue. I don't think anybody looks good in that color.</p> <p>TD: What's the matter? I listen to a lot of animosity in your words. Does your mother wear that color often?</p> <p>W: What are you talking about?</p> <p>TD: I think that you mean something else, but you don't dare say it. No one hates a color without a reason.</p> <p>W: No, not my mother . . . but now that you mention it . . . I will have to think about it.</p> |
|---|---|

After the woman inquired if the taxi driver had formal training as an analyst, he responded “I think more than thirteen years of therapy makes you understand how these things work. But to answer your question: no, I have never been trained as an analyst.”

This type of exchange is extraordinarily common in Buenos Aires: people often question the semantic meaning of a particular utterance and offer a psychoanalytic reinterpretation (e.g., you don't like a color, therefore you are thinking of a particular person that you dislike). Also common is the type of response the woman gives to the taxi driver's interpretation: people often question the psychoanalytic credentials of the one giving the interpretation. Frequently, as in this example, the response involves a reference to the number of years that an individual has undergone therapy. Some respondents point to the commonsensical relation between an utterance and its real meaning without further explanation; some reveal that a close friend or family member is a therapist and consequently that they have been exposed to the particularities of this listening genre.

These interpretations are also based on nonverbal communication. For example, when I passed a knife to a friend after cutting a tart, accidentally giving her the knife from the blade rather than from the handle, she interpreted this action as if I wanted to tell her something unconsciously. “Why are you doing this?” she asked, “Are you trying to tell me something?” To my lack of response (I did not understand what was happening), another friend present re-

plied, “Stop projecting your own neurosis onto other people.” This kind of interaction, in which I would do or say something that was interpreted as meaning something else by an interlocutor, was a common experience throughout my fieldwork. At the beginning of my research, these experiences led me to think that in Buenos Aires, many individuals have a tendency to overinterpret things. It was not until later that I started to realize that this was a reflection of something else: the prevalence of psychoanalysis as an interpretative framework that is evident in such listening practices. My claim is that in Argentina, people listen differently than in other places. They look for meanings that are not attached to a specific referent but rather to a particular framework of interpretation based on psychoanalysis.

I do not want to suggest that these interpretations are in fact psychoanalysis; if anything, they are a caricature of the analytic encounter. The therapeutic relationship between an analysand and analyst is a profound association that requires transference, countertransference, a specific type of knowledge, and other features that are part of this private interaction. What I am proposing is that since a big part of the population in Argentina has somehow been exposed to psychoanalysis (in any of its mediatized *psy*-forms) a particular genre of listening has formed, one that partially symbolically structures other fields and many discursive arenas. The addressivity form “I think that you mean something else” uttered by the taxi driver plays the role of a shifter (Silverstein 1979) that makes explicit how the taxi driver is listening. By doing so, he is not only reproducing a psychoanalytic listening genre (suspending semantic meaning) but is also engaging in activity that indexes additional ideological dimensions: (1) an explicit ideology of knowledge, indexing the taxi driver as knowledgeable of something the passenger does not perceive; (2) a belief in unconscious practices; and (3) a disregard for semantic content in favor of an hermeneutic approach.<sup>12</sup>

The implication is that there is an open access to interpretation of verbal utterances that point to “uncover” aspects of the most intimate self. There is a tacit subtext that reads, “You are unable to understand the real motives of your actions and feelings, so a translation is needed.” When someone says, “What you really mean is . . . ,” there is an immediate transformation of a social situation (Goffman 1964) into a setting that grounds the exchange psychoanalytically and in which many ideologies are at play. The focus is on how the individual is listening.

12. We can think here of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion (1965, 32).

### Listening as Uptake

Can we analyze these listening practices uncovered by the addressivity form “What you really mean is . . .” through the lens of mediatization? It appears that the mediatized organization of the clinical genre produces a variety of “uptake formulations” (Agha 2011b, 163) that are themselves quite varied and that have distinct genre characteristics in everyday life. The best way to approach this issue is to focus on the concept of “uptake” in Agha’s work (166–67):

“Uptake” is simply a name for a phase or interval of mediation viewed from the standpoint of what is recontextualized (i.e., by asking “uptake of what?”). It also names an act from which other acts can follow. And from the standpoint of acts that follow, the erstwhile response or uptake is now a source message. Since the acts that do in fact follow produce signs of different artifactual duration (uptake in what?), and occur in participation frameworks of diverse kinds (uptake by whom?), which may unfold at varied thresholds of propinquity from each other (uptake where and when?), the outlines of the resulting social process readily remain obscure to the participants who shape it.

Forms of uptake recontextualize the message that an act of communication creates, allowing its semiotic partials to travel in a concrete way through distinct artifacts and participation frameworks, as when verbal utterances, song, poetry pieces, and so on, are transformed into “durable artifacts” that can be replayed, sung, or read in times and places different from that of the original, that is, in a range of different semiotic events. The focus on uptake is important because once a subject receives a message, once he or she interprets it by responding to it in a particular way, the subject stops being a receiver (an audience) and becomes a creator of a new uptake formulation, a new fragment in the chain of communication, to which others serially respond in distinct ways. This is why, for Agha, reception is a process in a long-standing semiotic chain rather than a fixed position (168).

When a subject utters “What you really mean is . . .,” it is evident that this uptake (the latter’s interpretation of the words she is “receiving”) is partly replicating a communicative form that is connected to the *psy*-world in Argentina. This uptake is so pervasive that I consider it generic. Genres are useful units of analysis because they link particular formal units (e.g., phonetic, lexical, and grammatical) to thematic ones. They also structure relations between the speaker (and listener) and other participants during spoken communication (Bakhtin et al. 1986). This means that genres may preexist any particular in-

teraction and yet may be adopted and combined in speech situations (Goffman 1964). Generic types, thus, orient toward a specific conceptual horizon, determined by “the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants” (Bakhtin 1986, 78) and by the already established orders of knowledge that precede the interaction (Bauman 1992).

In my experience, almost everyone who was “interpellated” by the addressivity form “What you really mean is . . .” either accepted the interpretation or denied it, but always inside the same framework. No one I observed was unaware that he/she was being interpreted by another person, and this activity did not raise any concern. I was an exception because I did not know how to listen to words apart from their denotational content. “What you really mean is . . .” is a form of uptake that became routine, regimented through its generic transformation. It interpellates subjects in a specific and successful way, and although the specific interpretation varies, and there is a back and forth among different uptakes, they all happen inside the same framework. “What you really mean is . . .” is also a very particular form of reported speech, in which what is reported is not a direct or indirect form of reported speech but instead a new narrative centered on unconscious practices. When people in Buenos Aires use the phrase “What you really mean is . . .,” they are reporting the speech of the other person’s utterance. But what kind of report is happening? The type-token relationship in this form of quotation becomes complex, because many different tokens of the same type can emerge (e.g., when more than one listener interprets different meaning out of the same statement). The problem of the appropriation of one speaker’s discourse by another, who may employ it in a manner either directly or obliquely opposed to the original intention, is fundamental in the psychoanalytic listening genre (and to any genre of uptake, following Agha’s suggestion).

Is this particular listening genre itself mediatized in any form? It does not appear to be so. Its relationship to mediatized practices is one of partial analogy: since the listening genre is calqued on a mediatized cultural form (the clinical psychoanalytic encounter) it appears fractionally to replicate the communicative partials of psychoanalysis through its own interactional-textual form, but it does not replicate the defining commodity partials of the psychoanalytic encounter (which is a service for a fee that is provided by a practitioner formally trained as a service provider). Since the use of “What you really mean is . . .” within the everyday listening genre recycles the use of psychoanalytic jargon from within the clinical encounter into events outside the clinic, and thus into events in which no trained clinicians are present as speech partici-

pants, the construal of such recycled fragments in everyday life is not itself tightly structured or constrained, and such recycling may yield an amorphous variety of interpersonal happenings as outcomes. Its construal is underdetermined. But its occurrence is ubiquitous.

This listening genre is also very different from the one adopted by a doctor when listening to the heartbeats of my heart through the stethoscope. This listening genre—auscultation listening—implies a very particular form of listening, where the sounds of my heart have a specific interpretation. The stethoscope is like the cathedral in Agha's example (2011b, 166). The stethoscope and the cathedral are mediums that structure a communication process. The cathedral is designed to give acoustic resonance to the choir's performance, which will vary from one day to another even if each instance follows the same blueprint (the music score). The stethoscope would also allow for the amplification of the unique sound of each heart and its interpretation from the standardized measure of a normal heartbeat rate. The stethoscope allows the reproduction of a very specific type of mediatized knowledge, which in turn derives from and reproduces a specific division of labor.

But with "What you really mean is . . ." we do not have the same systematicity that we have in auscultation listening. What we have is an idiosyncratic interpretation loosely based in psychoanalysis. The efficacy of these interpretations depends on the uptake formulation that the person being interpreted subsequently produces. For example, many weeks after the taxi driver exchange happened, the woman who said she hated light blue and white told me that her mother in law very often wears a sweater that is light blue with white stripes. She reminded me of what the taxi driver had said, and she felt guilty because she loves her mother in law but was afraid she had some unconscious hostile feelings toward her. She took the taxi driver's interpretation at face value.

From a related perspective, the internal dynamics that differentiate the original form of psychoanalytic discourse from its everyday reenactments in the "What you really mean is . . ." forms of reported speech may be further explained by Bakhtin's distinction between what he terms the "internally persuasive voice" as opposed to the "authoritative voice" (1982, 346). The former represents an open expression of ideas seeking some response in search for a philosophic truth, articulated by a speaker already convinced of her ideology, while the latter is closed off to further dialogue and possible dissent. In the "What you really mean" form we see the predominance of the internally persuasive voice. But it becomes an authoritative voice when the interpreter/

listener states that she or he knows the real meaning of an interlocutor's statements and the interlocutor then accepts this interpretation at face value.

At the same time, the construal of "What you really mean is . . ." in everyday life can be quite singular and unique in each instance. The words *hysteric*, *trauma*, and *phobia* are traceable to a mediatized discourse, and have a specific technical meaning within it. But their construal in the everyday listening genre is quite distinct, and may differ from occasion to occasion. Listening can certainly be mediatized, as the example of the stethoscope clarifies; a mechanic listening to the sounds of a broken car is another example of a mediatized listening practice that is regulated by training within a division of labor. But the listening practice now at issue is not itself a mediatized practice. Its participant roles are not linked to a technical division of labor and thus lack specialized training in the technical register of psychoanalytic terminology. What people do to each other by using these word forms in everyday life is not constrained by what the psychoanalyst means by them.

There remains the question of why this listening genre is so widespread in everyday life in Argentina. It is likely that it is widely practiced in ordinary encounters for two reasons. First, since the number of people who have undergone psychoanalytic treatment in Buenos Aires is very large, a great many people have a fragmentary grasp of what happens during such treatment and can reproduce such fragments with varying degrees of fidelity to source (and with varied interpersonal effects in the current encounter). Second, as I noted earlier, fragments of psychoanalytic talk readily circulate in secondary mediatized genres in Argentina (including such media genres as magazines and television), and it is likely that many people (including those who have not themselves undergone treatment) have a passing familiarity with such talk through the forms of "fragmentary circulation" (Agha 2007, 165–67) mediated by such genres.

### **Online Psychotherapies**

One important lesson that the analysis of mediatization provides is that tracing mediatized fragments involves tracing complex semiotic chains. It also demonstrates that mediatized practices are varied and ubiquitous, so there is no need to fetishize the mass media as the only communicative domain where mediatization occurs. When a communication event is inserted in mass media, the duration, scale, and propinquity of the event change (Agha 2011b). I will now turn my attention to how the psychoanalytic encounter has expanded its scale through novel channels of communication.

Psychoanalysis differs from other forms of therapeutic counseling primarily in that it entails a long process of immersion. Psychoanalysis is based on the concept that individuals are unaware of the many factors that cause their behavior and emotions. These unconscious factors have the potential to produce unhappiness, which in turn is expressed through a score of distinguishable symptoms, including disturbing personality traits, difficulty in relating to others, or problems with self-esteem or general disposition (American Psychoanalytic Association 1998). Psychoanalytic treatment is highly individualized and seeks to show how unconscious factors affect behavior patterns, relationships, and overall mental health. Treatment traces such unconscious factors to their origins, to show how they have evolved and developed over the course of many years, and subsequently helps individuals understand these processes.

Establishing a relationship with an analyst is key for this process. In Argentina, many analysands have long-established relationships with their analysts, some lasting decades. These relationships are valued on the basis that, through their archeological work, the analyst and analysand can uncover unconscious drives that are deeply suppressed. And this work takes time, usually many years. But since Argentines, both as a result of a long history of migrations and exiles and from being part of a globalized world, move to different places around the globe depending on different factors and circumstances (economic, professional development, family ties), they sometimes take their psychoanalyst with them, continuing to have weekly meetings through Skype sessions.

In Argentina many psychoanalysts oppose this novel therapeutic encounter on the basis of their view that the clinical space is irreplaceable and that, in order for the analytic experience to flourish, it requires face-to-face interaction (see Frosh 2010). F.N., an analyst and professor of psychoanalysis at the National University of Buenos Aires was firm about this: "In order to have an analytical session, very specific steps and processes need to be present, co-presence is one of them, otherwise there is no psychoanalysis taking place, but rather an intimate conversation with a friend or acquaintance." He was arguing against the generalized idea that psychoanalysis is everything that implies a psychoanalytic interpretation. According to F.N., the lack of the physical encounter that defines the clinic, along with its theoretical specificities, impedes any form of doing psychoanalysis.

Others, who are in favor of Skype sessions, argue that there is a fetishization of the face-to-face encounter. In orthodox analysis, they claim, the analysand is not looking directly to the analyst. Instead, lying on a couch, the analysand faces a wall, a window, or a door, but never the analyst, listening only to his or

her own voice and to the analyst's. The analysand interacts directly (with eyes and bodies as well as the ear) with the analyst only when arriving and leaving the session. One of the purposes of avoiding eye contact is that in order for the transference relationship to emerge, the analyst must be an empty vessel that the analysand can fill with her own repressed desires and anxieties. Not looking directly at the analyst facilitates this process. Under this rationale, Skype is only a medium that would replicate the analytic relationship almost in its entirety.

What the detractors of Skype therapeutic sessions are unaware of is that, before Skype, Argentines in exile were using other channels of communication to maintain their analytic relationships: telephones, letters, and, only recently, social media. Mauricio, for example, has maintained an analytic relationship with a couple of psychoanalysts for nearly twenty-five years. He moved to Europe for five years when he was twenty-three years old (he is now forty-six) and began corresponding—by letter—with his analyst. He also used the phone on certain occasions, but the cost of long distance calls prevented him from calling the analyst on a more regular basis. When back in Buenos Aires, Mauricio visits the analyst's office. Mauricio now lives in the United States and continues to have weekly sessions with his analyst through Skype. During these sessions, he makes sure that he won't be interrupted, lies down on a couch, and places his portable computer close to his head, that is, in the position where the analyst would be sitting, replicating as much as possible the orthodox analytic encounter.

All the communication channels that Mauricio used throughout his life to communicate with his analyst involve moments of mediatization, although they may differ from each other in various other ways. One major type of difference between these cases—between the encounter inside the clinic, the letters that the analyst and Mauricio exchanged, the phone calls, and the Skype sessions—involves matters of durability and propinquity. The letters and Skype sessions leave traces. Mauricio can refer back to the letters, and a hacker or a surveillance agency could gain access to the therapeutic encounters somewhere in the complicated infrastructure of digital communication. Live analytic sessions, on the contrary, are ephemeral (though one can argue that they have lasting perlocutionary effects through their therapeutic force), leaving no material traces.

The propinquity of the encounters also differs in that Mauricio and the analyst were able to maintain a therapeutic relationship despite the distance. Writing letters, talking on the phone, or doing Skype sessions replaced physical proximity. Skype in particular allowed a change in scale in that it expands the



business reach of the analyst toward more potential consumers; however, the interaction is still limited to a one-on-one encounter of analysand and analyst. This scale was never transformed, since in theory no one but Mauricio and his analyst participate in this relationship. This is an interesting feature of online psychoanalysis: a different scale in the possibilities of reaching a huge number of virtual clients, the same traditional scale between analyst and analysand.

The lamination between text and commodity form is also different compared with traditional encounters. In the letters the text is the written words commoditized by the postal service; on the phone it is the digitized sounds inserted in a channel of paid communication; in Skype and the clinical encounter the text is both verbal communication and visual images (even if the images may not be relevant in all cases) coming together through a commercial transaction, that is, the paid session. Each encounter presents singular mediatized moments whose uptake in all formats is regimented by the parameters of the analytic encounter.

Forms of digital communication now set new interactional challenges to analysands by making salient new mediatized characteristics as potential trouble spots. Even though the sound of a doorbell or other outside disruptive sounds can interfere with an in-clinic analytic session, they are unintended exceptions, and analysts usually have some control on the space where the analysis is being performed. But when they are having Skype sessions, the nature of the medium is that it might fail; the connection might break down or be interrupted by reminders of software updates that pop up without warning. If the analysand positions the computer out of his sight (as in Mauricio's case), she may continue to talk without realizing that the connection has been lost until several minutes later. Online psychotherapies remind the analysand that the relationship is being mediatized when these disturbances appear. Two interesting questions that emerge from this mediatized form of communication are: What happens when the analysand is out of the frame but unaware of it (as when losing connectivity)? And what does propinquity mean in the case of Skype when face-to-face interaction is still occurring?

In conclusion, a focus on mediatization is productive for understanding how particular discursive practices circulate by being recontextualized in frameworks that differ greatly from their original source. The scaling model that mediatization provides is useful because it allows us to trace semiotic chains that produce a number of varied uptake formulations, through which the semiotic partials of the psychoanalytic encounter enable a highly differentiated set of interpersonal routines in the social lives of Argentines.

## References

- Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2011a. "Large and Small Scale Forms of Personhood." *Language & Communication* 31:171–80.
- . 2011b. "Meet Mediatization." *Language & Communication* 31:163–70.
- Alonso, M., P. Gago, and D. Klinar. 2008. "Profesionales de la psicología en la República Argentina: Síntesis cuantitativa." In *Anuario de investigaciones*, 375–82. Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad de Psicología.
- American Psychoanalytic Association. 1998. "About Psychoanalysis." <http://www.apsa.org/pubinfo/about.htm>.
- Bakhtin, M. 1986. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1982. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Balán, Jorge. 1991. *Cuéntame tu vida: Una biografía colectiva del psicoanálisis argentino*. Buenos Aires: Planeta.
- Bauman, Richard. 1992. *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. 1990. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19:59–88.
- Bleichmar, Silvia. 2002. *Dolor país*. Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal.
- Dagfal, Alejandro. 2009. *Entre París y Buenos Aires: La invención del psicólogo (1942–1966)*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1918) 1955. *Lines of Advance in Psychoanalytic Theory*. London: Hogarth.
- Frosh, Stephen. 2010. *Psychoanalysis outside the Clinic: Interventions in Psychosocial Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goffman, Erving. 1964. "The Neglected Situation." *American Anthropologist* 66 (6): 133–36.
- Hanks, William F., and Don Stephen Rice. 1989. *Word and Image in Maya Culture: Explorations in Language, Writing, and Representation*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- . 1996. "Context." In *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hymes, Dell H. 1974. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Inoue, Miyako. 2006. *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lakoff, Andrew. 2006. *Pharmaceutical Reason: Knowledge and Value in Global Psychiatry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marsilli-Vargas, Xochitl. 2014. "Listening Genres: The Emergence of Relevance Structures through the Reception of Sound." *Journal of Pragmatics* 69:42–51.
- Plotkin, Mariano Ben. 2001. *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Plotkin, Mariano, and Sergio Visacovsky. "Los psicoanalistas y la crisis, la crisis del psicoanálisis." In *Quimeras: Cuando la literatura sabe, ve, piensa*, ed. Julio Premat, 149–64. Cahiers de LLRI.CO. 4. Saint-Denis: Université Paris 8.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1986. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Romero, Simon. 2012. "Do Argentines Need Therapy? Pull Up a Couch." *New York Times*, August 18.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1979. "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." In *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. P. R. Clyne, 193–247. Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society.
- Vezzetti, Hugo. 1983. *La locura en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Folios Ediciones.
- Visacovsky, Sergio. 2002. *El Lanús: Memoria y política en la construcción de una tradición psiquiátrica y psicoanalítica argentina*. Buenos Aires: Alianza.