

## 5 The Mass Mediation of Psychoanalytic Listening

There is no innocent drawing. All drawings always express something, even in spite of the cartoonist; and then in those drawings that apparently didn't make sense, sense appears, anger appeared—I don't know, all kind of things."

(No hay dibujo inocente. Todos los dibujos siempre expresan algo, incluso a pesar del dibujante; y entonces en esos dibujos que aparentemente no tienen sentido, aparece el sentido, aparece la ira—no sé, todo tipo de cosas.)

**Graphic humorist Tute, "Tute en APA, con 'Humor al diván'" (July 12, 2018)**

Today I am going to be a subject, not a person.

(Hoy voy a ser sujeto, no persona.)

**Gabriel Rolón, celebrity psychoanalyst on the TV show *Animales sueltos* (2012)**

Anyone spending an extended period of time in Argentina would be hard pressed to miss that psychoanalytic discourses circulate in several media outlets. A number of television and radio shows engage directly with psychoanalytic theory or indirectly by using psychoanalytic ideas and frameworks to explain a diverse set of phenomena. Many shows feature analysts who discuss an assortment of topics, ranging from Twitter exchanges between politicians to personal questions about the anchor's private life to the behavior of celebrities. At times, they are called on to discuss big questions:

What is love? What is solitude? And the one that recurs most frequently: What is wrong with Argentines?

Television shows feature an array of formats. There are one-on-one interviews (*Animales sueltos*, *El ángel de la medianoche*, *Tiene la palabra*, to name just a few), where the anchor simply asks questions and the analyst responds. These interviews explicitly invoke psychoanalytic theory. Analysts demonstrate their expertise by speaking about Lacan's theory of desire or Freud's conceptualization of the superego, and they usually bring up examples from their private practice to illustrate their points. The tone of these interviews resonates with self-help materials that give advice on how to cope with personal emotional problems. They also tend to make broad generalizations about different demographics—as, for example, when claiming that women's habit of wearing makeup and stockings makes them fetishists, while men do not share this quality.<sup>1</sup> Other shows (*Cortá por Lozano*, *Pura química*, *Políticos al diván*) invite guest analysts, or hosts who are themselves analysts, to “psychoanalyze” celebrities. On live television, a celebrity sits or lies down on a couch while a psychoanalyst asks questions and interprets their answers using psychoanalytic theory. Alternately, these shows might present short excerpts of celebrities speaking on tape, followed by analysts making assessments and interpretations (“what they really mean is . . .”). These shows usually include more than one anchor/presenter, and the tenor tends to be less serious than in the one-on-one interviews.

Television is not the only medium where psychoanalytic discourses are mediated for relatively broad public consumption. Radio shows such as *Radio Lacan*, *Programa radial psi*, and *Freudiana radio: La voz psicoanalítica del mundo* (The psychoanalytic voice of the world), also feature one-on-one interviews, following more or less the format used on TV. They might revolve around a discussion of the difference between neurosis and psychosis or relate Lacan's mirror theory to compulsive behavior in adolescents. There are also programs that incorporate the participation of listeners who call the studio and ask the analysts to provide guidance and counseling. Being a quintessential listening experience, radio shows emphasize the importance of listening and direct their audience to pay attention to particular words or concepts. They also ask what those words “invoke” in listeners, once more displacing denotation in favor of a hermeneutical interpretation.

In Argentina, the figure of the analyst is so pervasive that it even functions as a promotional character to sell products. Commercials draw upon the stereotypical figure of the analyst—a well-dressed, bearded man in his

fifties in a nice office. This figure is used to sell diverse products, from beer to potato chips, auto repairs, and aperitifs, to name just a few.

Psychoanalysis is also present in graphic humor, which has a long-standing presence in Argentine culture and the public sphere. In the three most widely circulated newspapers in Argentina, *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and *Página 12*, established cartoonists persistently depict humorous situations using the analytic encounter: an analysand on the couch and an analyst sitting with a notebook and a pen in hand. Some of these cartoons are allegorical representations of the analytic encounter. For example, a caricature by cartoonist Tute features an analysand—a man lying on a couch—with his speech represented in a huge bubble with a long text towering above him. The analyst, a woman, stands on her chair and seeks to read the “other side” of the text—that is, the “other meaning” of the analysand’s uttered words (*When you say X, I hear Y*) (figure 5.1). In other cartoons, analysts and analysands address topics through discussion. For instance, cartoonist Fernando Sendra depicts a man telling an analyst, “Doctor, women scare me.” The analyst responds, “Well . . . let’s look at your childhood,” and the man replies, “What if my mother finds out?” (figure 5.2).

Beyond graphic humor, most newspapers include one or more columns written by psychoanalysts and psychologists, either focused on psychoanalytic theory or using psychoanalytic frameworks to discuss political issues. For example, in August 15, 2019, the *Página 12* weekly psychology section included a note titled “Occupation Army: A psychoanalytic view on the saturation of uniformed agents in public space.” Here Cristian Rodríguez (2019), a psychoanalyst living in Buenos Aires, describes the parallels between the recent proliferation of blue and yellow vests used by the city and transit police and the militarization of Buenos Aires during the dictatorship of the 1970s. Using concepts such as *transsubjectivity* and *functional psychological repression*, Rodríguez embarks on a metaphorical psychoanalytic analysis of the vests, revealing how they trigger repressed memories of urban militarization. In 2019, another newspaper, the widely circulating *Clarín*, published in its psychology section the article “Apply the Marie Kondo method to order your life and your bonds. Psychologist Alejandro Schujman (2019) “and Laura Escobar, a disciple of the Japanese woman, give the keys to take it to the inner world.” The word *bonds* (*vínculos*) make explicit reference to a psychoanalytic term that describes the way in which a person relates to others by establishing a relational structure. Thus, Kondo’s book—globally popular for urging readers to declutter their houses in order

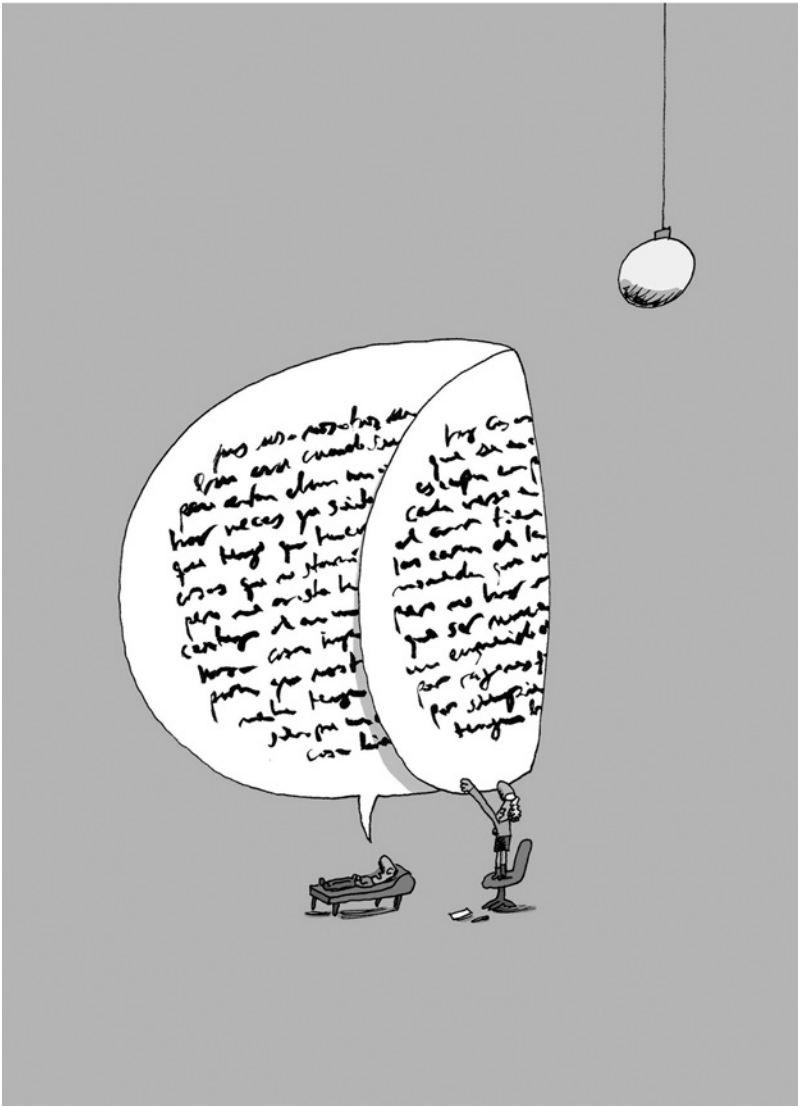


FIGURE 5.1 Cartoon by Tute (Humor al diván. 2017, 152).



**FIGURE 5.2** Cartoon by Fernando Sendra (n.d.).

to achieve order in their lives—gets embedded in a conversation about psychoanalytic theory.

There are numerous other prominent examples of the presence of psychoanalytic discourse in media production in Argentina, across the political spectrum. *La Nación*, a conservative newspaper, has an online channel with a weekly show called *Terapia de Noticias* (News therapy), hosted by Diego Sehinkman, who is both a psychologist and a journalist. The show begins with a vignette on a particular political discussion in Argentina (e.g., a senator debating a government policy), followed by Sehinkman's monologue in which he gives “different readings” or “possible scenarios” regarding the meaning of the presented topic. The word *therapy* (*terapia*) in *Terapia de Noticias* conveys the idea that there are many possible interpretations of the things politicians say. The recurrent phrase “¿Qué habrá querido decir?” (What would he/she have meant?) resonates throughout the show. Since 2012 Sehinkman has hosted another show, *Políticos al diván* (Politicians on the couch), also on *La Nación*, where he interviews politicians in his role as analyst, replicating the analytic encounter. In his own words, the interviews seek to emulate “a first therapy session” and take “the best X-ray that can be taken of these characters” without judging or placing oneself “in a moral place.” The metaphor of the X-rays once again conjures the notion that there is something hidden, ready to be discovered (*When you say X, I hear Y*).

That a show like this is produced by one of Argentina's major newspapers is striking. Even more remarkable is the fact that many politicians are willing to participate. Sehinkman (2014) has conducted so many interviews with prominent politicians that he published a book based on these

interviews, the subtitle of which translates as “the unconscious ones that govern us.”

Psychoanalytic discourse also has a strong presence with other major elements of Argentine cultural production—such as tango, the quintessential Argentine music genre. An assemblage of psychologists and tango dancers called Tango-Psi have framed tango as having a direct connection to psychoanalysis. Mónica Peri, a psychologist and tango dancer who is affiliated with Tango-Psi, has written two books—*Tango: Un abrazo sanador* (Tango, a healing embrace) (2015) and *PsicoTango: Danza como terapia* (Psycho-Tango: Dance as therapy) (2010)—in which she describes finding a Freudian parallel between the embrace of tango dancing and “the first embrace we received from our mothers” (2010, 35). Peri (2009, 5) suggests that since tango has been “demonstrated to be an object of psychoanalysis, we can compare it to play, inasmuch as in playing, the dance of the tango allows us to put ourselves in contact with our unconscious. *Bodies that speak and are heard*. Incarnate bodies, in which life is manifested” (emphasis added).

Psychoanalytic discourse is also widely present in the theater. The famous opera *María de Buenos Aires*, written in 1968 with music by Ástor Piazzolla—one of the most celebrated Argentine tango composers—presents the story of María, a prostitute “born one day when God was drunk” who dies and is resurrected as a ghost. Her specter wanders the streets, finding a rare circus run by Los Analistas (the Analysts), in whose arena remorse, complexes, and nightmares are portrayed by reckless acrobats. When one of the acrobats, Analista Primero (First Analyst), tries but fails to interpret María’s memory of a shadow, she believes she has fallen prey to a strange madness.

The proliferation of cultural representations of psychoanalysis outside of the clinic in Argentina extends to rock music lyrics, astrology, numerous social media groups, and TV series, among many others. Although, as historian Mariano Ben Plotkin and anthropologist Nicolás Viotti (2020) have argued, psychoanalysis may be declining as a clinical practice in Buenos Aires, these examples suggest that the dialectic between the clinical practice and its commoditized forms persists. All the TV and radio shows, newspaper columns, and comics I have described continue to be produced today, with no sign of flagging interest.

This chapter analyzes in detail examples of three cultural representations: graphic humor, psychoanalysts on television, and advertisements. These examples can help us understand how these discourses have permeated popular culture and how they circulate; the metacommunicative messages embedded in psychoanalytic discourses; and how listening psychoanalytically, as

a genre, is present within these representations, helping to disseminate the listening ideology that there is a hidden meaning within the utterances available for interpretation (*When you say x, I hear y*). In these analyses we can see the dialogic movement between the constitution and circulation of psychoanalytic listening and the cultural production of discourses based on psychoanalysis.

But to approach these examples we need to understand first how psychoanalysis became a *framework of interpretation* to be used for different purposes. In what follows I outline a brief history of how psychoanalytic ideas permeated other fields.

### PSYCHOANALYSIS AS AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

People in Buenos Aires often say, “In Argentina, psychoanalysis has expanded beyond the clinic; you can find it everywhere!” This statement is likely based on the amount and variety of the field’s cultural representations. Yet psychoanalysis has left the clinic and acquired different forms almost since its inception. This has occurred most notably in academic settings, as scholars of the humanities and the social sciences began to analyze data and texts and create theories using the so-called psychoanalytic framework.

Thus, when analysts and lay people discuss the expansion of psychoanalysis beyond the clinic, it is important to answer some key questions: What part of psychoanalysis has migrated outside the clinic? Does this mean that information about psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theories are available to everyone? Does it imply that psychoanalysis is accessible and provided almost everywhere? And what, then, does psychoanalysis mean in the context of this broad circulation?

In its early days, psychoanalysis borrowed terminology from medicine—not only in an effort to give psychoanalysis prestige but also because most of the early analysts were doctors (Balán 1991; Frosh 2010). The consulting room became the key site of psychoanalysis because it was where treatment took place. The professionalization of psychoanalysis followed the structure of medical settings (e.g., sessions were expected to have a certain duration, emotional involvement with the patient was restricted, and specific places were assigned to the patient/analysand and the analyst in the consulting room). Since psychoanalysts were already doctors who provided medical care, the figure of the psychoanalyst consolidated as that of a therapist (Dagfal 2009; Roudinesco 1990).

In a very concrete sense, the therapeutic clinic became the source of psychoanalysis, and its theories and practices were developed to be applied inside the clinic (Dagfal 2009; Frosh 2010; Roudinesco 1990, 2003). However, over time the “clinic” in psychoanalysis came to extend beyond its original physical space and became a metaphor.

From this perspective, psychoanalysis is not just a medical science but a practice. It involves the presence of an analyst and an analysand in which the analysand’s aim is to uncover the hidden (repressed) source of a particular ailment and to learn to live a life where suffering may not necessarily disappear but is kept at bay. The analyst helps in this process by being both a *listener* and a witness to the presence of meaning in what, for the analysand, is unspeakable or meaningless (Edelson 1975). This process happens within a very specific framework that involves transference (the unconscious way in which patients relate to or “use” the analyst to advance their treatment), countertransference (the analyst’s response to the transference of the patient), and, most importantly, the certainty that at some point unconscious impulses will emerge.

Under this definition, psychoanalysis is a *live encounter* that necessitates face-to-face interaction. As a senior analyst in the first-year introductory psychopathology class at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) described it: “Without analyst and patient, both being together in their transferential relationship, interpretation in the psychoanalytic sense cannot take place.” In order to have an analytical session, very specific steps and processes need to be present; otherwise, no psychoanalysis takes place, and the proceedings are no more than an intimate conversation with a friend or acquaintance.

Stephen Frosh (2010, 4), one of the most important historians of psychoanalysis, has discussed the same idea in detail: “When a literary author’s work is interpreted in terms of childhood trauma, it is not psychoanalysis; or when a political commentator draws on ideas about unconscious national impulses, it is not psychoanalysis; or when a social psychologist philosopher uses the idea of intimacy and stability of selfhood to understand identity conflicts, it is not psychoanalysis.” Frosh agrees with the UBA professor and many other psychoanalysts: that what defines psychoanalysis is the therapeutic encounter, which implies the co-presence of both analysand and analyst.<sup>2</sup> Thus, whatever social theorists are doing when they use psychoanalytic explanations, it is not psychoanalysis. Instead, they are using a particular framework to explain a collection of different social phenomena.



Frosh ascribes blame for this misuse of psychoanalytic ideas to Freud and early students such as Carl Jung. After all, Freud himself published studies of creative artists in which he used psychoanalysis to bring to light aspects of their psychology (see Freud [1910] 1964). In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud ([1930] 1962) expanded his focus to encompass society as a whole in an effort to make sense of the bleak aftermath of the First World War. Consequently, psychoanalytic interpretation in its beginnings served as a framework to interpret social behavior partly because “its rich account of unconscious processes inserts an appreciation of the ‘irrational’ into theories that otherwise find the unexpected, self-destructive or fanatical eruptions of social disorder hard to fathom” (Frosh 2010, 67).

But this is not the sole reason for using psychoanalysis to perform social analysis. Psychoanalytic theory is able to eschew fixed meanings and instead posit interpretations of particular people in particular contexts. This flexibility opened the door to an array of different uses for the psychoanalytic framework, especially for the so-called postmodern theorists: feminist studies (Butler 1990; Mitchell 1974; Spivak 1987), critical theorists (Adorno [1938] 1978; Althusser and Balibar 1971; Marcuse 1955), art (Ogden 1999), literature (Kristeva 1984, 1987), and postcolonial studies (Bhabha 1991a, 1991b; Chakrabarty, Majumdar, and Sartori 2007), among many others. All of these studies use particular aspects of psychoanalytic theory, from different schools of psychoanalysis, to achieve varying aims.<sup>3</sup>

The use of psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool in academic circles for the study of an array of social phenomena has a long history. Through this relationship, some analysts have become public intellectuals, generating sufficient cultural capital representing “cultural authority” (Zelizer 1992) to endow them with the right to talk about almost any cultural phenomenon.

This has happened in several countries. In France, for example, Lacan began in 1951 to hold private weekly seminars in Paris in which he urged students to study what he called “a return to Freud” that would concentrate on the linguistic nature of psychological symptomatology (Marta 1987). Due to its popularity, this seminar became public two years later and lasted for twenty-seven years, ending only when Lacan’s life was in its final stage. These seminars became highly influential, not only inside psychoanalytic circles but also in Parisian cultural life. Lacan was famous for his difficult prose and entangled propositions, but nonetheless, he appeared on televised shows to talk about many aspects of everyday life experience, sometimes being recognized more as a public intellectual than a practicing psychoanalyst (Roudinesco 2003).

When he emerged as a public figure in France, Lacan followed a trend that was already in place in other countries. In the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, this phenomenon took the form of books and magazines intended for lay audiences. In his book *The Fifty-Minute Hour: A Collection of True Psychoanalytic Tales*, Robert Lindner (1954, ix) quotes historian Max Lerner as saying that “one of the by-products of the post-Freudian age has been the emergence of a new genre of American writing—the work of the writing psychiatrist or psychoanalyst, who applies his insights to the problems of the day or tells of some of his adventures with his patients.” It was this genre that prompted the circulation of psychoanalysis outside the clinic in the United States and elsewhere.

Such interpretations and circulation of psychoanalytic discourses are possible thanks to the plasticity of psychoanalytic theory. It was lifted from its interactional and institutional origins and transformed, among other practices, through the process of entextualization, or “the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit—a *text*—that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73), and also through the process of contextualization, the accommodation of those texts to new institutional surroundings (Silverstein and Urban 1996).

So, what does it mean that psychoanalysis in Argentina has moved beyond the clinical setting, having infiltrated contexts that do not necessarily comply with the clinical setting? What circulates outside of the clinic is an entextualized and mediatized (Agha 2011) form of psychoanalysis that takes different shapes, depending on the context in which it has been placed (e.g., the university, radio and television shows, or advertisements). Consequently, when we hear such declarations as that of Yamil—a neuropsychologist who states that psychoanalysis is everywhere in Argentina due to its “hegemonic presence” in the national universities—what has become ubiquitous is not necessarily the clinical practice of psychoanalysis (although the number of people who attend analysis is very high compared to other countries) but particular texts that are decentered from its interactional and institutional origin and recentered into different contexts (Bauman and Briggs 1990) through their mediatized forms, which link institutional practices to processes of communication and commoditization (Agha 2011).

Within the process of circulation and mediatization of psychoanalytic discourses, and more broadly over the course of these discourses’ reproduction and dissemination, listening is key in that there is a common denomi-

nator that relates all the different modalities in which psychoanalysis is discussed outside of the clinical setting; it is the quality described elsewhere as *When you say X, I hear Y*—that is, there are things we do that we are unconscious of but that have meaning beyond our understanding. Once the cumulative resonance of experiences, sounds, and words finally finds a referent, then we are able to perceive the “real” meaning of a particular experience.<sup>4</sup>

When one looks at Argentina, for example, it is clear that these processes develop in practice, meaning that it is through the actions and exchanges between social actors that the mediatization of psychoanalysis surfaces. Discourses of psychoanalysis in the country rely on sociohistorical models (i.e., the idea of unconscious practices, the Oedipus complex) through which cultural forms are produced and reproduced, and these are further circulated in an array of mediatized forms. The rest of this chapter illustrates this phenomenon by looking closely at three cultural representations of psychoanalysis in different media outlets while also underscoring the crucial role that listening plays in this dissemination.

#### PSYCHOANALYSIS AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

When discourses of psychoanalysis are inserted into new contexts, the boundaries between expert knowledge, lay reception, and the later replication of this knowledge mix. The communication and listening models associated with psychoanalysis play a prominent role in this process.

The direct and indirect exposure to psychoanalytic discourses creates a lay audience with a tendency to freely provide psychoanalytic interpretations. This exposure may result from an individual having gone to analytic sessions for many years or through information shared by family members or close friends who are analysts. More recently, however, the significant presence of psychoanalysis in Argentina’s media has also directly contributed to the creation of this audience, leading to a prolific circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires and to its interpretative framework becoming part of the cultural and social life of the city. In brief, psychoanalysis as an explanatory model has become socially significant in Buenos Aires. Exactly *how* the circulation of psychoanalysis became so socially significant is attributable to the *communicability* of its textual form (Briggs and Hallin 2007).

It’s important to note that what is circulating is not “psychoanalysis” itself but a particular discourse based on the practice of psychoanalysis.

The concept of “communicability” helps us to understand certain discourses as effective, and therefore contagious, because they communicate successfully while others do not. Charles Briggs (2007, 556) explains, “Communicability suggests volubility, the ability to be readily communicated and understood, and microbes’ capacity to spread,” adding that “communicability is infectious—the way texts and the ideologies find audiences and locate them socially/politically” (see also Briggs 2005, 2011). Texts and discourses project a wholesome final product, failing to show all the ideologies that emerge when discourses circulate. Focusing on the concept of communicability helps disentangle the ideological dimensions that create “legitimate” producers of certain discourses (e.g., medical, legal), on the one hand, and supposedly passive receivers of information (texts), on the other. In the case of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, both consumers and producers of discourses based on psychoanalysis are responsible for its circulation and dissemination, so the boundaries between “authoritative” psychoanalytic discourse and the “lay” representation of psychoanalytic discourse are not as fixed as in other fields. By contrast, in biomedical discourses, science is the backup for any assertion, serving as a consistent and trustworthy technique for the development of our understanding of the natural world (Foucault 2010; Latour 1993, 2001, 2005). Scholarly works on medical discourses (J. Anderson 1998; Briggs and Hallin 2007; Capra 1982; Good 1994; Kleinman 1980) have demonstrated that these constructions never exist at a purely conceptual level; they are always applied through sets of material practices. The material understanding of human illness is thus reflected in the material practices of the medical profession, which has become a dominant discourse through the application of scientific knowledge. It is through such practices that the power of the biomedical discourse of health and illness has become socially embedded (Briggs 2011, 2005, 2004).

While psychoanalysis also has to do with health and illness, it does not invoke the same legitimation that science confers on biomedical discourses. Becoming an analyst entails a long and idiosyncratic process in which one must earn legitimacy after a long personal engagement with analysis. In France, though psychoanalysis enjoys high cultural prestige, it does not possess the social legitimation that is expected from a university profession (i.e., the title of psychoanalyst is not recognized by the university) (Lézé 2006). Since the boundaries of psychoanalysis are porous, and the legitimation of the analysts is not always supported by a learning institution, the overlap between analysts and lay audiences is common. Such a dilution of

expertise is anathema in the biomedical realm, where institutional accreditation grants doctors the authority to diagnose and prescribe medication.

That these concepts are so far removed from biomedical discourses is, to an extent, part of their appeal. The communicability of psychoanalytic discourses does not project the authority that biomedical discourses do. And although Argentina has recently created university programs that confer “legitimate” degrees in psychoanalysis, the overuse of the prefix *psy-* (as in *psychotango* and *psytrance music*, among many others), the presence of psychoanalysis in so many different fields of cultural production, and the perceived antiempiricism of some disseminators of psychoanalysis suggest that psychoanalytic discourses are communicable because they appeal to a universal quality of humanity related to personal emotions and feelings mediated by unconscious practices.

### Graphic Humor

The medium of graphic humor is useful for understanding how psychoanalytic discourses and depictions of listening psychoanalytically circulate in Argentina. Numerous graphic humorists, some of whom have large international followings, incorporate psychoanalytic frameworks into their works. In addition to a vast number of lay readers, psychoanalysts participate in this media ecology—as both artists and audiences—pointing to a broader ambiguity regarding the legitimate and authentic site for psychoanalytic discourses. Yet these ambiguities ultimately help to allow key aspects of psychoanalytic discourse and its listening practices to flourish well outside the clinical settings.

One fascinating example is the 2017 book *Humor al Diván* (Humor at the couch) by Juan Matías Loiseau, a famous Argentine graphic humorist who publishes under the name Tute. In the summer of 2018, Tute became the first cartoonist ever invited to present his work at the APA. Alicia Lagarrigue, the APA’s communications director, explained that she decided to invite Tute because “for me, he is the representative of psychoanalysis in all of us” (Tute 2018).

On July 12, 2018, the auditorium of the APA in Buenos Aires was packed. A heterogeneous group composed of many psychoanalysts but also a good number of lay people had assembled to listen to Tute. The event was focused on *Humor al Diván*, a collection of cartoons depicting moments shared between analyst and analysands, short stories involving couples, and solitary dialogues with one’s own psyche. This subject matter was familiar territory for

Tute, for he had produced other works concerning psychoanalysis. During the presentation, Tute was asked why he had become so interested in psychoanalysis. He paused and carefully selected his words before responding:

On the one hand I'm interested in psychoanalysis as a technique. I think it's a weird [*volada*] technique. . . . I mean, I think it's a very ingenious idea created by a madman [*laughs*]. . . . I have been going to analysis for many years, so I began to learn things—only as an analysand, because I never studied it, nor I am invested in reading psychoanalysis. But I'm interested. From the humoristic point of view, as a graphic humorist, I also find it superinteresting; it is a space that is very prone to humor, right? The little couch which is a kind of a little bed with a guy sitting there, and another one lying, and they do not know each other. And yet, they recount themselves . . . or at least the analysand tells his deepest, most intimate, most miserable things to a stranger. And there is supposed to be a cure taking place with the few words that the other subject—who every now and then says “Hmmm” [*laughter*]. . . . On the other hand, I consider the psychoanalyst an artist. . . . It makes me laugh when [people] try to bring psychoanalysis into the realm of a discipline, as if it was an exact science. For me it's so far away; it's much closer to the artistic field than it is [to] science. (Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina 2018)

The event included a panel discussion with distinguished figures in the field: Dr. Andrés Rascovsky, one of the most famous analysts in Argentina, former president of the APA, and the son of APA cofounder Arnaldo Rascovsky, who was among the primary disseminators of psychoanalysis in Argentina; and Liliana Pedrón, an active member of both the APA and the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), an editorial coordinator of the IPA's *Journal of Psychoanalysis Today*, and the APA's coordinator of cultural events and symposia.<sup>5</sup> Their presence further demonstrated that the APA considered this an important event in the institution's broader engagement.

Far from being just a celebration of the author's artistic achievement, the discussion was instead a psychoanalytic analysis of numerous elements relating to the book and the author. For example, using a psychoanalytic framework, Rascovsky addressed the subject of the father in Tute's work, noting that both he himself and Tute had followed in the footsteps of successful parents (Tute's father, Caloi, was also a famous cartoonist). His comments explored the continuity of the subjective bonds between father and son.

Pedrón similarly drew from a psychoanalytic framework, looking for “that which is not said (or drawn)” in each cartoon. She speculated about the meaning of some of Tute’s drawings, wondering whether the sketch of what seems like a “floating stone” (depicting the moon—a frequent image in Tute’s cartoons) represents *la culpa* (guilt) (figure 5.3). She remarked on the fact that Tute strikes out words in some of the cartoons and replaces them with new words, making her wonder whether it is because he drew in haste or if there is another motive. She warned that for psychoanalysts, the stricken word threatens to override the effect of the new word.

Tute’s book was widely popular among lay readers, and its extensive discussion at the APA among distinguished psychoanalysts underscores how psychoanalytic discourse can be pushed well beyond the clinic, mediated, and connected to the cultural milieu of Buenos Aires. Tute himself admitted that he does not read psychoanalytic theory but that his own experience as an analyst has enabled him to appropriate psychoanalysis as an interpretive framework through its artistic representation.

Moreover, the engagement of two prominent analysts in discussing the book using psychoanalytic techniques and discourses further legitimizes the use of psychoanalysis outside the clinic. When Tute states that he sees analysis more as a form of art than as an “exact science,” he amplifies the separation of psychoanalysis from the clinic, although he concedes that



**FIGURE 5.3** “My mom would have loved to meet you.” Cartoon by Tute (2013).

there is some kind of healing during the interaction between analysand and analyst. Psychoanalysis is thus presented as a creative technique rather than as a clinical practice with a rigid nosology, a proposition that is implicitly backed by two prominent analysts.

The mediatization (the amalgamation of linguistic practices and commodification) of psychoanalytic discourses also plays an important role in the circulation of these discourses at a remove from the clinical setting. Mediatization links processes of communication to processes of commoditization (Agha 2011). It thereby connects communicative roles to positions within a division of labor. For example, in the analytic encounter, discourse is transversed by an economic transaction: there will be a payment involved at the end of the session.

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 the face-to-face clinical interaction. For example, advertisements, newspapers, tarot, and tango are practices that not only are generated outside of the clinic but imply an economic transaction that produces revenue. Tute's presentation offered another example, as it provided an opportunity to sell books, which he graciously signed at the end of the talk. Through this process of mediatization, psychoanalytic discourses transform into a commoditized form: a book that sells for twenty dollars.

But as mediatized practices proliferate, concerns about authenticity tend to emerge. That Tute is considered by a spokesperson for the APA to be “the representative of psychoanalysis in all of us,” even though he clearly stated that he is not an expert in psychoanalysis and is not interested in becoming one, suggests an ambiguity regarding who is authorized to use psychoanalysis as an interpretive framework.

When I interviewed Tute in his studio in San Telmo, he admitted that he did not like the lay psychoanalytic interpretations in which *porteños* engage. He found this practice intrusive and often “*cualquier cosa*” (nonsensical). In his work, he said, he employs creatively a theory that is open to anyone. He is not doing psychoanalysis but using the main ideas and concepts “to create something new.” By recycling psychoanalytic discourses, Tute is decentering them from the clinical setting, yielding an amorphous variety of outcomes. In an interview with *En el margen*, a psychoanalytic magazine, he noted that in his childhood home “there was a language spoken very naturally that was completely foreign to me.



When different episodes or behaviors were repeated, there were interpretations or second readings. I didn't find any sense or logic in it" (Avolio 2020). This *language*, unknown to Tute at a young age, is learned through listening, by hearing the resonances—the music—in the words. This *music* circulates through different media and cultural practices, becoming a genre of listening.

In 2012, the cartoonist published *Tuterapia*, a play on both his pen name and the phrase *tu terapia*, meaning “your therapy.” The book includes a foreword by writer and psychoanalyst Gabriel Rolón—arguably the most famous disseminator of psychoanalytic ideas to lay audiences today—who states that the psychoanalyst is searching “for a truth that hides behind the barrier of repression” (Tute 2012).<sup>6</sup> Tute's books feature many representations of this idea of “searching for [the] truth.” For example, one cartoon depicts a man lying on the couch, talking. His words construct a cavernous maze that his analyst is investigating with a lamp on his hand. After a good amount of searching, the analyst's head comes out from one of the holes in the cavern, and he asks the analysand to continue next time.

Tute is hardly the only one using psychoanalytic ideas through a mediatized chain. Quino, the most important and widely recognized graphic humorist of Argentina (he is the creator of *Mafalda*, an iconic comic strip about a little girl that has been translated into over twenty languages), also uses the figure of the relationship between analyst and analysand in his work.<sup>7</sup> Another graphic artist, Rep (Miguel Repiso), developed the character Gaspar, el Revolú (a play on the words *revolucionario* [revolutionary] and *reboludo* [the dumbest one]), an anguished leftist father whom Rep mostly portrays lying on the psychoanalytic couch talking with his analyst (figure 5.4). Rudy (Marcelo Daniel Rudaeff) is a psychoanalyst who produces cartoons with a political edge that often discuss economics, current events, and the character of politicians (figure 5.5). Fernando Sendra, a longtime contributor to the newspaper *Clarín*, also focuses on the analytic experience in drawing some of his characters. Through the process of mediatization, these graphic humorists, who are among the most recognized and influential in their field, transform psychoanalytic discourses into commoditized forms that create particular divisions of labor (cartoonists, publishers, institutions), all of which contribute to the circulation of psychoanalytic discourses. Moreover, these mediatized forms play a crucial role in the mass circulation of psychoanalytic listening as a genre in Argentina, directly disseminating specific listening models (specifically the idea that there is



**FIGURE 5.4** “I did Freudian therapy, Lacanian therapy, Jungian, Gestalt, behavioral, and I finally know who I am. I am a guinea pig. Gaspar, *el Revólú*, by Miguel Repiso (Rep), n.d. Courtesy of Miguel Repiso.



**FIGURE 5.5** Woman: I want a hysterical hamburger.

Rudy: A hysterical one, ready!

Woman: No . . . today, better not . . .

Man: I want an obsessive hamburger.

Rudy: What do you want with it?

Man: You decide.

Woman: A sausage!

Rudy: A phallic one, ready! What do you want with it?

Woman: All of it.

Rudy: I am making a lot of money since I started the "Fast Freud."

*El Licenciado Rudiez*, by Marcelo Rudaeff (Rudy) and Pati (n.d.). Courtesy of Marcelo Rudaeff.

something hidden that can be discovered) to audiences in an array of social contexts well outside the clinical encounters of analysts and analysands.

### Psychoanalysis on Television

As psychoanalytic discourse becomes increasingly part of media, art, and cultural production in Argentina, listening continues to play a central role in the process of its circulation, not only in the way it affects people's interactions and social ideologies but also as a commodity that can be exploited,

further facilitating the spread of psychoanalytic discourses through Argentina's market forces. A good illustration of this can be seen in the depictions of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic listening on Argentine television.

Psychoanalyst Gabriel Rolón has become perhaps the most famous interlocutor between psychoanalysis and lay audiences in Argentina. He works as a clinical psychoanalyst in his own practice and has written nine books about psychoanalysis. Free of esoteric jargon, these books consist of easy-to-read prose that makes them accessible to readers who have little to no training or exposure to psychoanalysis. All of his books have become best sellers.

Rolón used to give talks about psychoanalytical concepts on Saturday mornings at *Clásica y Moderna*, a traditional bookstore and coffee shop in Buenos Aires's fancy neighborhood Barrio Norte. These sessions were open to the general public at a cost of thirty-five dollars per session—reservations had to be made weeks in advance due to their popularity. I attended some of these sessions, each of which lasted two hours and focused on a general theme (e.g., perversion). Rolón would reflect on the concept's meaning, how it had been developed by different psychoanalytic schools, and the significance that Freud and Lacan proposed for it, as well as how it can be seen in interactions. Like Rolón's books, these talks were intended to be accessible to nonexperts, and even though there were some psychologists present, most of the people in attendance were just curious to learn more about psychoanalysis.

Rolón's fame has transcended books and bookstore presentations, circulating psychoanalytic ideas to a mass media audience. He has appeared on numerous television shows (*Va X Vos*), *Siempre listos*, *Todos al diván*, *¿A vos quién te ama?*, and *Animales sueltos*, to mention just a few) and has produced and hosted three radio shows of his own. On his radio show *Noches de diván* (Couch nights), listeners call in to describe a particular problem or situation. Rolón then gently "analyzes" the situation in psychoanalytical terms, suggests some outcomes, and offers advice to the caller. On television shows, he will provide "analysis" in numerous formats—from informally "analyzing" a whole group of people working as hosts of a late-night show to a more formal act of one-on-one analysis, where a celebrity lies on a couch as Rolón performs a "conventional" clinical session. His media appearances range widely and have even included guest spots on a sports program, where he discussed the phobias of famous athletes. Throughout these appearances, the format draws its appeal, in part, from the inviting

nature of Rolón's psychoanalytic methods and discourses. The fact that he is "analyzing" people in public gives the audience the sense that they have been admitted into one of the most ritualized and private spaces: the therapeutic session.

The tremendous success of these therapeutic performances—evident in the large audience avidly consuming these mediatized forms of psychoanalysis through television and radio shows, popular books, café concerts, and commercial theater—points to the variety of ways in which psychoanalytic knowledge has circulated outside of the clinical setting.

When specific knowledge travels, disseminators and consumers play differing roles in the process (Briggs and Hallin 2007). Disseminators, whom we might also call experts, are separated from consumers of the knowledge they are disseminating, but this is not a direct separation so much as a negotiation of shifting roles. At times, consumers can become experts in their own right. This process is not simply the result of forming asymmetrical relationships with others; rather, it comes from learning to communicate knowledge from an authoritative angle—in other words, through the performance of expertise.

Expertise is intensively citational. Expert actors use linguistic and meta-linguistic resources, such as jargon and acronyms, to structure their interactions (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Carr 2010a). As a result, expertise requires a mastery of verbal performance, including the ability to use language to index and instantiate states of knowledge (Silverstein 2003). Rolón exhibits this expertise in his talks by harking back to Freud and Lacan, describing mental health diagnoses and their etiology and, in some ways, performing the role of a doctor. He also includes other philosophers, such as Plato, René Descartes, and Friedrich Nietzsche, through reported speech: "Nietzsche has a phrase that describes well the personality of the psychotic . . ."

But it is not only language that constructs tropes of expertise. As can be seen in the mediatized practice of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, experts must also draw upon a mastery of listening.

On April 28, 2017, during the show *Cortá por Lozano*, Gabriel Rolón appeared to promote the release of the movie *Los padecientes* (*The Sufferers*), based on a book he published in 2010.<sup>8</sup> A voice-over introduced Rolón, saying, "Rolón is not only a psychoanalyst and author of best sellers; he is also an actor, musician, teacher, radio host, and a well-known face of television. . . . His books made him the country's most famous analyst and a successful writer. . . . Gabriel Rolón is the exception to the proverb that

says, ‘Do not spread too thin’ [*El que mucho abarca poco aprieta*], because he performs each of his activities with an incomparable passion. But his multiple roles have a common core that is what he does best: *to know how to listen* [saber escuchar].”

Immediately after this introduction, host Verónica Lozano (VL) began conversing with Rolón (GR):

**VL:** Very good, to know how to listen.

**GR:** Which is not going to be of any use to me right now, because *it’s time to talk*, isn’t it? You see I, sometimes, I appreciate the possibility of being able *to give talks*, *to have conversations*. Because, as the opening report said, we analysts are a little bit—I do not say condemned, because it is a choice—but we are destined to listen. To always listen to what happens to the other, what hurts the other. And then, to have some *moments to talk*, *to be able to talk* about what happens to us, I always thank you, so thank you for the invitation.

Listening frames the interaction of this encounter from the beginning: Rolón is an expert listener. Through a series of metalinguistic remarks (which are underlined in the transcript), Rolón expresses his relief that he will not be listening but instead will talk about the things that happen to him and to analysts in general. But his desires will be frustrated soon after the beginning of the interview.

Following an emotional recounting of an experience Rolón had with his deceased father, Lozano (who is also a psychologist) takes advantage of a short pause to task Rolón with a new act of listening:

- 1 **VL:** How beautiful [what you just told us]. Now I’m going to put you to work because we have to analyze a few lapses—Freudian slips, let’s say.
- 2 **GR:** Let’s say.
- 3 **VL:** Let’s go with the first one and see what we can say about this . . .

They cut to a video of a priest performing a ceremony:

- 4 **PRIEST:** Por Dios, por la **plat/por la patria** . . .  
[**PRIEST:** For God, for the money/ for the fatherland . . . (money = *plata*, which sounds similar to *patria* = fatherland)]
- 5 **VL:** Por Dios, por la plat/por la patria.

- 6 **GR:** Oh, wow! Well, first let's make a clarification. You are a colleague, Vero, so you know Freud once said that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. Right? So sometimes a mistake is just a mistake.
- 7 **VL:** In this case it would not look like that [*loud laughter*]. I allow myself [to interpret that].
- 8 **GR:** I love it, because we are analyzing it together. Why are we two therapists, two psychologists? So, I mean, Freudian slip or lapse is important when it is said in front of the analyst—that is, when it is said in front of someone to listen to it.
- 9 **VL:** OK.
- 10 **GR:** Right? Well, I tend to think it's possible that in many of these cases it's a Freudian slip or a lapse because the people [*el pueblo*] are an other who are there to listen.
- 11 **VL:** Sure, it's a big ear; it listens.
- 12 **GR:** It's a big ear to listen. But not in all the cases, but many times it can be. And therefore, it is necessary to know how to listen well when we choose, when we vote, and also sometimes to have the generosity to understand that someone comes from making twenty-six campaigns and/
- 13 **VL:** You can make a mistake . . .
- 14 **GR:** He was talking two minutes earlier . . .
- 15 **VL:** Or maybe counting a lot of money . . . [*loud laughter*]
- 16 **GR:** Or thinking to what sector, whom I was going to give this money to? This money is for whom?
- 17 **VL:** Right, right.
- 18 **GR:** And you were left with the signifier of the word spinning [in your head], and you do this, which condemns you publicly . . . [*laughs*]
- 19 **VL:** We send him a little kiss, and we have another one. This one is of a different kind; let's analyze it together.

Rolón reveals himself to be a savvy communicator and is careful not to casually lodge malignant interpretations. He begins by including Lozano in his interpretation (“You are a colleague, Vero”), thus expanding the interactional framework and positioning both of them in the category of experts. He continues by citing Freud's idea that sometimes discourses do not have double meanings. Lozano, having given him authorization to interpret, affirms that this is not a case of confusion (line 7). Rolón legitimizes her interpretation (line 8) by once again emphasizing that she is also a psychologist. However, he then changes the register.

Shifting into more formal language, Rolón explains that lapses or Freudian slips make sense only in the context of a listener. So as not to directly contradict Lozano, Rolón explains that listening can also be a collective experience that can legitimize certain interpretations. He provides different scenarios that can explain the priest's confusion. He closes by expressing sympathy about how one mistake can insert a subject into a discredited discourse. These discursive strategies allow Rolón to assert control over the exchange without having to contradict Lozano. He enacts expertise but also includes Lozano—even when he disagrees.

Besides featuring a bravura psychoanalytic performance, this exchange is rich with ideas about listening. Rolón expresses three such ideas: first, the indication that lapses or Freudian slips happen only when there is someone to interpret them as such (line 8); second, the figurative conceptualization that *el pueblo* (society) is “a big ear,” allowing the interlocutor in a one-on-one interaction to be replaced by society at large (lines 10–11); and third, that since anyone can listen, it is the responsibility of the subject to “learn” to listen before making any important decision—overinterpretation is risky (line 12), and listeners must be generous and not jump to conclusions. As Rolón reminds us, there is an ethics of listening: it is the responsibility of the listener to avoid confusion and especially to avoid inserting subjects into wrongful discourses. Lozano tries in two occasions (lines 7 and 15) to force a particular interpretation: the priest is thinking about money and probably not about God. But Rolón stays away from that interpretation and continues to provide alternative explanations. During this part of the exchange, there is overlap between Rolón and Lozano (lines 12–15) until Lozano gives up, admits that this could be a simple mistake, and closes her intervention by sending kisses to the priest (line 19).

This exchange reveals how psychoanalytic listening as a genre circulates and how it is represented in its mediated form. The focus is explicitly on listening, and when Rolón explains, in his role of expert, that “*el pueblo*” is a big ear, he democratizes listening; thus *anyone* is authorized to listen and can make interpretations. If anyone can listen psychoanalytically, the *What you really mean is . . .* addressivity form emerges as an index of how people are listening and is far from being an imposition; it becomes a form of sociability in which one can be interpreted by another. This televised exchange serves as a pedagogical tool contributing to, or reflective of, the broader presence of the genre of psychoanalytic listening in Argentina.

But Freudian slips represent just one form of listening psychoanalytically. Although as Rolón explains, the slip needs to be heard to be interpreted as



such, the focus is on the verbal performance. In the next example, Rolón explains how “listening slips”—the act of listening per se—are at the core of psychoanalytic listening.

Lozano presented another clip, this one from a television show, featuring a woman saying “*Tengo aval*” (I have a guarantor). The woman to whom she is speaking becomes noticeably upset and responds, “*Y traelo a Bal, tanto lo querés a Bal traelo*” (Bring Bal, you love Bal so much, bring him). She is quickly corrected by the first woman, who repeats “*aval*,” and from off screen we can hear a man saying, “*Aval, aval, para que le sostenga lo que dice*” (Guarantor, guarantor, to back up what she is saying). The woman who is upset seems to have *heard* the first woman refer to an actor—a man named Federico Fernando Bal—rather than the word *aval*.

When asked to offer an interpretation, Rolón responds:

- 20 **GR:** Well, you know that many times the lapse is not in what it is said, but in what is heard/  
 21 **VL:** What one interprets, right.  
 22 **GR:** And that shows what one has in mind. In reality, what the lapse tells us is about an unconscious idea, that one has kept, perhaps/  
 23 **VL:** And that is very common in conversations, that the other understands something else because he heard something else.  
 24 **GR:** That always happens, almost always. There’s nothing more difficult than communicating, look/  
 25 **VL:** “But I told you this thing, no, you told me that other thing.”  
 26 **GR:** Well, a few minutes ago I had a conversation with two people who said to each other, “You told me this because I . . .” and the other said, “No, no I did not tell you that”/  
 27 **VL:** “Hey you, Juan Carlos, weren’t you listening?” There is usually someone else listening. [She is using the name Juan Carlos as a figurative witness.]  
 28 **GR:** That place [Juan Carlos’s place] is the worst in the world.

Rolón explains that lapses often emerge not from the producing site but from the receptive end (line 20), highlighting the idea that listening can be a productive and not just a passive act. Rolón once again explains that the signifiers that roam our psyche are responsible for the mishearing.<sup>9</sup> Lacan (1997) has emphasized the importance of language in finding the unconscious, something that Rolón brings to many discussions, situating the unconscious at the forefront of any interpretation. Lozano’s interjection

(line 23) that mishearings are a common practice prompts Rolón to say that “mishearings” are *always* happening (line 24). Immediately, he hastens to add “*almost always*,” but the idea remains: most communication entails the mishearing of utterances.

For years, linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists have researched the idea that communication is anything but linear, contradicting Ferdinand de Saussure’s model of the talking heads, where utterances travel from Person A to the ear of Person B and vice versa in an unproblematic and direct way. But Rolón’s statement is different; the inquiry is directed not to speech but to the *reception* of speech. This conceptualization is slightly different from the *What you really mean is . . .* phenomenon. In the latter, the listener does not “mishear” but instead listens to “that which is not said,” then adds a surplus of interpretation.

Rolón seems to be referring here to the polysemic reception of language, where the signifiers that roam the mind of the listener influence the later reception of particular utterances. Rolón adjudicates this phenomenon to the unconscious (line 22). And he argues that the worst position one can be in is that of the overhearer (line 28) because one would have to decide which is the best interpretation and thus would have to side with one of the parties involved in the misunderstanding. Once more, the idea that a witness is needed for the unconscious to emerge is present in this exchange.

These conversations between Lozano and Rolón offer a clear picture of how mediatized discourses about psychoanalysis circulate in Argentina. Lozano tells Rolón directly that she will put him to work (line 1). A division of labor is already established, where his labor is to listen. These exchanges are notable both for their descriptions of the importance of listening in psychoanalytic discourse and for the remarkable pedagogical focus of the discussion. The exchanges are—as a segment on television for broad viewing audiences and couched in the form of entertainment—directly teaching how listening models associated with psychoanalysis (*When you say X, I hear Y*) are mediated for large public audiences. Although there is no way to concretely measure the specific impact of this mediatization of psychoanalytic discourse on the broader presence and circulation of the genre of psychoanalytic listening throughout Buenos Aires and Argentina, its prevalence in social areas well outside the clinic suggests that this mediatization and the development of the genre of listening among diverse social contexts are intertwined. In the context of Rolón’s television shows, writings, and other works, it is worth highlighting that these projects are created and

sold in the context of a market economy, a market that is able to expand the circulation of a listening model that is structured around specific modern ideologies, with clear theoretical roots, and which, based on the wide popularity of these television shows, books, radio programs, and so forth, is supported through its commodification. As Marcel Mauss would say, there is no free gift. Rolón appeared on the show to promote a movie based on his novel, both commoditized products spawned by discourses on psychoanalysis. The air and publicity time Lozano granted to the movie based on Rolón's novel is offered in exchange for Rolón's willingness to perform the labor of listening psychoanalytically.

The circulation on television of psychoanalytic listening as a genre can also be seen in Rolón's interview on the show *Animales sueltos* (Loose animals), hosted by Alejandro Fantino. Throughout the interview, which aired on June 9, 2018, Fantino seemed excited and eager to speak with his guest, even telling him that he had been carrying around a notebook to record any interesting event he witnessed, in the hopes of asking Rolón about it.

An interesting discussion between the two began with Fantino telling Rolón that he once asked a famous tattoo artist to identify the most commonly requested tattoo design. The artist encouraged Fantino to try guessing the answer and provided this hint: "It is one word that many women ask for." Fantino volunteered the words *peace* and *love*, but the artist responded, "No, we tattoo approximately five or six times a day the word *soltar* [to let go]." Then this exchange ensued between Alejandro Fantino (AF) and Gabriel Rolón (GR):

- 1 **AF:** I start from that word, the most tattooed, for many, "to let go." What is it to let go? How does psychology understand, or how do you understand, what it is to let go? What is the meaning of letting go?
- 2 **GR:** Look, I think it's interesting that they choose that word, because we basically have the idea that we can't be happy because we carry a lot of weight. Right? So when they tell you, "Well, you have to let go"—let go of what? Let go of the commands, let go of the story, let go of a love story, specifically. Let's say you didn't let go of it and they tell you, "Let go, go out again, meet someone, let go of your past, to say . . ."
- 3 **AF:** But are you supposed to go around the world with little weight?
- 4 **GR:** Look, I think it's impossible to go around the world with little weight. What you have to try is to carry only the weight that is indispensable or inevitable.

- 5 **AF:** What do you call *weight* in psychology? Because I could tell you what weight is in physics, but I don't know what weight means for psychology. What do you call *weight*?
- 6 **GR:** Look, more than anything it's like a metaphor for . . . I would say . . . those things that . . . I don't know if for psychology . . . I try to translate what people tell me . . .
- 7 **AF:** Yes, exactly.
- 8 **GR:** When [someone] says to me, "I carry a lot of weight" . . . hmm, imagine this, OK? It is as if we were all born with a backpack, a backpack in which, little by little as we live, many people put things. Some things are good and other things are bad. We get phrases, words; someone places a stone that says, "You'll never be happy"; another places something . . . /
- 9 **AF:** Can they put that on you? Are there people who get that in their backpack, "You're never going to be happy?"
- 10 **GR:** But of course. "You're not good at anything." There are ways to introduce [the stone]. Look, when a mom or dad asks a boy to work on something, and two minutes later he [the father] comes and says, "Leave it, leave it, leave it. Leave it, I'll do it for you." What is he telling him? "You're not good for anything." "Let me do it for you because you are useless, you cannot do it."
- 11 **AF:** In that small act you are placing a stone that has that [inscribed] in the boy's backpack.

Perhaps most striking in this exchange is the polysemic nature of the words Fantino and Rolón deploy. They are having a conversation about the meaning of words; people from different professions assign distinctive meanings to words depending on the context. Fantino begins by asking what it could possibly mean that women tattoo the word *soltar*. He implies that there is some hidden meaning unavailable to him. He asks first what meaning psychologists assign to this term but rapidly shifts the question to ask how Rolón would interpret it. Rolón explains that *soltar* is related to the idea of carrying weight by accumulating experience throughout one's life. This prompts Fantino to ask about the word *weight*. He asserts that he knows what the meaning conveys in physics, but he is curious about what *weight* could mean to psychologists (line 5). Rolón starts to respond but immediately acknowledges (in an act of self-repair) that he will talk not about psychology but about what he interprets in the words of his patients (line 6) ("what they really mean is . . .").

Rolón explains that the word *weight* is used as a metaphor. To illustrate this idea, he presents an allegory of someone carrying a backpack where people deposit words and phrases that begin to feel heavy. Some people introduce words that feel like stones with the legend “You’ll never be happy” (line 8). Fantino is surprised that someone could add those words to the imaginary backpack, and Rolón, now invested in his role as an analyst, explains that the *real meaning* of a parent’s words when telling a boy to stop doing something he had previously been asked to do involves a cruel metamessage: “You are not good for anything.”

Across all of Rolón’s conversations with television hosts, the idea that everything has a meaning beyond pure denotation occurs again and again. As Rolón explains to Fantino (line 6), what he does is translate the words that people tell him. This translation depends on listening to “that which is not said,” bringing to the fore unconscious practices, the real motives that drive one’s behavior.

In this conversation between Rolón and Fantino, several key elements of the model of psychoanalytic listening are being mediated and performed for a broad television audience. The context of this performance and the remuneration that both Rolón and Fantino receive underscore how naturally and thoroughly the genre of psychoanalytic listening can be packaged and circulated through the media for public consumption.

For example, one of the four main elements that help define the genre of psychoanalytic listening is the fact that the way words communicate is dependent on how listeners receive them (see chapter 2). Rolón’s comment on the word *weight* directly points this out to the show’s viewers. Similarly, Rolón consistently affirms that everything has a meaning beyond pure denotation. In his response to Fantino’s comment that *soltar* is the most tattooed word for women, Rolón links it to the idea of carrying weight by accumulating experience throughout one’s life. This is a very effective illustration of this element of psychoanalytic listening.

It’s not essential that viewers of shows like Fantino’s consciously grasp the listening model that Rolón is describing. But Rolón and, to some extent, Fantino are both part of a larger media ecosystem wherein psychoanalytic discourse is part of their everyday lives and listening is key to understanding different aspects of their worldviews.

As we shall see in the next section, sometimes words are attached to complex stories, myths, and worldviews. In Buenos Aires psychoanalysis has become a cultural practice that depicts the world through particular

ideologies of the self but also of gender, where the figure of the mother occupies an important role.

## Advertisements

Mediatized discourses on psychoanalysis are communicable in part because the consumers created by these discourses' ubiquitous circulation continue to disseminate and recycle them. When the media deploy psychoanalytical discourses, they use a language that is attached to ideas and concepts that date back to Freud but that are nevertheless recognized among a big part of the population in Buenos Aires.

This language is impregnated with semiotic meaning capable of communicating many ideologies and beliefs. It is so powerful and recognizable that Argentine advertisers have come to use it to promote products and sell things. In this way, psychoanalysis is not just about a relationship between an analyst and analysand or about saying  $x$  and meaning  $y$ —it is also sometimes used to craft a relationship between discourses and commodities.

In his celebrated book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), Keith Basso developed a fascinating analysis of how the Western Apache of Cibecue assign significance to places in their culture. There is a close relationship between landscape and language, where the invocation of the name of a place serves to educate and transmit the culture of Cibecue ancestors. More than being descriptive, place-names in the Cibecue community are accompanied by a story that usually conveys a moral lesson. In the chapter titled "Speaking with Names," Basso describes Louise, a woman who is worried about the reckless behavior of her brother. Several months previously, her brother stepped on a snakeskin and did not complete the necessary ritual to protect himself from this mishap. Now the brother is sick, and the sister is complaining to three friends, Lola, Emily, and Robert. While she is talking about the situation, Lola interrupts by saying, "It happened at Line of White Rocks Extend Up and Out, at this very place!" No one responds for thirty to forty seconds until Emily says, "Yes. It happened at Whiteness Spread Out Descending to Water, at this very place!" After another long pause, Lola utters another place-name. Louise starts to laugh softly, and Robert states, "Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming." After this exchange, Louise tells her dog that her brother acted foolishly, but she is visibly in better spirits than before.

Upon witnessing the interaction, Basso initially had no idea what had happened. For anyone not familiar with this form of communication, the

exchange would seem incoherent. Through his ethnographic work, however, he later came to understand that speaking with names implies a very sophisticated metacommunication process in which each place-name is connected to a specific story. The long pauses between each exchange are necessary to visualize the place and thus remember the story connected to it. The stories behind the place-names that Louise's friends uttered conveyed a tale of a person who behaved badly, suffered the consequences of that behavior, but nevertheless had a happy ending. As Lola told Basso, the "pictures" that were sent with the names had a perlocutionary effect that calmed Louise's distress.

Perlocutionary acts are speech acts that "extend" the illocution of an utterance by having a direct impact or consequence on the listener (for example, persuading, inspiring, or promising). The illocution of the *What you really mean* is addressivity form is also a perlocutionary act because the listener usually accepts the interpellation. As the interpellation is accepted, doubts, worries, and uncertainties appear, generating a particular state of mind for the listener. In the example of the Cibecue people, the names attached to a story are performative and have a perlocutionary effect because, by being connected to a story, they produce different dispositions, feelings, and outlooks.

The Cibecue example shows how metacommunication plays a part in everyday interactions. The most ordinary words can carry meanings that go beyond their denotational capacity. Names specifically convey a particular form of cultural knowledge that circulates, and social actors associate differently with each name. Similarly, through the mediatized nature of psychoanalytic discourses, certain words and names in Buenos Aires are attached to a semiotic chain (e.g., myths and stories) that convey a particular cultural meaning of their own.

In the summer of 2018, I was watching television in Buenos Aires when an advertisement caught my attention. It was a commercial for Fernet, an Italian aperitif that is very popular in Argentina ("Nuevo Fernet 1882 RTD-Psicólogo" 2017). Fernet is a liquor that is usually mixed with Coca-Cola, and the commercial was introducing Fernet 1882, a new product that is already mixed with Coca-Cola and is ready to be served. The motto of the new packaging is "extremely practical," pointing to the advantages of not having to open and mix the content of two bottles. The ad begins with an analyst sitting in his modern office while a young man who has just arrived is starting to lie down on an empty couch. But before he lies down completely, the following exchange ensues between the psychoanalyst (P) and Julián, the analysand (J):

- 1 P: How are you, Julián?
- 2 J: I don't know.
- 3 P: It's your mother's fault.
- 4 J: Of course.
- 5 P: See you next week.
- 6 J: OK.

Just as Julián says, “OK,” he starts to leave the couch. After the dialogue, a black background with the words *extremely practical* appears, followed by video footage showing a can of the new Fernet being opened. Then there is a cut to another black background with the name *1882 Sabor Fernet & Cola*, followed by the words *ready to drink*.

The commercial lasts fifteen seconds, and the exchange between Julián and the analyst is only five seconds long. But in this very short period an array of ideologies, stereotypes, and competing discourses are communicated.

In the Fernet advertisement we can *hear* a word that communicates a very idiosyncratic meaning: *mother*. In Buenos Aires, the word *mother*—meaning a female parent—conveys two stories that appear to be omnipresent, since they are found throughout so many discourses and in so many forms: the story of the mother as the source of psychological abnormalities and the story of Oedipus.

The first story, illustrated by Sendra's cartoon earlier in this chapter (figure 5.3), is linked to the ideology that the relationship with one's mother will shape most aspects of one's life. This relationship is usually associated with negative outcomes. Feminist scholars have argued that this belief is so prevalent that it is almost axiomatic: both parents produce our selves, but our mothers are especially essential to this process.<sup>10</sup> There is an emphasis on self-scrutiny, looking for signs that point to “normality,” “abnormality,” and “pathology” that are the direct outcome of the relationship with our mothers (see Lawler 2000). As Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989, 15) put it, the mother has become “the guarantor of the liberal [democratic] order.” Thus, it is the mother's task to produce the good, healthy, and well-managed self, which will in turn uphold democracy.

In the ad for Fernet, the word *mother* replicates this ideology. Whatever problem Julián experiences, it is his mother's fault. In his reply to the analyst's question about how he is doing, he expresses neither a lack of composure nor bad feelings; his response is neutral: “I don't know” (line 2). The



analyst's reaction to Julián's statement is to implicate Julián's mother. Julián legitimizes the analyst's interpretation by quickly responding "Of course" (line 4), underlying the self-evident nature of this discourse. If we apply the commercial's motto, *extremely practical*—that is, you don't have to do anything but serve the contents of a can—to the interaction between Julián and the analyst, we find the following message: "as practical as knowing instinctively that mothers are responsible for all our problems." There is also a subtext that serves to mock the analytic encounter, suggesting that "you go to therapy for years just to realize that everything comes down to your relationship with your mother."

The negative association wherein "mother equals problems" is not unique to Argentina. Motherhood has long been conceptualized through discourses of extreme benevolence and sacrifice or as pathological and damaging (see Rose 1991). The hegemonic ideology that only some people count as "healthy," "good mothers," and "good children," while others are pathologized, is prevalent across many cultures. What is exceptional in Buenos Aires is the link between this negative association and psychoanalysis itself.

In the Fernet ad, we can witness how psychoanalysis frames motherhood and how these discourses are simultaneously being recycled by the media as they disseminate ideologies and create social identities. During my research in Buenos Aires, I lost count of how many times friends and acquaintances expressed a direct link between their problems and their relationship with their mothers. Only very seldom did they talk about their fathers. The word *mother* follows a particular semiotic chain through a story that links mothers with problems, and this story is very much present in psychoanalytic theory.

The successful communicability of this discourse lies in how internalized this story is in Argentina. Consequently, as with the Cibecue place-names, the word *mother* in Argentina triggers a particular story, albeit a negative one. Indeed, this idea has become so widespread in Buenos Aires that diverse companies are able to capitalize from it and use it to sell commodities.

The second story attached to the word *mother* is the Oedipus complex myth. (We saw an example in chapter 3, when Carlos alludes to the Oedipus complex to raise the possibility of sexual tension between Darío and his analyst.)

The word *mother* triggers a particular story: the complex emotions awakened in a child by the unconscious desire for the parent of the opposite

sex.<sup>11</sup> This story is clearly illustrated in an Argentine commercial for Hellman's mayonnaise, first aired in 2004 to celebrate Mother's Day (Hellman's 2004). The ad—which many would consider cringe-provoking—lasts fifty seconds, as a love song called “*Algo contigo*” (Something with you), sung by famous Argentine singer Vicentico, serves as background music. The lyrics are about a desperate man who is madly in love with a woman and pleading to have a relationship with her:

Do I really need to tell you that I'm dying to have something with you?  
 Don't you realize how hard it is for me to be your friend?  
 I can't get near your mouth without wanting it in a crazy way.  
 I need to control your life, to know who kisses you and who embraces  
 you.<sup>12</sup>

The ad presents the interactions of five boys, from approximately two to about eleven years old, with their respective mothers. As the mothers add Hellman's mayonnaise to different dishes, the boys look at their mothers in what can be interpreted as a lustful way. The first kid tells his mother, “Mommy, you are the love of my life”; the second stares at his mother in awe; the third says, “You are an incredible woman”; the fourth grabs his mother's arms, saying, “Did I ever tell you that I love you?,” to which she responds with a surprised, tender look. The last kid, virtually a baby, tells his mother, “*Me encantás*” (which can be translated as “I really like you” but which is directed only to a romantic partner, not to a parent). The astonished mother asks him to repeat what he just said, and the boy replies by babbling. The commercial ends with the slogan “Hellman's is to give one's best.”

The combined effect of the song, the lascivious expressions of the children, and the declarations of love give the impression that the boys are, in fact, infatuated with their mothers. Some of the comments on YouTube discussing the commercial corroborate this interpretation: “Oedipus Complex XD,” “Emotional incest,” “Ahh the Oedipus,” “The Oedipus complex in a commercial with sexual connotation? Or am I just a pervert? :S.”<sup>13</sup>

The Oedipus complex is one of the most widely circulated ideas spawned by twentieth-century psychoanalysis. It is a multifaceted concept that Freud developed throughout his career. It took Freud over twenty years after his first extended discussion of Oedipus in *The Interpretation of Dreams* to reassess his belief that the Oedipus complex was equally valid for girls and for boys (Leonard 2013). It is well known that Freud rejected Carl Jung's ef-

forts to provide a comparable mythic narrative for girls in what he called the “Electra Complex” (Jung 1913). In his struggle to understand female sexuality, Freud also discussed the idea of a pre-Oedipus stage. But despite his recognition of female desire, Freud ([1926] 1959, 212) continued to declare his inability to understand female sexuality by notoriously asserting that “the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology.”

The Oedipus complex is a great example of how communicability disseminates an array of ideological tropes. The further recycling by lay audiences of the concept has taken many forms, sometimes completely unrelated to the original history. This later consumption and recycling by lay audiences establish hierarchies by situating ideologically the producers, disseminators, and consumers of certain discourses.

During casual interactions in Buenos Aires, the invocation of the Oedipus complex indexes a variety of social situations: for example, it can be a joke describing the close relationship that a male *porteño* has with his mother; it can take the form of a mother’s complaint that her young son does not want to go to kindergarten because “he is still in the Oedipus phase”; or it might serve to justify the sexual attraction that a young man has for older women.

In the Hellman’s ad we can see the lamination of a commoditized product—mayonnaise—and the semiotic chains that connect it all the way back to Freud. When lay subjects invoke the complex, we can still trace back its inception, but it is not mediatized since it is not commoditized and does not assign a division of labor. But it shows the internalization of particular stories attached to the concept of mother.

The two commercials—one for a liqueur, the other for mayonnaise—present stories linked to the word *mother*. One is attached to a strong ideology that links motherhood with identity, the other with a supposed passage that all male infants go through. Both stories emerge from psychoanalytic theories interpellating subjects as occupying very concrete social roles. There is a possible link between both stories: male subjectivity appears by having an unhealthy relationship (or attachment) with their mothers. When psychoanalysis is invoked, there are many ideologies attached to it, and they also appear. An important one is a gendered ideology represented through the figure of the mother that transmits messages depicting motherhood in a ruthless way. The perlocutionary force of summoning motherhood produces the same effect as the *What you really mean is . . .* form in that, although the denotation is clear, the concepts attached to it are idiosyncratic and differ significantly from the referent. We all speak in names one way or another; in Argentina, it is the concept of

mother that awakens stories and concepts connected to psychoanalysis. And listening is key.

Consequently, as these discourses and their ideologies are depicted in the media, they also enter into the listening genres and listening ideologies of people throughout the country who may see the advertisements or simply be exposed to them later due to the circulation of these discourses, a circulation that is strongly determined by the specific genre of listening associated with psychoanalysis.

\* \* \*

Advertisements, television, radio, books, and other media provide a powerful vehicle for the mediatization and dissemination of key elements of psychoanalytic discourse outside the clinical setting in Argentina. The circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires takes a great many forms, and the dissemination and transmission of these forms are due to their communicability and their mediatization. Mediatization is always a communicative form—focusing on specific instances of communication like those in this chapter helps reveal how particular symbols emerge and become relevant. In the extreme case, the communicative form is a single syllable, the prefix *psy*. In other cases, as in that of Rolón, 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 one tries to capture how a particular social relation created inside a clinical setting—the relationship between analysand and analyst—gets replicated outside that setting, the concept of mediatization helps to shine a light on how this relationship gets reproduced and to trace the semiotic chain(s) that preceded and follow it. Communicability, on the other hand, is a crucial lens for grasping how, in Argentina's media ecosystem, the roles of producer, disseminator, and consumer of psychoanalytic discourses interact and how these relationships project a wholesome product to broad public audiences, indexing social actors as occupying specific roles. The success of the circulation of psychoanalytic discourses is due to its capacity to project ideologies as commonsensical and natural.

Listening is key to these processes. In all these examples, either listening is explicitly invoked and transformed into labor or the words summon in the listener particular stories that generate cultural models indexing stereotypical characteristics of interactional roles. The abundant examples of psychoanalysis in the media help to circulate the ideology that there is more

to denotation in every statement uttered. In some cases, advertisements, television shows, and graphic humor replicate listening practices based on psychoanalysis by performing *What you really mean* is ideologies. In other cases, the perlocutionary reception of words triggers stories that are connected to mythical figures and ideologies of motherhood.

These representations underscore how the psychoanalytic discourses that permeate Buenos Aires and Argentina more broadly are founded on psychoanalysis as a genre of listening. Even in its textual form, psychoanalysis entails a huge component of listening. When Gabriel Rolón and Verónica Lozano discuss the behavior of people, or when Tute explains how his creative process resembles psychoanalysis, or when Sehinkman “analyzes” the evening news, psychoanalytic listening is strongly present. As a “social fact” in Buenos Aires, psychoanalytic listening as a genre is reproduced in numerous forms and places and with semiotic chains that can be traced all the way back to Freud—even though, in many cases, this listening genre has become so accepted and pervasive that the chains have become blurred.