

1 For a Theory of Genres of Listening

Our human interest in the person to whose confession we listen remains alive because we do not only hear his words, but also what is said and left unsaid between and beyond the words. We do not only listen, we also look at the person, observe him, become aware of peculiarities of his gestures, of his posture, of the movement of his body and of his facial expression.

Theodor Reik, *Fragment of a Great Confession* (1949)

To listen is an effort. And just to hear is no merit. A duck hears also.

Attributed to Igor Stravinsky

In the summer of 2018, during a dinner party at the house of my friend Ramiro, the conversation turned to psychoanalysis in Argentina. Ramiro has undergone analysis himself and is aware of some of the literature regarding the so-called *cultura psi*, or psychoanalytic culture in Argentina. I asked Ramiro, who was born and raised in Buenos Aires, if he thought discourses about psychoanalysis circulate outside of the closed relationship between analyst and analysand (e.g., patient), beyond the clinic into the public discourse. He responded that he believed it to be a practice confined to the clinic and exclusive to the elite and middle-class spheres. But at one moment during our conversation, he seemed to remember something. He then told me the following story:

Well, now that I think about it, last summer in Buenos Aires, I was coming back from having dinner with my brother, and the taxi driver kept trying to make small talk. At one point he asked me if I had kids. I said, “Yes, Leo and Fede.” He then asked me how old they were. I told him, “Leo is eleven and Fede is fifteen.” At that point we were on a stoplight and the taxi driver—a man in his fifties—turned to the back seat where I was sitting and asked me, “Why did you mention the name of your youngest son first?” It was such a strange question, so I mumbled, “I don’t know, because eleven goes before fifteen?” To which he responded, “Yes, but Fede was born before Leo, right?”

Ramiro told me that the exchange left him feeling uneasy and sad. He kept wondering whether he actually had a favorite son—the question he had *heard* when the taxi driver asked why he mentioned Leo’s name before Fede’s. After a long pause, he laughed and said, “I don’t know why I listened to the taxi driver, but the question still resonates in my head.” He then reconsidered my question and agreed that psychoanalytic discourses might indeed have extended outside of the clinic and beyond elite and middle-class soirees.

Ramiro’s exchange with the taxi driver is very common. Many *porteños* (as the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are called) I interviewed or interacted with during my years of fieldwork in Buenos Aires had the experience of being interpreted by others who seemingly “were able to hear things that they themselves were incapable of hearing,” as Natalia, an Argentine musician who has been psychoanalyzed throughout her life, told me. In Natalia’s view, *porteños* have been exposed to psychoanalysis by undergoing analysis themselves, by reading the permanent flow of articles on psychoanalysis published in newspapers, magazines, and media outlets, or by watching television shows that discuss analytic encounters. Through these experiences, she thought, they “learned how to interpret through a psychoanalytic framework.” This creates a “kind of a *cultura psi* that it is very specific to Buenos Aires,” as a renowned psychoanalyst told me.

Although most people in Buenos Aires accept the interpellation, there are some instances when *porteños* think that these interpretations—which, they agree, circulate in many social contexts—can become “overinterpretations,” as Tute, a famous graphic humorist who has drawn many cartoons depicting analytic encounters, told me in an interview. For Tute, as for others, interpretations of one’s intimate self should be confined to the clinical setting or to close friendships, not undertaken by strangers in casual encounters. This ambivalence was also expressed by Carlos, a neuroscientist

who complained that, in Buenos Aires, “everyone thinks they are psychologists, and as such, they try to interpret your life as if they were a card reader,” suggesting that, because of the widespread circulation and popularization of psi culture, people’s appropriation of psychology becomes *as fanatical as* card reading.

Even though Carlos disparaged *cultura psi*, during my fieldwork I encountered more people who were interested in deciphering possible buried meanings, and in hearing interpretations of their psyches, than critics. As Ernesto, an expat *porteño* living in Europe, told me, “The only good thing about this damned country [Argentina] is that people are interested in listening to what you have to say.” Ernesto, like many other Argentines, finds that there is a sociability in Buenos Aires that allows for the exchange of personal stories, even when there is no close familiarity with the interlocutors. In their view, personal tales are shared with strangers to find solutions to life’s predicaments.

Beyond the ethical discussion about whether it is acceptable for a stranger to unearth potentially hidden meanings beneath people’s statements during casual verbal interactions (see chapter 3), the questions posed by Ramiro’s exchange with the taxi driver deserves closer attention. What does it mean to listen to something that was not said? The taxi driver never asked Ramiro whether he had a favorite son. What were the taxi driver and Ramiro *listening* to in each other’s statements? Clearly, both heard something beyond the mere denotations of their words, prompting the taxi driver to ask why Ramiro chose that particular order when mentioning his son’s names and, in turn, compelling Ramiro to *hear* that he was being accused of having a favorite son. Such questions raise a further query about listening practices: How do we, as social actors, listen? My research in Buenos Aires led me to identify the circulation of a specific form of listening that goes beyond the denotation of utterances to one that infers meanings from the resonance of other people’s experiences and communicates those resonances back to the speaker. This form of listening emanates from psychoanalysis and has permeated many social arenas. It is so ubiquitous that I analyze it here as a particular genre of listening. The basic premise of this genre can be schematized in the formula *When you say X, I hear Y*. In Ramiro’s example, both interlocutors heard “something else” in each other’s statements, opening the door to the emergence of particular ideologies and forms of interaction that emerge from listening “in a particular way.”

Defining this form of listening as a genre provides a structure to identify its specific theoretical lineages and its ability to circulate through social

practices. It also offers important implications regarding listening practices, particularly relating to the implicit ideological biases that circulate within specific social contexts, and especially through listening forms. When I was developing the idea of genres of listening, psychoanalyst Salman Akhtar published the book *Psychoanalytic Listening* (2013), wherein he explains the methods analysts use to listen to analysands, including objective, subjective, empathetic, and intersubjective listening (see chapter 2).¹ This book is not only about the specific techniques that psychoanalysts apply, which Akhtar studies convincingly, but about something broader. Through an ethnographic approach to a form of listening based on the psychoanalytic framework that social actors in Buenos Aires deploy inside and outside of the clinic, I propose to conceptualize Akhtar's specifically clinical forms of listening, as well as other forms encountered in my ethnography, as a genre of listening.

The chapters that follow document how psychoanalytic listening as a genre and its associated listening ideologies are reproduced in professional and clinical contexts, as well as in an array of other social contexts outside of the clinic. Before discussing these issues, this chapter lays out three central concepts that are necessary for understanding both the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of listening genres and the ethnographic approach to one genre in particular, psychoanalytic listening, in its concrete implications, circulation, and reproduction in Buenos Aires. To do so, this chapter delves into questions of listening and meaning making by understanding the semiotics of listening and its performative reach. It continues by analyzing the concept of genre and why it is a useful approach to understand the ubiquities of psychoanalytic listening in Buenos Aires. The chapter ends by presenting a genealogy of listening as it has been defined by Freud and his disciples and considers how some of Freud's intuitions gave rise to the concept of *resonance* later developed by Lacan, which constitutes the core element of psychoanalytic listening as a genre.

THE SEMIOTICS OF LISTENING

To understand Ramiro's exchange with the taxi driver as involving a particular listening practice that can be defined as a genre—following the structure *When you say x, I hear y*—it is important to understand the semiotics of listening and its importance in creating directionality, or how *listening orders and orients our attention*.

Sounds carry information about the world, and when one listens to sounds, communication takes place. This has been well documented in terms of speech sounds, though other nonspeech sounds such as music, machine-produced sounds, and natural sounds can communicate information as well (Darwin 2008; Menon and Levitin 2005; Werker and Fennell 2004). In principle, each acoustic event can be perceived as a sign carrier through which information about the world is communicated. How listeners interpret sound is dependent on the context and on the indexical connections the listener has established with specific referents—that is, the decoding of sounds are dependent on different variants, such as belonging to a particular social group or knowing a particular language. But sounds without a conventionalized referent are open to different interpretations, with the potential to point to distinct ideologies or worldviews.

A good example demonstrating how this process of creating meanings from nonconventional sounds unfolds appears in Edgar Allan Poe's famous story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." In Poe's story, Auguste Dupin, a fallen French aristocrat with a remarkable capacity for analytic reasoning, solves the brutal murders of two women. In solving the mystery, the hero is faced with a confounding set of aural evidence: while the murders were taking place, numerous witnesses heard two suspects, one speaking in a gruff tone and the second in a shrill voice. All of the witnesses agree that the first was a French man, but the language of the second was difficult to identify. The witnesses—the listeners—are of five different nationalities: Italian, English, Spanish, Dutch, and French. Each witness is sure that it was not the voice of one of their own countrymen; instead, they describe hearing a different language (Spanish, French, German, English, and Russian, respectively). This sharp discrepancy in the language that the witnesses heard ultimately leads Dupin to conclude that the voice could not be human. The killer is revealed to be an orangutan, and the mystery is solved.

The drama of Poe's plot arises from the perception of sounds that are neither linguistic utterances nor musical compositions and therefore lack the systematicness inherent in symbolic systems. Within a symbolic system, if a hearer cannot recognize the meaning of particular signs, their meaning can most likely be inferred through context (see, among others, Cicourel 1992; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Schegloff 1987). This means that unintelligible sounds are given meaning depending on where, when, and by whom they are produced. But when there is no systematicness, as in the sounds produced by the unrecognizable shrill voice in Poe's story, the hearer will most likely invoke a sound that resembles

something familiar. This is because in order to be able to codify a sound, the hearer must have previously been exposed to the sound, by witnessing its production firsthand, by reproducing the action that produced the sound, or by internalizing conventional knowledge that links this particular sound to a specific action (e.g., the sound produced by a hammer pounding against a nail). Sounds thus become comprehensible and are transformed into signs, even in the absence of a referent.²

In Buenos Aires, as in most places, the words that people use to communicate in casual conversations have conventionalized, fixed meanings. Yet, like the listeners in Poe's story, in some exchanges they treat the words of their interlocutors as unknown and mysterious. Aural signs are not obvious or objective but constructed and contextual. The peculiarity of Buenos Aires is that what prompts these interpretations is the assumption that words have meanings beyond their denotation, a proposition that comes from psychoanalysis and the belief in unconscious practices.

Hence, listening never takes place in a void; it is shaped by other kinds of sensory experiences. In a 1955 experiment, the French composer Pierre Schaeffer (1966) sought to isolate listening from other forms of sensorial perception. He created what he described as an "acousmatic" situation in which listeners were forced to rely on hearing alone to make sense of sound (91). After blindfolding listeners, Schaeffer reproduced sounds and asked the listeners to decode them. He concluded that listeners' temporary blindness prompted them to move their attention away from the physical object responsible for sound and toward the content of the perception itself, redirecting their awareness to hearing alone. Through this sensorily reductive procedure, Schaeffer concluded that "often surprised, often uncertain, we discover that much of what we thought we were hearing, was in reality only seen, and explained, by the context" (93).

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe offers a similar example in which the source of a sound is unseen. Unable to see the scene, the witnesses are forced to rely on sound alone—in this case voices—to understand what is happening inside the house at Rue Morgue. Unlike in an acousmatic scenario, however, the context—two screaming women in danger, plus two voices in conversation—allows the listeners to transform the unknown sound into signs: different languages. Poe's tale shows that outside of the artifice of the acousmatic setting, we create signs (real or imagined) every time we hear something. Indeed, as David Toop (2010, 8) notes, we become unnerved when we cannot identify the source of a sound: "Sound must be trusted, cannot be trusted, so has power. When sound that should be

present seems to be absent, this is frightening.” As a result, in everyday experience, listeners are always looking for meaning; sounds are always attached to a sound image, and there is always a semiotic process at work, whether we are conscious of it or not. In Buenos Aires, the semiotics of listening takes the form of a hermeneutic approach to language, where words have meaning beyond their denotation.

The degree to which the act of listening creates meaning is visible in the example of so-called mondegreens. A mondegreen is the mishearing or misinterpretation of a nearly homophonic phrase in a way that gives it a new meaning. These misinterpretations are common when listening to the lyrics of music or verbal poetry, although they can occur in any other context. Sylvia Wright (1954) proposed the term *mondegreens* as she revisited a childhood memory of listening to the ballad “The Earl of Murray.” These are the lyrics Wright thought she heard:

Ye Highlands and Ye Lowlands
 Oh where *hae* you been?
 They *hae* slain the Earl of Murray,
 And *the Lady Mondegreen*.

The original verse reads:

Ye Highlands and Ye Lowlands
 Oh where *have* you been?
 They *have* slain Earl Murray,
 And *they’ve laid him on the green*.

As the listener, Wright took what was, to her, an unintelligible set of sounds and reinterpreted them as “Lady Mondegreen.” In doing so, she subtly shifted the meaning of the original utterance. As literary critic Steven Connor (2009) notes, such mishearings stand in direct opposition to verbal confusion or “slips of the tongue.” The latter are momentary relaxations of self-monitoring, whereas mondegreens transform random noise into meaning, thereby moving from the direction of nonsense to sense (Connor 2009). As Poe’s example shows, mishearing seems to represent human intolerance toward pure meaningless phenomena. Here, once again, listening entails a process of *ordering*, of putting things into place.

The ordering impulse in listening is essential to understanding genres of listening. The process by which such ordering takes on a generic quality

becomes clear when we look at how the same sound is decoded differently when listened to by different hearers. Take, for example, the musical or medical realms in which each sound, whether a singular note or a sound inside the body, is attached to a particular referent that is fixed. In order to understand these sounds, the ear has to be trained in what French film theorist and composer Michel Chion (2012) calls semantic listening.³ As hearers situated within a general public, we can all understand the nature of the sound, but the specialized meaning is something that only a few master.

This mastery has a material reality. For example, when I hear the beats of my heart, I recognize them as such because they have been codified not as a random sound that comes from inside my body but as a particular sound that the heart emits when a human (or animal) is alive. This sound has been transformed into a sign. By contrast, when a doctor listens to my heart with a stethoscope, the concepts attached to the sound image or signifier are very different.⁴

The doctor is able to hear signs that the patient is unable to decipher because the doctor has learned to decode a specific genre of listening. Particular sound images will have different concepts attached to them, depending on the individual who *listens in a particular way*. Doctors listen differently because they have labored or built a skill to listen in this fashion. Listening is something that hearers learn to do, and it depends on a kind of *pragmatics*—the production of meaning in context.⁵ Social actors listen *pragmatically* as well as *intentionally*.⁶ Whether we are talking about the taxi driver in Ramiro's example, the doctor with a stethoscope, mondegreens, or the witnesses in Poe's tale, hearers are listening with a purpose; people are constantly looking for meanings, and the outcome of their interpretations transforms various social dimensions. As Stravinsky says in the epigraph that begins this chapter, listening "is an effort." And this "effort" points to the constitution of social positions and identities. While fluid, the boundaries of these social positions and identities in turn shape the culturally situated listening practices that I identify as genres of listening.

PERFORMATIVE LISTENING

While sounds are unpredictable, coming and going with no apparent control, listening involves intentional positioning vis-à-vis a given sound, and the codification and interpretation of that sound are an act of consciousness.⁷ Studies have postulated that hearing and listening are not passive

modes of reception; rather, the listener/hearer is an individual agent (see Carter 2004; Connor 2004a; Hirschkind 2004, 2006; Sterne 2012). As an embodied listener, one is able to position oneself in particular ways in relation to symbolic sounds. In consequence, particular sound images are constituted differently depending on the location, the social actors involved, and the production of sound itself; they rely on the distinct *context* in which the action of listening takes place, developing specific characteristics that differ greatly from one context to another.⁸ Accordingly, while listening is an act of interpretation, it also entails occupying a particular social space, a way of being in the world.⁹

A remarkable example of this paradigm is found in Steven Feld's concept of acoustemology (1982). Combining acoustics and epistemology, acoustemology "asks what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening" (Feld 2017, 84). Rather than focusing on the physical components of sounds' materiality, acoustemology focuses instead on the plane of the audible to inquire into sound as simultaneously social and material, exploring the experiential nexus of sonic sensation.

In his book *The Ethical Soundscape*, anthropologist Charles Hirschkind (2006, 56) explains how the widespread practice of listening to Islamic sermon cassette tapes in Egypt is a way of acquiring "knowledge and sensibilities that help one to live and act ethically in a rapidly changing social and political world." Listening to these tapes is a social practice, and no matter where they are being played (inside a cab, in somebody's home), the personal disposition—or what I would call context—that shapes people's listening to the sermons is based purely on the act of listening. The cassettes are not musical but speech oriented, containing words that ultimately transform the listener. Similar to the concept of resonance in psychoanalysis, the words uttered in the cassettes do not dictate behavior because they are attached to a particular semantic reference. Rather, transformation happens through the anticipation and the disposition that the body establishes to allow for listening "through the heart." The source of this transformation comes through the disposition toward acquiring ethical behavior. It is as if the Egyptians who listen to these Islamic sermon-tapes "turn on" a particular ear—that is, they inhabit a specific genre of listening.¹⁰

The lay listeners in Buenos Aires have developed their own listening practice resonating with the referents of the words but not accepting them as face value. Instead, through their dialogical exchanges, a translation emerges, creating a form of symbolic exchange that creates new narratives but also social positionings indexing the lay listener as a translator.

Thus, how listeners position themselves vis-à-vis received sound becomes a key marker of differing social identities. The tolling of bells from churches in nineteenth-century Europe defined the very being of the proletariat by segmenting their labor and leisure time. At the same time, churchgoers relied on the ringing of bells to comply with the call for ecclesiastical duties (see Corbin 1998). In both instances, listening not only directed behavior; it also indexed the listener as a worker, or as a worshiper. There is a social role performed by listening.

The same phenomenon is replicated with the mastery of a particular genre of listening (as in the case of the doctor listening to a patient's heartbeat). For example, skilled listeners of musical performance who can recognize even a tiny mistake or the most insignificant change in tone or style index themselves as inhabiting a particular social persona: a music expert. Sound experts (e.g., mechanics, physicians, instrument tuners) occupy a specific social role by virtue of their ability to listen within a particular framework of expertise.

In the context of speech, philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) coined the term *performative utterances* to describe situations where the act of speaking goes beyond simply reporting on or describing reality. Austin partitioned speech acts into *locutionary* (referring to the ostensible meaning of an utterance: a statement), *illocutionary* (where the utterance prompts an action: a request or a command), and *perlocutionary* (referring to speech activities that give rise to consequences: a promise). The perlocutionary act sets an expected outcome that any illocutionary act may or may not perform. For example, when a friend promises to return the book that I lent her within a couple of days, the sense of expectancy that I experience will linger until she returns the book to me. Her words of promise convey a perlocutionary effect that will continue until the promise is fulfilled.

The perlocutionary effect of the utterance of a particular statement or a word (e.g., "Stop!"), comprises both the subject who uttered a particular directive (the illocution) and the listener. When we say that listening has the capacity to direct behavior, the directive is sometimes evident and automatic, as in the case of the bells ringing from churches that call forth a particular action. But the consequences or outcomes of the perlocution of listening can linger and manifest much later, or during an extended period of time. This is the case for "ethical listening," which generates the lasting effect of pious behavior. When one listens to an Islamic sermon, it is not the semantic content of a statement (as in the case of a promise, a greeting, or a directive) that prompts an action. Instead, it is the prosody or the com-

ponent of praying, or the activation of a memory, that can in turn trigger a particular behavior. In short, it is the *resonance* of words and rhythm that have the potential to continue to produce an effect even many hours (or days) after the subject has heard the sermon. As in Ramiro's example, the uneasy feeling that the conversation with the taxi driver generated and that continued to emerge exemplifies how the perlocutionary temporality of listening defies the here and now of sound production and is key to the constitution of psychoanalysis as a genre of listening (see chapter 2).

Taken together, listening to “that which was not said”—in Ramiro's words to the taxi driver, in the sounds of music while one is blindfolded, in a heartbeat heard through a stethoscope, or in the sounds of a murderous ape in Poe's story—constitutes particular ways of apprehending the world that also involve taking a particular position through the performative act of listening. Listening to music, listening to the body through a stethoscope, and listening to sermons are also social practices. They could be described as *situated listening* with specific characteristics that pertain to each sphere. In each case, listening is a unique act with a particular path that can be observed and analyzed (see Becker 2010). These modes of listening also possess *boundaries* that define them, creating genres of listening.¹¹

WHY GENRES?

Just as textual genres have distinctive characteristics (contextualization cues, intertextuality, and pragmatics, among many others), genres of listening have their own characteristics that allow us to understand the constitution of a variety of complex social relations. There is a substantial literature on the formation and propagation of textual, verbal, and musical genres, ranging from the study of poetic structure to music composition, practice theory, and literary theory, to name just a few areas of investigation.¹² The abundance of studies that focus on conceptualizing genres is motivated by the fact that genres have the capacity to create context and social relations, bringing an array of ideologies, orders of knowledge, and horizons together in practice (Hanks 1993). Each genre has structural and compositional dimensions that organize the thematic content and style of particular works. Operating prior to the interactional settings in which they are inserted, these constraints create “relatively stable types” (Bakhtin 1986, 60). The result is a co-occurrence of formal features and social structures.¹³ What this means is that as listeners, we recognize words or sounds through

rules defined at a grammatical level; simultaneously, that grammatical structure itself must be replicated in our social world. For example, when the taxi driver told Ramiro that “Fede was born before Leo,” the formula (at grammatical level) *When you say X, I hear Y* surfaced because the taxi driver dismissed Ramiro’s own explanation of his statement—namely, that “eleven goes before fifteen.” If Ramiro did not *hear* that the taxi driver was asking something else, then this listening genre would not have emerged. The listening genre *When you say X, I hear Y* surfaced only when Ramiro “entered” a dialogical exchange by applying a psychoanalytic framework; the “meaning” of the taxi driver’s comment thus emerged at the moment of reception. Consequently, the psychoanalytic listening genre that emerges with the formula *When you say X, I hear Y* is followed by a constant social response (thus the co-occurrence). In this case, listening beyond the denotation and focusing on possible alternate meanings emerge from the *resonance* that the taxi driver produced in Ramiro through his questioning.

How genres of listening accomplish this function is part of an ongoing discussion across different fields. For those of us interested in reception, genres can be constituted by particular operations of reading/reception determined by the interpretation of the reader, who focuses on some features of the text (in its broader sense) while overlooking others—this is, the reader creates the genre *at* the moment of reading/reception.¹⁴ This approach postulates that receiving and producing are in a constant dialogical relation in which the receiver is not passive but rather an active producer of meaning. In Ramiro’s conversation with the taxi driver, the genre emerged at the moment of reception—that is, when the taxi driver “heard something else” in Ramiro’s words, although it was preceded by a particular “listening culture” in which both participate, based in psychoanalysis.

Sounds embedded into a particular context become genres when there is a co-occurrence (a structure or a pattern at the level of syntax, phonetics, and morphology) that is the internalization of norms and the knowledge of when and how to apply these norms to everyday situations. In this process we see a dialectic between the structural and the social.¹⁵

Consequently, genres do not emerge in a vacuum; they are shaped by a set of “normative basic patterns” that help delineate the process of reception.¹⁶ These patterns encompass the social norms and the historical situation of a given time and place and also situate the genre in relation to others. This means that genres are historically flexible and can be understood differently depending on the dialogical relationship established within a particular historical/cultural context.

Genres are historically constituted, and they reflect an overarching normativity. In the case of listening genres, this means that such genres emerge out of already existent *listening discourses*. Listeners do not receive sound in a vacuum but rather classify sounds in relationship to preexisting listening texts. In Ramiro's exchange with the taxi driver, both have been exposed to psychoanalytic methodology where "free associations," or freely occurring ideas that emerge after someone has uttered a sentence, have a meaning beyond their denotation. They are listening to each other's statements in a particular historical context (Buenos Aires in 2017) and through a disciplinary lens ("psychoanalysis" in a broad sense) that makes the exchange intelligible.

Thus, genres are useful units of analysis because they link particular formal units (e.g., phonetic, lexical, and grammatical) to thematic ones. In the case of psychoanalytic listening as a genre, it is the formula *When you say x, I hear y* that provides the structural component of the genre. The taxi driver embedded Ramiro's words into a psychoanalytic framework because he had been exposed to other thematic episodes (i.e., conversations where a hermeneutic interpretation trumped the denotation). Put in formal terms, a genre emerges only when the construction and maintenance of the significance and indexical associations enable a description of the genre as a social, culture-specific phenomenon, in relation to which expressions can be produced and interpreted (Agha 2007; Agha and Frog 2015; Briggs and Bauman 1992). That Ramiro accepted the interpellation shows that he is part of the *cultura psi* of Buenos Aires, as explained by the senior psychoanalysts I interviewed.¹⁷

Accordingly, genres structure relations between the speaker, listener, and other participants during spoken communication (Bakhtin 1986). They pre-exist any particular interaction, even as they are adopted and combined in speech situations (Goffman 1964). Generic types orient speakers and listeners toward a specific conceptual horizon, determined by "the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants" (Bakhtin 1986, 78), and what Bauman (2006, 2012) calls the already established "orders of knowledge" that precede the interaction. These orders of knowledge are reproduced, as in Ramiro's example, as a tacit framework inhabited by both the taxi driver and Ramiro.

Genres are thus defined as *kinds of discourse* (including listening) that are the outcome of historically specific acts that "derive their thematic organization from the interplay between systems of social value, linguistic convention, and the world portrayed" (Hanks 1987, 671). As a result, the

listener's personal history and social agreements inform a particular social situation, become embedded, and create specific genres of listening.

The genres most studied by linguistic scholars are speech genres, seen as a precondition for meaningful communication, because they organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical forms do, conveying expectations of content, style, and structure that help to shape any verbal exchange, from the simplest conversational rejoinder to the most complex scientific statement (Bakhtin 1986, 90). If we transpose the idea that speech genres point to a specific conceptual horizon during interaction from reading to listening practices, we will find that generic types *order* reception (as the mondegreens or Poe's orangutan shows). Genres of listening differentially tune or guide the ear to attend to some aspects of an utterance—or sound—while not attending to others. *Genres create context and frameworks of relevance that shape the listener's orientation at the moment of reception.*

Understanding the listening formula *When you say X, I hear Y* in Buenos Aires as a genre of listening allows us to focus on a particular sociability that is based on a listening practice and on the resonances that language creates in each other's psyches. It helps us to trace and understand how psychoanalytic discourses are disseminated in and permeate throughout *porteño* culture.

The particularities of Ramiro's exchange with the taxi driver exemplify that just as there are many ways of speaking, there are many possible ways of listening. When a mechanic listens to the sound of a broken car, it is not the same as a music lover listening to Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* opera or a doctor listening to a patient's heart through the stethoscope. Moreover, these types of listening can further diverge depending on qualities of the listener. Musicologists, for instance, may be listening *for* the musical form of a particular music piece, focusing on musical structure, syntax, style, and history, through either architectonic or synoptic listening, drawing from their knowledge of musical structure (Kivy 2001), while neophytes who listen to the same musical piece may experience instead a physical and emotional change (such as goose bumps or tears) but without a concern for musical structure.

I contend that each particular way of listening in these examples is a listening genre. A listening genre is a *framework of relevance* that surfaces at the moment of reception and orients the apprehension of sound. Sound reception is neither neutral nor automatic and always involves a particular type of ideological and practice intervention. By focusing through a par-

ticular frame, the listener creates a context or, more precisely, a *contextual configuration of reception* that provides a unique interpretive lens. Listening genres—like speech genres—are types produced at the moment of reception (Bauman 1992; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hanks 1987) and are also 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.

In this book, I scrutinize psychoanalytic listening as a genre defined through the analysis of *overtly occurring discourse*. As Ramiro’s example shows, this genre of listening emerges through the *responses during the dialogic encounters* that a psychoanalytic listening produces. The formula *When you say X, I hear Y* is a form of reported speech that points to how the listener positions the self vis-à-vis a particular statement. Ramiro heard that he loved one of his sons more than the other, whereas the taxi driver conceivably heard a hesitancy or a change of tone in Ramiro’s voice, which seemingly triggered in his own psyche a memory or a bodily sensation that awakened through the resonance of Ramiro’s words, compelling him to inquire further into Ramiro’s answer. As Reik’s statement in the epigraph of this chapter suggests, we as listeners also listen to the hesitancies, the silences, the “in-between lines”; thus, listening is an embodied experience containing different cognitive modalities.

GENEALOGIES OF PSYCHOANALYTIC LISTENING

To demonstrate how genres of listening emerge, I now turn to the central subject of this book, psychoanalytic listening, a listening genre that permeates social life in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I conducted fieldwork over a period of six years. As exemplified in Ramiro’s exchange with the taxi driver, in Buenos Aires there is a displacement of the *performativity of speaking* in favor of a *performativity of listening*. Although linguistic practices are an intrinsic part of the exchange, the argument is that the taxi driver is dismissing the denotation in favor of focusing—listening—to “that which Ramiro did not say,” by resonating with his words.

What are the contours of the genre of psychoanalytic listening? In the clinical setting, psychoanalysts are invested in being acutely aware of their own ways of listening and speaking, and they attend to analysands (i.e., the patient) through a specific interpretive lens (thus the performativity of

listening practices). Typically, this means that psychoanalysts go far beyond what a patient says to infer what is meant, even though it may remain unsaid. Spoken words are placed in a relation of relevance to a patient's unspoken (and perhaps unrecognized) motives and feelings. This generates the signature statement of the genre *When you say x, I hear y*. The regularities of this genre allow the analyst to move from what is said to what is inferentially heard.¹⁸

Eduardo Mandelbaum, a senior psychoanalyst with more than fifty years of clinical practice experience, told me in an interview, "Being trained as an analyst and having worked for so many years in both my personal practice and 'the Multi' [multifamily psychoanalytic sessions; see chapter 2], it's hard to turn off the psychoanalytic ear. Everywhere you go you start to analyze what people are saying. It's like a curse!" As an analyst with many years of experience listening to different analysands, Mandelbaum developed a *psychoanalytic ear*, one that refuses to be contained within the space of the clinic.

Even though listening is one of the key elements in the psychoanalytic encounter (i.e., an analysand speaks and a psychoanalyst listens, and vice versa), most of the studies of psychoanalysis that focus on listening are concerned either with listening to the internal voices produced by the punitive superego or with the process of fantasy creation through the repression of desire (see Freud [1923] 1995; Isakower 1939). A number of psychoanalysts have directly theorized listening between analyst and analysand. Among them were Sigmund Freud; the Viennese American psychiatrist Otto Isakower; Theodor Reik, a friend and disciple of Freud, with many connections in Argentina; and Jacques Lacan, another theorist with a large following in Argentina. Additionally, a number of recent scholars, most notably Salman Akhtar (2013), have continued to study and systematize the phenomenon of psychoanalytic listening (Connor 1997, 2004a, 2009; Wilberg 2004). Reconstructing the genealogy of this theoretical effort is necessary to understand psychoanalytical listening as a genre of listening, both from a theoretical perspective "internal" to psychoanalysis and from an ethnographic perspective situated in Buenos Aires.

The "Third Ear"

While analyzing the sense of "guilt" in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud ([1923] 1995, 654) remarked on the role of auditory traces in the constitution of fantasies: "It is as impossible for the super-ego as for the ego to disclaim its

origin from things heard; for it is a part of the ego and remains accessible to consciousness by way of these word-presentation . . . but the *cathetic energy* does not reach these contents of the super-ego from auditory perception (instruction or reading) but from sources of the id.”¹⁹

Here Freud explains a particular kind of listening, constituted during childhood and in dialogue with the superego, which involves the internalization of parental voices. “First and foremost,” notes Freud ([1923] 1995, 780), “there is the incorporation of the former parental agency as a super-ego . . . [and] identifications with the two parents of the later period and with other influential figures.” Internalizing the parental voice creates verbal residues derived from auditory perceptions that the child is not yet capable of understanding as such. The unconscious process of internalizing these auditory insights will eventually constitute the superego, which many times is punitive and regulatory. Thus, the superego is depicted as an “internal voice” that will both reprimand us for our disobedience and encourage us in the pursuit of impossible tasks, while the ego is left to suffer the consequences of these contradictory imperatives (654–55, 780–85).

Following Freud’s proposition on the constitution of the superego as an internal voice, Otto Isakower, in his article “On the Exceptional Position of the Auditory Sphere” (1939), analyzed this idea into a more direct reflection on the physical and psychic process of hearing. Isakower concluded that “the auditory sphere,” which encompasses both the auditory dimension and the bodily sense of equilibrium and orientation, is of critical importance for the formation of the unconscious.²⁰ Making a curious comparison between the constitution of the superego and that of the crustacean *Palaemon* (figure 1.1), he explained that the otolith apparatus (a structure in the inner ear responsible for balance, movement, and sound detection in higher aquatic and terrestrial vertebrates and for a sense of gravity in lower animals) does not serve the function of hearing in the *Palaemon* but instead enables “the perception of movement and position of the body relative to its environment and orientation in space” (340). In order to be able to orient itself, this crustacean fills the canal of the otolith apparatus with sand or any material that is close by. In other words, the crustacean incorporates external elements into its organ to be able to orient itself, and the characteristics of the elements it incorporates (rock, sand, magnetic debris, etc.) shape its awareness and perception of the external environment. For Isakower, something similar happens with the formation of the unconscious: the external “resonance” of the outer world, which is yet to be decoded by an infant, enters the auditory sphere, making an unconscious imprint that will shape the



FIGURE 1.1 *Palaemon macrodactylus* Rathbun, 1902. Live color. Photography of the body in lateral view. Photo by Nahuel Farias. In Spivak et al. 2019.

infant's behavior. The superego is thus constituted as the “psychical organ of equilibrium” (344), the apparatus that regulates and controls behavior. It is in the capacity of linguistically ordering the structure of the auditory perception that the child begins to form an inner voice, and for Isakower, this is what constitutes the “ego-apparatus in man” (345).

This theory about the auditory sphere as incorporating more than one cognitive modality (i.e., audition and equilibrium) constitutes a particular way of understanding listening.²¹ Within this framework, listening becomes nothing less than the most valuable sensorial dimension for the constitution of one's self. As Isakower explains, the visual system of a newborn infant takes some time to develop. In the first week of life, babies do not see much detail. Their first view of the world is indistinct and only in shades of gray, and it takes several months for the child's vision to develop fully. In contrast, the auditory system of a newborn is fully developed.²²

These early theorists of the discipline of psychoanalysis ultimately understood listening as a dialogue within the psyche. But how this theory of listening translates in the psychoanalytic encounter is a different analytic problem altogether. Understanding the connection between a sound image and a concept in a psychoanalytic exchange—a session between an analysand and an analyst—is a difficult task. In his books *Listening with*

the Third Ear (1948) and *Voices from the Inaudible* (1964), Theodor Reik described how psychoanalysis developed its own way of listening or what he calls a “third ear.” According to Reik (1948, 144), the main peculiarity of this genre of listening is that it surpasses the conscious dimension: “Psychoanalysis is not so much a heart-to-heart talk as a drive-to-drive talk, an inaudible but highly expressive dialogue.” The psychoanalyst learns to collect this material, which is not conscious but which has to become conscious. The suggestion is that when an analysand speaks to an analyst, certain utterances lose their semantic referents, and the analyst’s task is to *listen* to how “one mind speaks to another beyond words and in silence” (144). Reik continues, “It can be demonstrated that the analyst, like his patient, knows things without knowing that he knows them. The voice that speaks in him speaks low, but he who listens with the third ear hears also what is expressed almost noiselessly, what is said, *pianissimo*. There are instances in which things a person has said in psychoanalysis are consciously not even heard by the analyst [*When you say x, I hear x*] but nonetheless understood or interpreted” (145).

To illustrate this process, Reik recounts the story of a female patient he had been treating for some time. At the end of their fifth meeting, he noticed that this patient did not look at herself in the mirror when putting on her coat and hat. Reik realized this conduct was unusual and began to wonder why he had not noticed it before.²³ His conclusion was that, through all the previous sessions, he had unconsciously begun to hear things beyond what was explicitly said. Reik’s sudden realization that his patient never looked at herself in the mirror was the result of this auditory accumulation, which finally—unconsciously—revealed itself as he noticed this single trait. Reik’s inability to notice his patient’s habit of not looking in the mirror became a sign of something he was not able to understand before. In his recollection of the story, Reik suggests that he had likely noticed this action before but recognized its significance only “when the unconscious became visible” (147). This is because, for Reik, psychoanalytic listening is neither a conscious thought process nor a logical operation but “an unconscious—I might almost say instinctive—reaction that takes place within” (147). As in the metaphor of the crustacean *Palaemon*, the analyst internalizes—takes in—information of all kinds that will later develop in the demarcation of a specific path. When declaring that a psychoanalyst should be able to hear the “inner voice” of the patient’s unconscious, Reik is referring to this phenomenon. While not necessarily focusing only on the restrictive inner voice of the superego, the aurality a psychoanalyst seeks

to decode pertains to the unconscious world. For Freud ([1923] 1995, 630), psychoanalysis “cannot situate the essence of the psychical in consciousness, but is obliged to regard consciousness as a quality of the psychical.” Thus, the duty of the analyst is to find this auditory space inside the psyche of the analysand, and by doing so, the analyst constitutes a specific psychoanalytic listening genre.

The approaches and literature of such theorists as Reik, Freud, Lacan, and Isakower were central in the curriculum for psychoanalytic training in Argentina. It is no coincidence that the individual most often identified as the founding father of psychoanalysis in Argentina, the Spanish-born psychoanalyst Ángel Garma, was Reik’s close disciple and analysand. Therefore, generations of psychoanalysis in Argentina inherited and recirculated this specific approach to listening.

In the therapeutical settings I visited, as well as in my own theoretical analysis based on the clinical practice that my informants shared with me, of all the key concepts related to psychoanalytical listening, one reappeared constantly, explicitly, and tacitly: that of *resonance*.

Resonance

The concept of language as transindividual—as something passing from one individual to another—is of paramount importance for understanding psychoanalytic listening as a genre. Foundational to the emergence of psychoanalytic listening is a process resembling what psychoanalysts call resonance. Freud postulated that resonance makes an imprint in the infant’s psyche. Isakower later developed this idea further, and his interpretation was amplified and circulated by Lacan and his followers in dialogue with their reading of the Swiss founder of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure.

In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan ([1966] 2006) outlines the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language—not just any kind of language, but rather one full of parapraxes, condensation, and the evocative intricacies of dream work. He writes, “The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject’s disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (258). According to Lacan, speech is transindividual, meaning it moves from one psyche to another and is divided into two classes. The first, which Freud called secondary processes, involves those linguistic utterances that are at the disposal of the speaking subjects (and are preconscious and conscious)—that is to say, verbal acts that

the subject understands as autonomous when using them to communicate something. The second belongs to the class of primary processes and is unconscious; it contains those utterances that obtrude against the will of the speaking subject. Accordingly, the human self appears split into two agencies: one potentially or actually conscious and seemingly autonomous, the other unconscious and only “symptomatically irruptive” (Bär 1974, 476).

Lacan introduced the idea that the unconscious is structured as a language to distance himself from a pseudobiological model derived from nineteenth-century physics (see James 1890; Schwarz and Pfister 2016). In his view, linguistics could provide a more exact analysis of the psychoanalytic encounter. In particular, he depicted the role of the therapist as that of a *translator* (similar to what lay listeners do by interpreting the speech of others) between conscious and unconscious systems of meaning, meanings that themselves emerge in the clinical encounter between the analyst and analysand.

Central to Lacan’s early theory of language is de Saussure’s observation that the linguistic system is constituted by signifiers that stand in relation to something (*x*) that is signified, this relationship being arbitrarily assigned by a particular code. Lacan ([1966] 2006) decided to invert this relationship by proposing that something (*x*) which is signified is itself another signifier. Consequently, signifiers relate to each other forming sequences in a *signifying chain*, which “gives an approximate idea: links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links” (418). Lacan focused on the subjective signification that people create throughout their individual stories in which particular words become “nodes” for a particular salient and polyphonic chain of signifiers. Thereby, the primary task of the analyst is the “achievement of a state of resonance” (126) with the polyphony of the patient’s language, which, in turn, may permit a recognition and explication of nodal points in the patient’s discourse when they occur. In describing the process of resonance in Lacan, analyst Samuel Ysseling (1970, 108) observed, “Analysis does not intend so much to control the speaking, but rather to let oneself be dominated and controlled by a word to which one must correspond and listen”—that is, resonance. By employing their own associations in resonance with the patients’, analysts join in the quest for that which is signified at a nodal point. Lacan contends that this activity can permit and facilitate the analysand to speak fully by bringing those words in their signifying relationship to one another into speech, which constitutes “the essential structure of his own fundamental subjectivity” (Gorney 1978, 255). The importance of the concept of resonance is

not that it leads to interpretation on the part of the analyst, but rather that it permits the analyst to speak evocatively, therein facilitating an enrichment in the polyphony of the discourse of the other. In chapter 3 I identify this form of listening as a learned process that can be cultivated and, as Eduardo Mandelbaum noted, is capable of being deployed in contexts well beyond the clinic.

The ramifications of this approach are rich, and they speak to an array of disciplines. The idea of the deferment of signification as a form of listening can also be found in philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's *Listening* (2009). Nancy asks whether listening can be conceptualized as a resonant act that does not relate to an understanding but to sense itself: "perhaps it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be logos), but that it wants also to resound" (5). Sensing is conceived through the act of listening (re-sounding) as the "experience of truth."²⁴ Contrary to the theorizations previously discussed, Nancy's conceptualization of listening does not necessitate reason; he inverts the relationship between hearing and listening by conceptualizing hearing as responsible for neutralizing understanding and listening as the corporeal "reverberant echoing of the resonant" (9).²⁵ Resonance is represented as pure phenomenon, as a sort of Dasein. He shares with Lacan (and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld) the idea that listening is not necessarily sonorous, especially when listening to oneself through the transindividual self.²⁶ But Lacan is still looking for some kind of logos by finding the "nodes" in the signifying chain that will eventually help the analyst and the analysand give meaning to the analysand's suffering. Yet this interpretation is unconscious, embodied knowledge that resonates in the polyphonic relationship with the analysand. Both models present the idea that resonance surpasses the sonic realm. To listen is to resonate, and this resonance lingers and may—or may not—find a signifier.

The concept of resonance developed by Freud, his students, philosophers, and scholars interested in the formation of the psyche remains the core of psychoanalytic listening: it implicates a codification that does not necessarily involve an act of consciousness, yet it needs to reach consciousness for interpretation through the resonance of the analysand's and analyst's listening. Thus, the imprints on the psyche during infancy will inform the analysand's subjectivity, creating nodes, as Lacan points out, with the enunciation of particular words that analysts will be able to uncover once they "resonate" with the analysand's subjectivity.

In Ramiro's example, both he and the taxi driver were listening to denotation but let themselves resonate with each other's words. In doing so,

they created referents that were beyond the mere sense of the words they exchanged. This is precisely how resonance works and why it is transindividual. Ramiro and the taxi driver embodied a genre of listening where consciousness is not located solely in an individual body (through an empiricist framework) nor by means of pure intellectualism but, rather, is a listening formed in a dynamic process of interaction between the resonances produced in each other.

Psychoanalytic listening, as a genre, is to listen through the intersubjective dialogue of analysts and “resonate” with them. This surpasses the here and now of the verbal interaction through the perlocutionary effect produced by listening in the clinical setting. The fact that Ramiro continued to “feel bad” about the encounter with the taxi driver exemplifies how psychoanalytic listening as a genre can “linger” (the perlocutionary force of listening) and find a referent or not.

Resonance is thus a central feature of psychoanalytic listening as a genre—and in psychoanalytic theory, resonance is conceptualized as a central feature of listening in general. But the frameworks through which resonance occurs and that organize the listener’s interpretations are specific, contextual, and in some cases determined by concrete ideologies. This book critically “tunes into” resonance in Buenos Aires. Each of the particular ways of listening in the examples I have provided in this chapter—from doctors listening to heartbeats, to the implications of church bells and the effects of Islamic cassette sermons, to the multiple theories of sound in psychoanalytic theory and in linguistics—inform my concept *genre of listening*. The theoretical cartography I have outlined in this chapter is crucial to understanding the genre of listening shared by Ramiro and his taxi driver, as well as countless others whose voices fill my analysis of how this genre of listening unfolds and functions.

Throughout the rest of the book, I illuminate the multiple textures that intersect to form and codify psychoanalytic listening as a genre of listening in Argentina. Psychoanalytic listening has moved beyond the clinic and emerges as a key genre of listening that permeates social interaction in Buenos Aires in significant social ways. In the following chapters I discuss the methodological impossibility of listening for someone else and analyze genres of listening through the examination of *how subjects talk about listening*. It is through the dialogic encounters that incidents of “hearing beyond what someone is saying” reflect the dense history and continued presence of psi culture today.