Refractive Cogito: An Ethnography of Relational Imagination

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Abstract

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Refractive Cogito explores the production of intersubjective intimacy through psychotherapy and visual technologies. I have conducted one year of ethnographic research in Argentina, a global center for psychotherapeutic treatments. In Buenos Aires, I researched "systemic couple therapy." This therapeutic model utilizes visual technologies like the one-way mirror or Closed Circuit Television in order to allow teams of therapists to observe or supervise live sessions of therapy. Building on my "observant participation" of live sessions of therapy, I argue that this setting exemplifies how late modern affectivity is mediated through the optical apparatus, which includes visual technologies but also the anonymous gazes of the observing therapists and the ethnographer's I/eye. This visual mediation foregrounds the emergence of the "couple image," an interpersonal imaginary that filters the normative reproduction of coupled intimacy.

Adding to research on therapeutic lifeworlds in Latin America, the work challenges the notion that modern institutions such as psychotherapy and the romantic couple have produced reflexive and self-transparent identities. I draw from the systemic setting to describe a constitutive non-coincidence and visual dispossession of late modern subjects in respect to themselves. I contribute to qualitative methodology defining ethnography as a *genre of presence* that involves the use of non-conscious imagination. To consider the ethnographic enterprise as an experience of refractive dispossession, I describe sessions of hypnosis I underwent to as a patient/researcher during my fieldwork.

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Prelude (The Flesh)

I invite the reader to start imagining the texture of an *entre-deux,* an "in-between two," that precedes and sustains the split between self and other, between subject and object, between the visible and the seer, between the ethnographer and his *milieu* (mi-lieu*:* the space/place in the middle). The *entre-deux* is an affective, culturally located, and existential space. Following the relational ontology of the late Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this work will look at the textural *flesh* of this experienced yet also impersonal "in-between two." We will see it emerge across contemporary genres of intimacy, psychotherapeutic lifeworlds, ethnographers, and screens. We will literally *look at* surfaces and screens attempting to see "farther than one sees" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 20), to see "according to, with" the visible (*ibid* 2007: 355), thus trying to hear at the core of the visible the incessant murmur of an imagined and present flesh of the world. To imagine what is happening, what might have happened, and what might be happening is a form of ethnographic perception oriented towards affective, sensorial, and always shifting modes of presence. Perception, as Merleau-Ponty thought, is first of all a perceptual tradition, a historically situated and embodied form of sensuous imagination that reaches the depths of the invisible through its carnal contact with surfaces and fragments of being (1968).

The *flesh* is what Merleau-Ponty understands as an "element of being," that can be compared to the ancient Greek notion of "element," such as water, fire, or air. The flesh is a texture of differentiation between self and other that allows for a being-with, an "having-in-common," while punctuating and sustaining an *écart* (gap, separation). This imagined and carnal space troubles our culturally naturalized tendency to separate our-selves from others. The flesh is Merleau-Ponty's last attempt to formulate a notion that would bridge the subject/object polarization. It is the fundamental image that grounds what I will call a *phenomenology of contact*. The flesh of this *entre-deux* is the localized, contingent, and always already originating medium through which first-person forms of understanding can be produced and sustained as legitimate modes of qualitative knowledge production. This is why you will find a consistent quantity of sentences that are written in the first person. The first and second person are the fictional – arbitrarily discursive yet real – points of departure of a trajectory that obsessively lands on ec/static forms of being and relation. The first person here always indexes and evokes its outside, the flesh in-between you and I. Every time I write "I," I am thinking with and through Merleau-Ponty's "eye." To see, is always to see further than one sees. To see, is to be thrown into the moving flux of the world while touching, smelling, hearing, sensing it. The world sustains us, while our reflexive processes of thought and perception are in a restless non-coincidence with it.

To write "I" is to write further than one's "I." Thus, I will tend to (ab)use the "I-you" relational system of representation in respect to the more anonymously formal third person. What is anonymous, as Merleau-Ponty wrote, is the flesh texturing the split between you and I. This texture is an intertwined carnal flux of becoming that traverses us. The "third," then, is too important to become the way I escape the first person narrative. The first-person, maybe surprisingly, seems still today to be resisted by a returning wave of objectivist desires within qualitative modes of knowledge production.

In this work, again, the third person is the flesh, the texture of the in-between, the anonymous, the determined, and the cultural. A vector traversing and sustaining every perception we have of the world. The third is the medium. The flesh is the medium. You and I are *of* it, and

it speaks, *it* moves, *it* originates through us. To see, with the I/eye, is to enter the carnal and tactile realm of contingent lifeworlds. To see with the "I" is to develop through the "eye" a form of affective *voyance*. Theory, as Heidegger's etymology reminds us, is first of all seeing. Seeing as a *way of seeing*. Seeing as a theoretical way into the textural unfolding of historical contingency. Seeing, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is entering in carnal contact with a phenomenal, phantasmatic, and situated series of invisible elements. To see is to see farther than one sees.

Vision: affects: imagination: ethnographic perception: dyads and their thirds. In the logic of temporal deferral, "of this more later," but this opening might pre-occupy your imagination and address your resistance to a proliferating series of "eyes/Is" to come.

Addendum: This work chooses "positive anthropology" and phenomenological descriptions over critical analysis; affected lived abstractions over demystifying practices of knowledge. To think with, and not to think against: this is the rhythm, this is the genre.

Introduction: A Phenomenology of Contact

Figure 1. Portrait by Ayako Kanda and Mayuka Hayashi.[1]

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[1] Using an x-ray machine, the student artists photographed couples. "X-ray images usually show the finite nature of our bodies composed only of matter," say the duo. "But these couples' portraits reveal a pulse that isn't normally seen." Winners of the Mitsubishi Chemical Junior Designer Award (2013).

There is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself… a subject destined to the world.

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty 2002: xii)

We witness every minute the miracle of related experience, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships.

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty 2002: xxiii)

The idea of a chiasm, that is: every relation with being is simultaneously a taking and being taken, the hold is held, it is inscribed and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of. Starting from there, elaborate an idea of philosophy… it cannot be total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession – – It is not above life, overhanging. It is beneath. It is the simultaneous experience of the holding and the held in all orders. What it says, its significations, are not absolutely invisible: it shows by words. Like all literature. It does not install itself in the reverse of the visible: it is on both sides.

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1968: 266-267)

We are absolute beginners, here, and having nothing in the way of a logic to provide norms; we can do nothing but reflect, engross ourselves in the still not unfolded sense of our task.

(Edmund Husserl 1970: 134)

Mirror, mirror

[Buenos Aires, Argentina, c. 1982-1984.]

The screen flickers for a few seconds while the recording of the therapy session begins. Gala and Jorge are probably in their thirties.[2] Two chairs are at the center of the frame and we can see that behind them there is a one-way mirror. We can assume that other people are behind that mirror. When they enter the room, Gala and Jorge's figures occupy most of the frame. The therapist is out of frame but we can see his outline reflected in the one-way mirror behind Jorge and Gala. The DVD of this old videotape is titled "Jorge y Gala. Problems of Communication. Dr. Sánchez." While Jorge is adjusting his jeans, Gala is already sitting down and starts commenting on a public protest happening downtown Buenos Aires. As therapy unfolds a certain rhythm between Gala and Jorge emerges. Every time he begins responding to the therapist's questions Gala interrupts him correcting or negating what he is saying. Gala speaks over Jorge's insecure tone while he tries, almost listlessly, to gain communicative space: they are performing a fast paced dance of reciprocal rectification. Every sentence is punctuated by the other's rapid comment on it. The more Jorge tries to explain his points of view the more Gala contradicts or rejects what he is saying.

"So… it is always like this? You talk over him while he talks to you?" Sánchez asks commenting on the explicit *juego relacional* (relational game), but also emerging in the scene as the director of a dys-phonic orchestra playing interrupted and over layered communications. "But I already know what he thinks! He doesn't need to explain it!" Gala replies.

Therapy quickly unfolds and the tone of the arguments envelops and delivers a "performative complicity" between the partners that draws in the viewer as if he was watching a well rehearsed scene of a situation comedy. In the midst of an argument between Jorge and Gala regarding Gala's intrusion in Jorge's relationships with his larger family, Jorge attempts to explain how much he owes to his uncle's family but Gala interrupts him saying that she needs to know what's the problem. "Just tell me what is the problem!" she says. Then she adds that nothing of what Jorge just said is true, that she doesn't interfere in his relationship with his uncle, and that she only thinks that he shouldn't call his uncle that much. In the very moment Gala is about to say more, Sánchez abruptly interrupts her, almost mimicking a play of communicative interruptions and contrapuntal punctuations.

"Do you have an *espejito* [purse mirror]?" Sánchez asks Gala. She stares at him surprised, she smiles, "Yes…?" she responds with a curious tone. The therapist asks her to take it out. Gala takes a small mirror out of her bag. She gives the mirror to the therapist. Jorge is looking at the scene amusingly surprised. Gala smiles more curious than amused. Sánchez, whose face we see for the first time and only for a couple of seconds in the video, leans towards Gala to take the mirror, looks at himself in the mirror then gives the mirror back to Gala. "Ok, now… Jorge you can say whatever you want to say and you, Gala, look at the mirror, focus on your lips and facial expression as you see them on the mirror, listen, nothing more" Sánchez asks Gala. Gala is lost for a few seconds, she passed from being curious to being startled. Jorge starts talking again about his uncle. "But… so I have to look at myself in the mirror?" Gala interrupts. Sánchez doesn't reply. While she begins looking at herself in the mirror, she looks uncomfortable. She restlessly moves on her chair. Then she begins cleaning the mirror with her

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[2]In this work all names and minor details have been changed to protect the anonymity of patients and therapists. All the research was in Spanish and all translations are of the author. Most transcriptions have been done directly from Spanish to English.

white button shirt. "You have to understand that my uncle is almost dying, he is old, you could just call him every now and then, I mean…" Jorge keeps talking but he is not looking at Gala, nor at the therapist. He seems to be talking to himself but the trajectory of his gaze almost touches the eye of the camera. Gala seems progressively absorbed into her own reflected image in the mirror. She is looking, it seems, at her reflected lips as she is touching them. While Jorge keeps talking, she is suspended between the reflected image of herself and the therapeutic setting. He slowly starts looking at her, again. She glances nervously at him while trying to focus on the mirror. She looks at Jorge, then the mirror, then the therapists. Jorge keeps talking. He explains that he needs to call his uncle because he is family, because he helped him out when he had economic issues and that his uncle always invites him over even if he never goes.

Then for the first time in the session there are four full seconds of silence. Jorge and Gala's gazes intertwine as mediated by the mirror-image held in Gala's left hand. Four seconds of silence. The dance of interruptions is interrupted by the irruption created by the intrusion of the mirror. Then, as if dodging this moment of mediated intimacy, Jorge starts talking again without looking at Gala. Having now the possibility to address her without being interrupted, he looks elsewhere. His gaze briefly addresses the relational interstices between Gala, the mirror, and the therapist to then land over the therapist. *Pero habla con ella cuando hablas*! (But...Talk to her when you talk!), Sánchez says. Jorge looks at Gala while she seems to be struggling to contain/retain her voice. She keeps glimpsing at the therapist, at the mirror, and at Jorge as if asking for how much longer she needs to be trapped by the mirror image of her silence. She rubs her eyes, she coughs. When Jorge says his uncle's wife doesn't interfere that much in their conjugal life Gala burst out in a laughter thus breaking the silence. While throwing the mirror over her bag she says "*no está metida? No está metida? Pero de que hablas Jorge*!" (She doesn't interfere? She doesn't interfere? What are you talking about!) Jorge quickly responds, "But she doe[sn't]…"

The DVD is broken here and the video jumps ten minutes forward.

The fluid in-between

[Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 23, 2013.]

It is the second session of hypnotherapy. My eyes are closed, I let myself sink into the armchair. The video camera is running. Alicia, the hypnotherapist, is speaking to me. "Listen only to the sound of my voice," she says, "can you hear the texture of my voice? What's the color? What do you see, when you close your eyes? Just listen to my voice as you slowly sink into the couch. Like this, yes, like this, very good. Now just listen, listen to the texture of my voice. Maybe it is too fast, maybe too slow, maybe it is a whisper. What is the color of my voice? Just listen to my voice and… like this, take a deep breath and let my voice come to you." Alicia's voice is slow and warm, while my eyes are closed the vibrations of her voice flicker softly on a dark background of reds and blues. "We were talking before about your work, the way you think about your body, the way you do ethnography, and I asked about your boundaries, the boundaries of your self… we all have limits, a limit, a limit could be your skin, something further from you, a vital space, an environment… what is a limit, how do you imagine your limits? Without guide, without knowing how to do it, let's see if your non-conscious produces an image… what is your limit? Limits, boundaries, your limit, my limit, where do you I start? Where do you end? I am asking you, without rationalizing, just listen to my words, just listen,

and let an image appear in your mind, and I talk about image but maybe sensations will appear, words… whatever it is… how are your limits? How would you represent in this moment the relation you have with your milieu (*el medio*)? Up till this point it's me, and there, there, outside it is not me... the intimate space, the public space, the private space, so many spaces, so many spaces between you and me, you and the world. Your limits, your own boundaries, what image would you use to represent them? Your boundaries here and now… how do you see them? Which images, which words, which symbols come up? How do you represent your boundaries, the limit of your self?"

  While weaving the threads of her circling and repetitive sentences Alicia asks me what I am seeing. I mumble something, with a slow paced voice. "I am floating," I whisper, "you say limits but the more you say limit… the more I see myself floating, like underwater. I was first in my bedroom, the door was closed, but then water came in… I… I see myself floating now, I cannot see where my left hand ends I am looking at it but I see it vanishing through the water's depth. I am underwater. I am the water, no… I am through it…" I stop talking absorbed into the image. "Do you hear any sound, any vibration?" Alicia asks. I don't reply. "Floating," she continues, "the metaphor, an image of a primal experience, the space of the womb… sure… you are alone and not alone, being alone without feeling alone... here, in this space there is a different way things have meaning and sense, there is no loneliness nor not-loneliness, there isn't loneliness nor companionship (*no hay ni soledad ni compañía*), there is something different, an oceanic feeling…? Everything and nothing, where one is one and with another while not knowing what it is (*donde uno es uno con otro y tampoco sabe que es*). Where you are one with another, while different… "

  It is all dark blue around me. I float my way through space while I see familiar faces, objects, and words traverse my body. I see the image of my body and it looks like an amorphous and porous surface. Surface of a depth? A black chair, Alicia's face, and something I cannot recognize start clustering around me. Other objects simply pass through my body/surface. I am floating through dark blueness. "Interesting," whispers slowly Alicia, "something brought you to this space, to this form of being (*este estar*)… there, there, just stay there, let your body float, let it move through this evocation, or this re-construction of sensations, sensations coming from afar but that can be reproduced, rewritten, imagined and sensed again in your body… enter this space." I am silently absorbed but progressively restless. Alicia notices it, "What's happening to you now?" I am agitated on my chair, feeling an anxious pinch through my abdomen. "I want [this] space," I mumble. "It is... it is a space with no space and no time, it precedes the limit… maybe… but you want to pass through it?" asks softly Alicia. My anxiety loops on itself creating an affective intensity. I touch my stomach. I feel the pinch turning into a punch. Something hits me. "It's… This is the space… which connects me to the being of relations… but things are just..."

Argentina: psy-cultures and the modern

  I opened with two scenes set in two therapeutic settings in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The first scene is extracted from a thirty years old recording of a session of couple therapy. I have found the video among other video taped therapy sessions in a pedagogical archive of a psychotherapeutic institution offering "systemic" family and couple therapy. The second scene is from a video recording of one of the therapy sessions of clinical hypnosis I underwent to as a patient/researcher during my fieldwork. Both scenes are mediated, "remediated," and displayed

through video cameras, screens, ethnographic modes of "re/presentation," and an incessant passage between formats and mediums.[3] In this work I will describe the affective, imaginative, and textural relation between therapeutic "genres of intimacy" (Berlant 2000), visual mediums, and ethnographic modes of perception.

The visual and re/presentative mediums that allowed the descriptions of the two scenes are not extraneous to the intimacy they capture: there is a constitutive relationship between the intimate and its own conditions of exposure. There is no intimate, that is, which does not fold within itself its own outside. Quite literally, the intimate needs to be exposed to an exteriority in order to come to the surface *qua* intimate; just like a photographic film needs to be exposed to a certain amount of light in order to produce an image. Intimacy, in other words, is phenomenologically dependent on the mediums through which it becomes visible.

Intimacy is a genre of proximity, a mediated and stylized mode through which modern subjects, or better, the subjects of the modern, compose and experience their affective imaginaries. These lived imaginaries sustain the everyday vicissitudes of their couple form, the family form, and other closely related relational forms.

As Lauren Berlant writes, therapeutic "institutions of intimacy" are tied to public "genres of witnessing" (2000, 1) shaping normative narratives on what it means to have "a life." At the same time, therapeutic institutions of intimacy and, more generally, the "psy-disciplines" have been critically understood as having participated in the creation, disciplining, and flourishing of individual modern subjects (Illouz 2008; Rose 1998).[4] The disciplined subject of the modern, that is, has been substantially shaped through the psy-disciplines as a self-enclosed and individual psychic entity. The autonomous, psychic, and emotional subject of will, indeed, is most often understood as the result of a post-Enlightenment disciplining of the subject *qua* psychic entity (see Foucault 2006) which enters the modern era also as a *reflexive* identity (Giddens 1991) rendered docile to (therapeutic) technologies of the self (Foucault 1995).

However, this might not be an attentive understanding of certain psychological traditions and concepts. Stefania Pandolfo shows in her psycho-political (and psycho-poetical) engagement with psychoanalysis and Islamic theories of the "soul/psyche" that the analytic tradition holds an ambivalent relationship of intimate exteriority in respect to modernity.[5] In this sense, it also also an ambivalent relationship with the Foucaultian, disciplined, and will-full subject of the modern. Psychoanalysis, from Freud onwards, always provided and considered the constitutive presence of an "other scene," the unconscious realm, within the subject. This other scene always escapes a

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[3]I follow Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in thinking that any form of mediation through specific media (painting, photography, film…) is always already a form of remediation, of an incessant passage and refashioning between mediums and mediatic forms (1999). The authors make a distinction between forms of remediation, considering "transparent immediacy" as a form of (re)mediation where the medium tends to disappear, and "hypermediacy" a form of (re)mediation where the fascination with the medium brings the medium itself in the foreground. Throughout this work I will tend to produce "hypermediated" descriptions of different mediums, thus temporarily "putting out of play" (if/when possible) the paradoxical "propensity of media to erase themselves in the act of mediation" (Eisenlohr in Meyer 2011: 25). I write "re/presentation" in order to display the tension between phenomenological and ethnographic genres of presentation seeking a "transparent immediacy" of the medium (in this case writing) through evocative descriptions and the always already representational realm of language (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1993). On immediacy and mediums I am thinking with Birgit Meyer's work on the mediated production of sensorial im/mediacies (2010, 2011).
[4]Nikolas Rose defines the "psy" disciplines as disciplines having "psychic" life as object of knowledge (1998: 2).
[5]*The Knots Of the Soul* (forthcoming), but see also Pandolfo (2008). For a discussion on North-American *therapeutic culture* see, among others, Caplan (1998); Illouz (2008); Moskovitz (2001).

self-enclosed "ego" and the reflexive subject of the modern.[6] The psychoanalytic apparatus, indeed, identifies through dreams, slips, drives, transferential attachments, an in/finite series of "incursions" of unconscious processes constituting the life of the subject. These processes do not fully belong to the subject and resist the realm of language and representation.[7] At the same time, as the work of Jacques Lacan has suggested, at the very core of subjective formations we will always find a constitutive other, an intimate kernel of exteriority that constitutes us while escaping us (1998). Even superficially, thus, we can appreciate a clinical and epistemic attention in certain psy-disciplines to the ways subjects are "never alone" and never fully aware of their own reflexive choices.

However, not only the psychoanalytic tradition provides the possibility to think against the idea that the psy-discplines only sustained the disciplining of an individual private, and reflexive self-enclosed subject of will. The two non-psychoanalytic traditions I will explore in this research, also present pregnant counter-points. The systemic model of psychotherapy, which moved away form the psychoanalytic focus on intra-psychic processes, promotes a deeply relational approach where individuals' behaviors are understood as the result of their interaction within systems of relation. As we will see, the family was the initial focus of this model which developed in the 1950s and 1960s in Palo Alto. The model resulted from a mixture between Gregory Bateson's pioneering application of cybernetic theories of communication and an explicitly visual apparatus allowing therapists to *see* relational patterns *in vivo*.[8] Through optic technologies of observation, the systemic model developed along a specifically visual imaginary that literally brought families, couples, and vision under the therapeutic gaze (Weinstein 2013).[9]

The systemic model was deeply influenced also by the work of American hypnotherapist Milton Erickson who, in the same period, was promoting a "positive" understanding of the non-conscious (which he understood as a vital and creative principle rather than as the psychoanalytic repository of the "repressed").[10] Believing that psychological change could only be triggered through non-reflexive and non-conscious processes, Milton Erickson developed various forms of hypnotic induction and suggestion to promote his patients' change. Systemic therapy as well, in some of its declinations, developed strategic techniques to promote change *beyond or behind* individual intentional choices.[11] Again, the psy-subject emerges here as profoundly relational and somewhat un/willful.[12]

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[6]The birth of psychoanalysis can be thought as the identification of this "other scene" of the unconscious in Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Histeria* ([1985] 2000). However, the Freudian notion of the "psyche" bears a genealogical relation with pre-modern traditions and philosophies of the "soul" (see Ellenberger 1970; Bettelheim 1989; Pandolfo 1998). In this sense, we can identify an ambiguous intimacy between psychoanalysis and non-modern traditions within the hearth of the development of the modern psy-disciplines.

[7]I am here especially thinking with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1998).

[8]See the first chapter on the birth and development of systemic therapy.

[9]See previous note.

[10]The Palo Alto group, and especially Jay Haley, was deeply influenced by the work of American hypnotherapist Milton Erickson who used forms of indirect suggestion to hypnotize patients with or without trance-like experiences (see Haley 1973). Bateson himself, who had a strong penchant for visual forms of ethnographic recoding, videotaped also some of Erickson's hypnosis sessions fascinated by his capacity to influence, affect, and produce change in his patients.

[11]As I will explain in the first chapter, the most known strategic techniques where the "paradoxical injunctions" developed by the Milan School in the 1970s.

[12]I will explore Ericksonian hypnosis in the second chapter.

In the tension between the birth of a psy-subject of the modern and psychological traditions promoting relational approaches, Argentina presents itself as a particularly fecund milieu where to consider current forms of attachment and intimacy and their relationships with ontologies and therapies of/for the subject.[13]

Statistics vary, but numbers seem to be growing steadily: Argentina has the highest concentration of psychoanalytic, and more generally, psychological practitioners per capita in the whole world.[14] It is common to hear that there are more Lacanian psychoanalysts in Buenos Aires than in France.[15] While the neurosciences and cognitivist approaches seems to be globally on the rise, the humanistic tradition of psychoanalysis finds its way in Argentina also within psychiatric and prevalently medicalized institutions (see Lakoff 2005). One of the first therapists I have met in Argentina jokingly told me, "but… don't you know? If you shake a tree in Buenos Aires four psychotherapists will drop… and three of them are analysts!"

The impact, more generally, of the psychological disciplines across the Argentinean private/public culture is often measured and identified in the proliferous circulation and passage between venues and mediums of the "psychological idiom" (see Plotkin 2001, 2003). From TV shows to political discourse, from taxi drivers to intellectuals, from idiomatic expressions to popular books, there is a psychoanalytic vocabulary and attention that characterizes the cultural background of Argentina, its national narrative, and its ordinary life.

Argentineans love their therapists and they know it, as they transit through what Argentinean sociologists and historians call the *mundo psi* (psy-world), or the *campo* psi (psy-field). In this this therapeutically inflected cultural milieu the psy-idiom has become an available "secular theodicy" (Visacovsky 2009: 60) to understand everyday malaises but also wider national political and economic crises.[16]

As Lucia, a psychotherapist I interviewed told me, "you go to the analyst to solve a fight with your best friend, you go because you discovered you are pregnant and you don't want to pass on any traumas to your baby, you go because your mother pays for your analyst, you go because your primary care doctor told you so, you go because your wife told you so, you go to overcome a collective trauma, you go because there is an analyst at the emergency room, you go because *todo mal*…"[17]

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[13]I say ontologies because the question is, specifically, what *is* a subject and what are the incessant, determined (and yet always originating) conditions of its production. As many sociological and anthropological works have suggested, the reflexive question about the *identity* of the subject seems to be an exquisitely modern problem.

[14]Among other sources I am here citing a recent publications and statistical statements by Brotherton (2016), Marsilli-Vargas (2012); Romero (2012). As Marsilli-Vargas writes the WHO 2005 estimated that there were 154 psychologists – including psychoanalysts – for every 100, 000 inhabitants, making Argentina the country with the most psychologists per capita in the world (2016: 136).

[15]See, for example, Jon Beasly (in Sarlo 2001: xii).

[16]As Plotkin and Visacovsky (2008) show the psychoanalytic discourse intervened in the public sphere addressing the past economic crisis of 2001-2002. The authors question the capacity of psychoanalysis to address such socio-economic event. Differently, Silvia Bleichmar's successful book *Dolor País* (2007; the tile means literally "country pain) uses psychoanalysis to understand the national crisis in collective and cultural terms, while offering a psychoanalytic reading of Argentina. Addressing the ongoing and public debate between psychoanalysis and its social role in Argentina, I recall the cover of the weekly magazine "Ñ" depicting Freud and Lacan taking a couch in the street. The cover read "*El psicoanalisis saca el divan a la calle*," psychoanalysis brings/takes the couch in/to the street (September 3, 2013).

[17]The last expression means "all (going) bad(ly)" and I often heard it in reference to the country's situation, one's one existential situation, or as a general statement. Argentinean anthropologist Alejandro Grimson writes "*somos fanaticos del 'todo mal'*," we are fanatics of the "all bad" in reference to an "Argentinean" ambiguously negative attitude towards one's one country and socio-political situation (2012: 14).

However, as is most often remarked, the Argentinean peculiarity is that the psychoanalytic and, more generally, psychological idiom circulates across social venues not exclusively related to the *consultorio* (consulting room). In this sense, Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas rightly understands the circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires as a process of constant "mediatization" (2016: 140). This mediatization brings our attention to the passage and recycling of the psy-idiom across venues and mediums. Finding the circulation of a psychoanalytic hermeneutics well beyond the clinical space in everyday Buenos Aries, Marsilli-Vargas defines such psychoanalytically inflected structure of attention as a particular *listening genre* (2016).

Psychotherapy, then, is a culturally circulating genre of intimacy, clustering and intermingling with a series of other genres of listening, healing, and relating that are all mediated, remediated, and mediatized in the Argentinean public/private sphere. Every genre has its own rhythm, its affect, its recurrent medium, but every genre is also ceaselessly revisited.

Within the porous space of the Argentinean intimate publicity of psychotherapy we can begin to formulate a series of questions on the passage between mediums, on the incessant remediations of the intimate that conform to, confirm, and trouble the individual boundaries of the (late/post/never-been) modern subject.[18]

In fact, it is precisely through an ambiguous relationship with the modern and its political, cultural, and economic promises that we can imagine one aspect of Argentina's context.

As the Argentinean intellectual Beatriz Sarlo has variously written, Argentina can be considered as a recognizably Western country, but it also holds an ambiguous relation with European traditions of thought and more generally a complex relation of attachment with non-national cultural trends (1996; 2001). This ambiguous ambivalence, which she finds condensed in the literary work of Borges, presents an "oblique" reading of Western literature and thus an oblique relation with the modern and its cultural promises (see Beasly in Sarlo 2001: x). This obliquity can be imagined as a creative enfolding, an internalization and intimate remediation of "continental" humanities, especially the French tradition of literature and philosophy (see Dagfal 2009).[19]

Indeed, Argentina's national narratives and founding myths have been produced and sustained in the most part through massive waves of European migrations across the nineteenth and the twentieth century. At different levels these Southern and Eastern European migratory waves, fertilized the ground for the development of Euro-centered cultural, symbolic, and racial forms of nation building and class reproduction.[20] I write of class reproduction thinking of how

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[18]I am here referring to the multiple names through which contemporary forms of "modernity" are addressed. From the now less common "post" (see Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1991) to a more current "late" (see, among others, Jameson 1991; Povinelli 2006), to a "never been" (Latour 1993) modern. I say "contemporary" thinking with Paul Rabinow "the contemporary" as a "*a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (nonlinear) space that gauges modernity as an ethos already becoming historical*" (2009: 2, original emphasis).

[19]This creative re-appropriation of external traditions could/should also be thought along the post-colonial critical literature. Consider, for example, the heterogeneous productions of "hybrid cultures" in Garcia Canclini's work (2005), or the "third space" of hybrid, violent, and mimetic post-coloniality described by Homi Bhabha (2012). In this line, Eleni Kefala takes Sarlo's notion of "peripheral modernity" (1996) and considers Argentina as a hybrid and peripheral (post)modernity (2007) that mimetically enfolds, reproduces, and reinvents Euro-modern values.

[20]In this sense we can understand the national notion of the Argentinean "middle class" as tied to nationalistic "origin stories." The Argentinean middle class catalyzes a moral imaginary of white and modern migrants of European descent who "built" the country (see Adamovsky 2014; Visacovsky et al. 2009). The "middle class," which is the main protagonist of the "mundo psi," emerged in the public discourse as the main protagonist of the 2001-2002 crisis (Visacovsky 2014, 224). On one side actively engaged in the *cacerolazos* (spontaneous street

the migratory wave of Europeans fleeing persecution during and after the second World War sustained the attribution of "prestige" to the European tradition of psychotherapeutic practices becoming an "accouterment of upward mobility and status" (Hollander in Brotherton 2016: 103).

Such particular relation with its migratory past, as it has been written, also informs the psycho-historical notion that Argentina's "structure of feeling" is particularly melancholic, as it holds and folds within itself an ambivalent relationship with the absent motherland of migrants.[21] This is, for example, one of the origin stories of tango, a popular dance that develops through the individual encounters between strangers, in the shared solitude of transoceanic migration. There is a role played by the notion of "absence," then, which can be encountered across social domains. *El Tango es nada, el tango es caminar sobre una ausencia*, (Tango is nothing, tango is walking over an absence), a dance teacher told me over a fleetingly shared wine glass. "*Nosotros Argentinos tenemos una relación muy particular con la ausencia,*" (We Argentineans have a very particular relation with absence) commented once Alicia, my hypnotherapist.

Be it imagined, cultural, or affective, a melancholic genre defines a certain recursivity and attachment to promises that are never fully delivered.[22] These promises are often attributed to something outside the national boundaries. As the jokes goes, the difference between an Uruguayan and an Argentinean is that the Argentinean is an Uruguayan who has been to Paris. The enfolding of an external element, the making intimate of a mediated externality defines an ambiguous and constitutive intimacy with Argentina's own outsides.

The presence of such a strong psychoanalytic tradition, to continue, has been precisely related to the historical, cultural, migratory intimacy that Argentina held with European traditions of thought. As the psychologist and historian Alejandro Dagfal suggests in *Entre Paris y Buenos Aires* (2009), the invention of the "Argentinean psychologist" reveals a deeply rooted relation with the French intellectual tradition. Assimilating through a fertile humanistic milieu what he calls the "French cultural exception," Argentina turned as well into a champion of humanistic and anti-positivistic traditions of thought.[23] The specifically French tradition, which intertwined with the British tradition (especially with Melanie Klein's legacy), for several

protests), on the other called out for its neoliberal practices of consumption that metonymically represented the "sins" of the nation (see Fava and Zenobi 2009).

[21] The term "structure of feeling" is taken from Raymond Williams (1978).

[22] Taking one example from soccer, which is a national paradigm of/for sociality, gender relations, and everyday moralities in Argentina (Archetti 2003), we can read the recursively disappointing parable of soccer player Lionel Messi as an example. Messi, considered one of the best soccer players of all time, left Argentina in his early age to go play in Spain, where he had and is still having a stellar career, "winning everything" a player could hope for. Messi, the champion every Argentinean was waiting for, however, seems unable to provide full satisfaction to the *fanaticos* of the *Selección Argentina* (the national team). Lionel Messi, thus well representing the hope-full disenchantments shadowing the relationship between Argentina and its own national narrative. I recall one issue of *The Economist* (Feb 15–21, 2014), which addressed Argentina's economic instability portraying in the front cover a lonely Lionel Messi on a soccer field with the title "The Parable of Argentina. What Other Countries can Learn from a Century of Decline."[22] Messi still had to loose in the Argentinean soccer team two more finals. After the last Copa America final (July 2016) a disenchanted Messi declared he would leave the national team. He tried, but something is not working out. Lionel Messi, *The Economist* also seemed to suggest two years ago, condenses the ambivalent and precarious relationship the country has with its own heroes, with the modern national project, and with recursive forms of disenchanted attachment.

[23] In this regard, Hugo Vezzetti, a prominent historian of the psy-disciplines in Argentina, explored the role Freud played in the development of a heterogeneous intellectual milieu decades before the creation of the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association (1942). Without making any historical or genealogical claims, Vezzetti is able to offer a possible understanding of the role Freud and a humanistic tradition played in structuring the reception and diffusion of the psychoanalytic practice (1996).

decades has been informing a certain resistance to the diffusion of non-psychoanalytic models of therapy in Argentina.

However, as Dagfal interestingly outlines, while it is common to think that Argentina mirrored Europe, we have to add that "it is a peculiar/singular and capricious mirror, that deforms what it reflects according to its own perspective" (2009: 44-45).[24] Again, Argentina's milieu is read through its oblique relationship with a distorted and refracted modern.

At the same time, if Argentina has in part mirrored and assimilated its "m-Other Europe," Argentina also originated unique forms of psychological and psychoanalytic traditions.[25] These traditions, for what interests us here, have developed an eclectic attention to the social and relational dimension of the psychological subject. The most important example is Enrique Pichon-Rivière (1907-1977), one of the founding members of the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association (1942). The Swiss-Argentinean psychoanalyst fathered the diffusion of psychoanalysis in Argentina and, most importantly, developed forms of social psychology and "group" psychoanalysis, pioneering a theoretical attention to the "*vinculo*," the affective and relational tie (Pichon-Rivière 1991, 1997**;** Macchioli 2013).[26] The most recent attention to affective ties and relationship in Argentina has been promoted by the innovative approach of link psychoanalysis, *psicoanalisis vincular*, that explicitly focuses relational dynamics of attachment (see Berenstein and Puget 1997; Berenstein 2004). To conclude this overview of socially engaged and relationally focused forms of psychology, I must mention the well known sessions of "*terapia multifamiliar*" in Buenos Aires, where a numbers of psychoanalysts and dozens of patients gather for collective sessions of psychoanalysis.[27]

In the context of such heterogeneous psychological traditions, I focused my attention on two therapeutic models that also promote a profoundly relational understanding of the psy-subject. However, they both articulate explicitly non-psychoanalytic forms of therapeutic expertise. Systemic therapy and Ericksonian hypnosis are quite recent models in the Argentinean panorama and they reveal a genealogical relation with the North-American tradition of psychology. In this sense, they are to be considered as a form of "minor literature" within the hegemonic genre of psychoanalytic therapy. I remember one leading therapist of systemic therapy at a conference saying, "after more than twenty years we still have to fight the hegemonic ideology of psychoanalysis, we need a paradigm change!"

In the context of a culturally available psy-culture remediated through different genres and venues, I researched systemic therapy and Ericksonian hypnosis because of their attention to the relational dimensions of the psy-subject, but especially because of the use of visual technologies in their practice. These technologies allow teams of psychotherapists and students to observe and occasionally participate in ongoing sessions of therapy. At the same time, they allow therapists to prepare for upcoming sessions while watching the recordings of the previous therapy session. The close relation between these two models I displayed also by the common use of video cameras also in Ericksonian hypnosis (mostly with pedagogical purposes).

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[24]My translation. He writes in Spanish "[S]i bien se ha dicho muchas veces que la Argentina es un espejo de Europa, para no caer en un lugar común, habría que agregar que se trata de un espejo singular y caprichoso, que deforma todo aquello que refleja según su propia perspectiva (2009: 44-45; also in Marsilli-Vargas 2016: 138).

[25]My wife and colleague Yanina Gori introduced me, among other things, to Argentina as a conceptual, relational, and cultural milieu. At the same time, as I will also write throughout, she is the incessantly present other-of underlying most of my conceptual engagements. With her I explored through conversations and indirect forms of communications the conceptual role of the (m)Other in my own intellectual life.

[26]See also Balàn 1991; Dagfal 2009; Vezzetti 1996.

[27]See also Marsilli-Vargas 2016.

During my research I have been squeezed in dark rooms with therapists in training, alone, or with other psychotherapists; I have been sitting behind one-way mirrors and in front of LCD screens and Close Circuit Television (CCTV) and I have been observing live sessions of couple therapy. As I will argue below, the focus on "couples" intensified my curiosity towards relational structures of intimacy and their implications with mediating technologies and therapeutic institutions of intimacy. As historian Deborah Weinstein suggests, we need to understand the co-constitutive role that visual technologies and this type of therapy had in creating a moralized *vision* of affective family life (2013).[28]

Returning to the relationship between intimacy and mediating surfaces/mediums, then, in this work I will show how once delivered over to the optic apparatus of systemic therapy, the intimate couple offers a pregnant view-point where the "inwardness of the intimate" meets "a corresponding publicness" (Berlant 2000: 1) of romantic desires channeled into the couple form.[29] The intertwining between this inward intimacy and its corresponding publicness recalls the way Habermas defines modern (bourgeois) subjectivity where "at the innermost core of the private," we find a subject "always oriented to an audience" (1991: 49).[30] As I will argue, the pregnant relationship between vision, audiences, and intimacy is condensed in the Spanish term *público*, which means both public and audience.[31] As I suggested indirectly, the Argentinean milieu seems particularly prone to reconceive and rearticulate therapeutic forms that involve some form of interruption of the more common private intimacy of the therapeutic space. Therapy as a public genre is here a mediating surface that produces and sustains forms of intimate exposure of the private psy-subject.

Building on this conceptual infrastructure, I will also take the ethnographer and his embodied imagination as "screens" and mediating surfaces producing, reflecting, and refracting forms of intimate exposure. However, I will now lay out the stakes grounding my interest in thinking-with the couple form and its in-betweens.

Couples: entre-deux: vision (part I)

My focus on intimate couples is connected to the philosophical desire to consider ethnographically the textural flesh of intimate relations and the presence of a series of "thirds" sustaining the formations of dyadic attachments. In other words, while I describe different therapeutic dyads and their *entre-deux*, the in-between two, a series of mediating "thirds" will always trouble a binary understanding of the dyad. Thinking with the two opening scenes, a couple therapist is the third of a couple in therapy. The one one-way mirror behind Jorge and Gala is a third element (indexing the presence of in/finite gazes and bodies behind the mirror). The mirror where Gala sees herself is a third. Her own reflected image is a third. The ethnographer's embodied eye is a third. The ethnographer's sessions of hypnosis are literalized "third scenes" in respect to his research. The "two, the couple, the pair" in this work is taken as

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[28]See first chapter.

[29]Throughout this work I often use the figures of elements being "given over" or becoming available. I am in debt to Lawrence Cohen, amidst other things, for the circulation of these figures in my thought (see Cohen 2007).

[30]Also in Berlant and Warner 2000: 324. Berlant and Warner follow intimate publicities and public intimacies outlining the normative background sustaining worlds of attachment (2000).

[31] Within this analytic frame, we will see how the systemic setting of psychotherapy literalizes the intrinsically public (and visual) kernel of intimacy through an intimate ecology of spectatorship. I refer to an "ecology" referring to Bateson's influence on this therapeutic model and his interest on human/nonhuman systems of relations (2000).

always indicating and summoning entities beyond, behind, and beneath its duality. In order to think with the systemic model of therapy and its rejection of inner psychic processes, I am interested in considering this mediating thirdness mainly in its externalized and material manifestations (mirrors, screens, video recordings) within a present tense.

In thinking the "dyad," I follow Merleau-Ponty's desire to consider the relation between poles as mediated by a common flesh which is to be intended as the affective "texture of differentiation" that originates and sustains the split between two elements. Merleau-Ponty, since his *The Structure of Behaviour* ([1942] 1963) has variously dedicated his attention to the play between opposite elements and especially between subjective and objective stances in philosophy and psychology. As Cathryn Vasseleu writes, the French philosopher "describes the interweaving of subjective and objective relation in positive terms, as a philosophy of ambiguity" (1998: 22-23). Merleau-Ponty, she suggests, challenges "the division between the interiority and exteriority of psychical and physical embodiment" (*ibid:* 24). Indeed, my constant reference to the interiorization and enfolding of external surfaces and traditions is mostly grounded in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology.

Merleau-Ponty initially described the ambiguous and carnal play between dichotomous terms, interiority/exteriority or subject/object, through the concept of the *entre-deux*, the "in between-two." In Vasseleu's reading the *entre-deux* it is later developed by the philosopher as the notion of the *flesh* (*ibid:* 22). The flesh is a particularly ambiguous notion elaborated by the philosopher and, as I wrote in the Prelude, is to be imagined as an "element" (like water, fire, air) of being and as the texture that sustains the originating split between two elements.[32] Merleau-Ponty wrote of the flesh as something which has "no name in philosophy" (1968: 147), since it is neither mind nor matter nor substance. In a sense, as philosopher Mauro Carbone writes, the flesh resonates with the Platonic notion of *khôra*, as a receptacle, a thirdness, an in-between. As Derrida writes echoing Jean-Pierre Vernant's words, what Plato defines *khôra* seems to "defies the logic of noncontraddiction of the philosophers… that logic of binarity, of the yes or no" (1995: 89). The *khôra,* this spatialized receptacle and matrix, belongs to a "third genus" (*ibid*). However, for Merleau-Ponty the flesh, which is a mediating third between elements, is not an external and originary matrix, but a "texture of differences in constant differentiation" (Carbone 2015: 71). This texture cannot be thought as a static (and maternal) third. The flesh, in fact, is in perennial explosion and must be understood as the texture of localized, determined, contingent dimensions of history, culture, and society.[33]

The resonating relevance of Merleau-Ponty's work and the present project is that the philosopher posited an entangled relation between this textural in-between, the flesh, and vision.

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[32]The flesh is the common horizon where all beings belong, the "omou en panta" (all things were together): not an origin but something *originating* which is not "all behind us" but in perennial explosion (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 265, also in Carbone 2015: 8)

[33]Mauro Carbone, who I find one of the most interesting interpreters of the late Merleau-Ponty, provides also an interesting account of how the notion of the flesh "coincides in the 20th century with an attempt to name the possibility of a communication between the Husserlian conception of the body as *Leib* – that is, an experienced unity of perception and motion – and Nature, conceived in terms of "an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all" (2015: 7). Carbone offers an overview, which goes beyond the scope of this introduction, on the notion of the "flesh" in different French philosophers (2015 10-18). I am mainly thinking with him the works of Didier Franck who proposed to translate *chair* (flesh) with the Husserl's *Leib* (2014), Jean-Luc Nancy's equation of the flesh with the "body proper" (2009), Jacques Derrida's critiques of Nancy's "Christian" equation (2005), and Michel Henri's understanding of incarnation as an existential "being" in the flesh and not in the body (2015). In passing, ut is not by chance, as this work also displays, that, beginning with a deep engagement with Merleau-Ponty's ontology of vision, Carbone also developed a philosophy interested in screens and surfaces.

The relationship between the flesh and vision is so deep for the French philosopher that Carbone has recently reminded us the necessity to think of the flesh as Visibility.[34] Visibility and vision, that is, have represented for Merleau-Ponty the metonymical field where to conceive and, literally, envision our relational dimension with the invisible flesh texturing our presence in the world.

As Merleau-Ponty wrote, there is a "sort of madness in vision such that with it I go unto the world itself, and yet at the same time the parts of that world evidently do not coexist with me" (1968: 75). Buci-Glucksmann writes commenting this passage that "contrary to any metaphysics of the subject and the *cogito* as self-presence in re-presentation vision… dispossesses the subject from himself, disappropriates him, and absents him in a series of metamorphoses, movements outside the self" (2013: 25). This "madness of vision" is what allows Merleau-Ponty to take vision as the milieu whence to consider our ecstatic participation in a world of senses, surfaces of depths, and carnal intertwinings.[35] Such depths, and this is a fundamental aspect of the phenomenologist's ontology of vision, are an entangled intertwining between perceived surfaces of being and imagined absences that are rendered present *precisely* throughout incarnated imagination. The latter, plays a quasi-mythical role granting us access to the virtual depths of the invisible and textural flesh of our lifeworlds. This virtual depths articulate what for Husserl was the *hidden* sides of objects. However, this imagined depths are for Husserl only "hypothesized but sensibly absent" (Kelly 2004: 78), whereas Merleau-Ponty to takes them as *positive absences* (i.e. perceivable and given) that sustain our tridimensional vision of the world.[36]

In this sense Merleau-Ponty writes the sentence I have been repeating as a refrain: to see is to "see farther than one sees" (1993: 136). As Italian philosopher Mauro Carbone suggests, this seeing farther is a "*voyance* that 'renders present what is absent' not simply by presentifying it, but rather in *creating* it as a particular *presence* which, as such, *had never been present before* (2015: 3). The imaginary, then, while sustaining our contact with the given world, has its own "flesh" and dimensionality (*ibid*). This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty means by "seeing according to, with" the images which fill our perception as well as our imaginary:

This red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility […] A certain red is also a *fossil drawn from the depths of imaginary worlds* (my emphasis, Merleau-Ponty 1968: 132).[37]

Interestingly, it is often through the image of a chiasmic "pair" or couple that the philosopher elaborates both his ontology of vision and his vision of the flesh. Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note,

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[34]"It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to myself that we have previously called flesh…" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139).
[35]On the "madness of vision" see the brilliant text by de Certeau on Merleau-Ponty's *folie de la vision* (1982).
[36]Sean Dorrance Kelly provides a deep and clear reading of the difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on this point. At the same time he engages with the role the hidden side, the positive presence of the background plays in the constitution of Merleau-Ponty's thought (2004).
[37]Also in Carbone (2015: 4).

Consider the *two*, the pair, this is not *two acts, two syntheses,* it is a fragmentation of being, it is a possibility for separation (two eyes, two ears: the possibility for *discrimination*, for the use of the diacritical), it is the advent of difference (on the grounds of *resemblance*) (1968: 217).

Following this relation between the flesh, vision, and the two, the philosopher takes stereoscopic vision as both a field where to imagine the chiasmic intertwining between different elements and their relation with a common "third." This intertwining is often referred by Merleau-Ponty as a chiasm, an inter-crossing between elements. The notion of the chiasm[38] between elements bridges the philosopher's notion of the flesh with his ontology of vision. The chiasm, for him, is metonymically connected to the optic *chiasma*, as Vasseleu points out, as the optic chiasma is the point of "cross-over of the fibers of the two optic nerves, so that the shared visual field of each eye is linked to the part of the brain on the opposite side of the body (1998: 31). In this sense, vision for Merleau-Ponty embodies, since its origin, an intertwining between elements that point to a thirdness which eludes a simple combination of dyads offering a different order of depth. At the same time the chiasmic character of vision stems from the fact that the seer is always already also seen, in an incessant play between passive and active reversibilities.

In this ontology of vision, to see means to participate in the mysterious anonymity of this *carnal* element, the in/visible flesh of localized lifeworlds. Through Merleau-Ponty's work on vision and the flesh, we will also find a ground to consider the relationship between reflecting/refracting surfaces and the couple form. In a very interesting passage of his fundamental essay, "The Intertwining, The Chiasm," Merleau-Ponty writes of the emergence of a tangible visibility which belongs "properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact" and makes the example of two mirrors facing one another, "where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which there form a couple, a couple more real than either of them" (1968: 139).

The realm of vision, thus, provides the ground for Merleau-Ponty also to think of an incessant non-coincidence between reflecting surfaces, dyads, and their incarnated in betweens. This non-coincidence, emerges in his work also in terms of a never complete *reflexivity* of one's own body and thoughts upon themselves. As I will show in the chapter on hypnosis, he often used the Husserl's example of our two hands touching each other, where we can never be both sentient and sensible, touched and touching. In the space of this non-coincidence, in the *écart* (gap), the textural flesh of what he calls the "invisible" can emerge. The possibility of touching and being touched at the same time, is a reversible possibility that is "always imminent but never realized" (*ibid*: 147).[39]

To think about the emergence of this texture within gaps, he often used the botanical figure of dehiscence, the splitting apart of fruits, seed pods, or organs to bring forth a flesh which differs from but is of their flesh (see Vasseleu 1998: 31). Again, the play between interiorities and exteriorities, the exterior emergence of depths within the flesh is what Merleau-Ponty restlessly attempted to describe. This exposed intimacy, for him, was sustained and produced through chiasmic relationship with the Visible world. A world of visible surfaces where we are both seers and seen, where we are always already within Visibility (flesh), this anonymous third term that surfaces in his ontology of vision.

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[38]Or chiasma/chiasmus which refers to the rhetorical figure where words are repeated in an inverted order.
[39]Se also Carbone (2015: 8, 14).

As I will be clear in the upcoming chapters, *refractivity* is one the leading metaphors of this work. Refractivity describes the bennding of a wave when passing through mediums with different densities. The temporality of the medium alters the direction of the wave. This image/metaphor helps me consider the role surfaces and mediating thirds play in bringing to light (through dehiscence), this incessant non-coincidence and never complete reflexivity Merleau-Ponty was alluding to. An imminent yet never completed reversibility is at the heart of his philosophical ontology of vision. This non-coincidence produces also a spatio-temporal series of gaps, jumps, re/presentational changes of scale.

Surfaces, then, is the way we access carnal depths, textural in-betweens. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Eye and Mind* regarding the role of mediating surfaces and the painter's eye,

> when through the water's thickness I see a titling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if I saw, without this flesh, the geometry of the tiles, then I would stop seeing the tiled bottom as it is, where it is, namely, farther away than any identical place. I cannot say that the water itself—the aqueous power, the syrupy and shimmering element—is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It dwells in it, is materialized there, yet it is not contained there; and if I lift my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections plays, I must recognize that the water visits it as well, or at least sends out to it its active and living essence. This inner animation, this radiation of the visible, is what the painter seeks beneath the names of depth, space, and color (2007: 371, original emphasis).

Couples: entre-deux: vision (part II)

While holding a series of specific conceptual promises for me, however, the couple form also presents itself in the contemporary world as one of the most hegemonically reproduced structure of intimacy. The couple form, that is, is still alive and well, despite (or maybe because) the constant reference to its crisis and despite feminist, post-structuralist, queer, and social critiques that have been developed from the past sixty years. Such critiques often involved a queer and post-structural challenge to gendered forms of theoretical and practical *binarism.*[40] Again, I am interested in conceiving the binary, the dyad as never fully dyadic and this might probably ground its resilience in respect to recurrent socio-political and theoretical dismantlings.

Indeed, the couple form, as it has been shown in multiple ways, is still amidst the primary "structured and st*ri*cturing structure" channeling our affective attachments in the contemporary.[41] Contemporary coupledoms[42], we can say, keep sustaining the re/production of normative and late liberal imaginaries of happiness, social recognition, and emotional fulfillment. One of the main couple therapists that appears in this research, Dr. Almibar, told me once that the couple form might/could find its end in the near future, leaving space to "clanic" (*clanicos*) groups of three, four, five people, or maybe groups of couples coming together (which would be proliferation and

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[40]I am referring to different theoretical engagements that developed within *queer theory*. I am particularly interested in thinking with Eve Sedgwick a theoretical commitment attentive to in/finite multiplicities troubling binary forms of (always already gendered) abstractions (1995; 2003). See also Judith Butler's foundational critique of gender binaries (1999). For an engagement with the couple form and queer theory see my third chapter.

[41]I am here echoing Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* as a "structured structure" which is also structuring (1992). I use "st*ri*cturing" to evoke the narrowing of a canal conducting fluid and thus the structured channeling of flows of desire.

[42]I take this expression from Laura Kipnis and her polemic against monogamic coupledoms (2004)

intensification of the "two"). In the present, however, as he also admitted, this dyadic unit of relation is far from being abandoned. It still is the fundamental structure clustering moral fantasies of a *good life* (Berlant 2011; see also Ahmed 2006).

More than anything, as we will see, the couple form emerges as the fundamentally hegemonic unit of relation through which we mirror, shape, find, and sustain our sense of self. The "two," it seems, is most often at the service of the "one" (while being composed by an infinite series of thirds). We can see it especially when we look at the couples that pass through the therapeutic space in order to overcome their affective crisis. As the same therapist told me in one of our interviews, "the only thing I can say for sure is that the couple is the space (*lugar*) where we find confirmation of our identity. We want to see ourselves in the other."[43] This sentence is in resonance with the most common refrain I have heard across hundreds of sessions of couple therapy: "*no me registra,*" s/he doesn't register me, or, following this work's conceptual infrastructure, "s/he doesn't provide the mediating surfaces through which I can see my-self."

What Dr. Almibar suggested, was that to see oneself in the other is the main affective vector sustaining the everyday of certain couple forms: again, vision and the couple form intertwine in a co-constitutive dance between elements. This seems to indicate the "reflective" work of the dyad – I want to see myself through you – and the fundamentally "reflexive" desire characterizing an aspect of the modern subject (see Giddens 1992). As I will argue, however, it is never a clear-cut mirroring as what one pole of the couple sees in the other, when looking for itself, is always mediated and refracted, thus producing a de-formation of one's image. This de-formation will be a way to engage and sustain non-linear, queer, and slant-wise modes of seeing. This slant-wise approach to vision, following Sara Ahmed, can provide a *queer* reading also of what will be here the fundamentally normative couple (2006).

At the same time, this might be precisely what narcissism is about, if we follow Jacques Lacan. Indeed, as Joan Copjec comments referring to Lacan's notion of narcissism

> Since something always appears to be missing from any representation, narcissism cannot consist in finding satisfaction in one's own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that *one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image*. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it constantly fails to recognize itself. What one loves in one's image is something more than the image ("in you more than you") (1996: 37, my emphasis)

If we read this quote through Merleau-Ponty we could even suggest that the being in "excess" in respect to the reflected image is a being of non-coincidence that has a virtual, invisible, and *fleshy* dimension. But, returning to the figure of reflection, I will suggest that the couple form displays and materializes different orders of optic dispositifs at the hearth of modern relationships. I am thinking in terms of optic dispositifs as I will mostly consider visual technologies, which externalize the work of "third" elements in the constitution of subjectivities. Of course, if we follow the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, the most intimate and inner optic dispositif is what we can understand as the internalized split between our eye and the *gaze*.[44] In reading Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and The Invisible*, Jacques Lacan reformulates

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[43]In this sense, we can re-read Eva Illouz's cultural sociology of the romantic utopia and capitalist consumption as, first of all, a consumption of self-hoods (1997).

[44]Thinking in terms of the optic dispositif I am in distant conversation with the now classic use of the term "apparatus" in film theory. As Joan Copjec writes, "the concept of apparatus was not original to film theory but was

the phenomenologist's idea that every form of seeing is also a "being seen" and pushes it farther in identifying the anonymous gaze as the core of our subjective formation. As Lacan writes, "I am looked at from all sides (1998: 72). In the first chapter I will engage with with Lacan's idea of a split between the eye and an anonymous gaze.[45]

I hope that, at least obliquely, I delivered the conceptual stakes that sustained my curiosity in observing video recorded and "televised" sessions of couple therapy in Argentina. The couple form as a channeling and channeled structure of attachment holds a constitutive relationship with its exterior publicity. This exteriority can be imagined as visual. Vision, in the work of Merleau-Ponty, provides a metonymic milieu where to think about relationships between poles and their textural in-betweens. These in-betweens bring us to consider the dyad as always already mediated through surfaces. The surfaces are always the surfaces of depths and this is why we want to "see seeing farther than one sees."

While on one side Argentina is an exceptionally intensified milieu where to consider therapeutic processes of mediation and remediation, the systemic setting provides a farther intensification orchestrating a visual apparatus that literalizes the role of "thirds" in the formation and development of the contemporary couple form. As I will argue, this form of apparent panoptic surveillance is to be re-read through Merleau-Ponty's ontology of vision in order to grasp its relational and affective features. Vision and care, vision and affects will trouble any easy panoptic reading. While "seeing" puts things at a distance, it also discloses our intimacy with the visible realm.

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imported from epistemological studies of science. The actual term *dispositif* (apparatus) used in film theory is borrowed from Gaston Bachelard, who employed it to counter the reigning philosophy of phenomenology. Bachelard proposed instead the study of "phenomeno technology" believing that phenomena are not given to us directly by an independent reality but are, rather, constructed… by a range of practices and techniques that defined the field of historical truth" (1996: 20). Thinking about the relation of the optic dispositif and the formation of relational subjects I am also alluding to Lacan's idea that there is a constitutive relation between the subject *of* vision and vision. Commenting on Lacan's ontology of vision Copjec writes that for Lacan "behind the visual field, there is, in fact, nothing at all… The veil of representation actually conceals nothing" (*ibid:* 1996: 35). She is referring to Lacan's "beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze" (1998: 103).

[45]Buci-Glucksmann provides a fabulous engagement with both Merleau-Ponty and Lacan's rearticulation of the former's ontology of vision in a book about the madness of vision, gazes, and *baroque* aesthetics (2013).

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In the second part of this introduction, I will further elaborate the conceptual stakes of this work, especially in relation to an understanding of phenomenology which foregrounds the affective dimension of lifeworlds. As I will suggest, what we have been understanding so far as the "flesh" is to be explored as an affective realm. The connection between a phenomenological anthropology and affect theory, grounds my methodological decision to undergo sessions of clinical hypnosis during my fieldwork. Hypnosis, I suggest, exemplifies style of relation we can cultivate with(in) trans-personal affective realms. Mild trance states of absorption intensify the figure of a reflexive non-coincidence with oneself. I will understand this *écart,* gap, through the notion of *refractive Cogito*, which I elaborate in the chapter on hypnosis.

A constitutive non-coincidence of the reflexive subject with itself is a fundamental aspect in my understanding of "reflexivity." As Hoon Song has argued (2006, 2011), in the French tradition (which includes Sartre, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty among others) at the core of the self-reflexive subject there is an intractable negativity, a resistance of the object of (self) reflection to be fully objectified and visible. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty writes that the phenomenological reduction can never be complete (2002) or that reversibility is always imminent but never fully realized (1968). Song reads the "reflexive turn" in the social sciences in conjunction with the contemporaneous diffusion in the 1970s and 1980s of Foucault's model of the panoptic gaze and the emergence of a self-loathing "white nihilism" (2006, 2011). Contrasting the French self-reflexive model which implies an always already social/cultural sense of self-loss and dispossession, Song suggests that at the core of "reflexivity" in the social sciences we often find a "fully formed" subject of knowledge that can be rendered visible because of an imagined *coincidence* between the reflexive ethnographer and the panoptic gaze of (Foucaultian) power (*ibid*).[46] Precisely in this sense, I take reflexivity not only as an anthropological attempt to render visible the "contingencies of knowledge production." The reflexive ethnographic subject of knowledge production, I argue, always implies a resistant kernel, an intractable element which makes reflexivity a project of self-displacement rather than self-identification. The visual apparatus of my research, moreover, will provide the ground to trouble a panoptic reading of an apparently panoptic setting.

Following this approach, I also take from different strands of anthropological literature promoting a focus on the imaginative, non-conscious, and emotional processes of the ethnographer as a legitimate milieu of knowledge production.[47] The notion of refractive *Cogito* takes the first person ethnographic persona from the view-point of non-conscious, affective, and

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[46]Dominic Boyer (2015) offers a compelling reading of different generations of "reflexive" anthropologies before and after the so-called reflexive turn which was characterized by a post-colonial and "textualist" revisiting of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rabinow 1977; Rosaldo 1993). Considering anthropology itself as a fundamentally reflexive social science, Boyer understands reflexivity as a rendering "visible" the contingencies of knowledge production. Recent experiments in anthropologies of the contemporary (Rabinow 2003; Rabinow et al. 2009), anthropology of expertise and design anthropologies (Boyer 2008; Fabioun et al. 2009) are currently reformulating the stakes and methods the ethnographic enterprise. However, as I suggest throughout my work, these approaches are not engaging with the related question of (self) reflexive modes of knowledge production and their relationship with affects and human/nonhuman forms of relation.

[47]See my chapter on hypnosis. I am here referring to works that consider the role of the (psychoanalytic) unconscious in ethnographic research, from the classic (and still pioneering) work of George Devereux (1967), to more recent works on the inter-subjective and ethnographic role of dreaming, dream-interpretation, and reverie (see, for example, Borneman 2011; Miškolci 2015; Pandolfo 1997; Proudfoot 2015). I am also referring to recent turns to emotions (see Davies and Spencer 2010) and sensuous presence (Stoller 2010) in the field.

textural processes sustaining the anthropological imagination. At the same time, it considers the temporal consequences of an incessant passage between mediums of affective intensities. Thinking of hypnosis as a form of descent into affective spaces in-between, I consider this space as a "third scene" that mediates and remediates the production of the rest of my work.[48]

In the last section of this second part, I frame my work as a tentative "phenomenology of contact (through surfaces)" where to think of the (mediated) affective dimension of contacts between couples, therapists, and ethnographers.

My interest in engaging with the (self)reflexive first person that characterizes much of the phenomenological enterprise is also a way to consider of an elusive and relational kernel at the core of subjectivities. This relational kernel, I suggest, provides the basis consider the phenomenological first person as a legitimate mode of knowledge production within qualitative forms of contact and understanding.

Phenomenology: Affects

What is phenomenology? French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty opened with this question the famous Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2002). In the Preface, Merleau-Ponty positioned himself within the phenomenological tradition and laid the ground of what I would call an *expressive phenomenology of contact*. In Merleau-Ponty's work, indeed, we find a persistent return to an imagined and sensed contact between the perceptive body of the philosopher and the world it is destined to, immersed in, and oriented towards. The intertwining pair of sensation and imagination shape our lived perception. Merleau-Ponty, *repetita iuvant*, takes our perceptive contact with the world as sustained through our culturally determined imaginary which presentifies the invisible side of the surfaces (of depths) we encounter.

How to write, express, present, and represent this textural and elusive contact with the world which is given to our experience through an intermingling of sensorial and imaginative processes? Merleau-Ponty's fascination with painting and literature is not casual as it indicates the centrality of artistic genres of expression in the exploration of our contact with the carnal and, as he wrote, "wild being" of the world (1968).[49]

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of contact describes the relation our embodied presence has with a world that *has us* and is given to us through a determined "perceptual tradition" underlying our perceptual "faith" in the world (*ibid*: 28). Our body is *habituated* to its cultural world, allowing a form of pre-reflexive "skillful coping," and therefore it anticipates our reflexive and linguistic understanding of the world. This idea has grounded and influenced different theories of practice.[50] However, I am primarily interested in thinking a phenomenology of perceptual contact with a given situation, in order to articulate ethnographic forms of

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[48]Here, see also John Borneman's article on the "intersubjective third" emerging in the ethnographic encounter and sustaining the idea of the ethnographer as a "repository" of the informant's unconscious and daydreaming (2011).

[49]Merleau-Ponty's reference to "brute" and "wild" being has been greatly influenced by his reading of anthropology and especially the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (see also the latter's dedication to Merleau-Ponty in the opening of *The Savage Mind*, 1966).

[50]I take the notion of "skillful coping" from Hubert Dreyfus' reading of the embodied phenomenology of Heidegger (1991, 2014). Dreyfus attention is given to our everyday *habituation* to a world of practice and skillful action. Merleau-Ponty's work on the body holds a position of primary importance to understand Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as embodied disposition (see 1992, 2000). For different yet intersecting understandings of theories of practice in anthropology I refer to Sherry Ortner's seminal essay (1984) and think with Saba Mahmood the rearticulation of practice theory (2011).

perception and imagination. In a specific way, then, I punctuate Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to think ethnographic perception in relation to affects, a world in (and of) becomings, and the intertwined problems of expression (to use his term) and genre (to use a more contemporary term).[51]

Then again, what is phenomenology? While we can identify Edmund Husserl as the founder of a formalized version of phenomenology, I follow Merleau-Ponty in saying that phenomenology is, first of all, "*a manner or style of thinking*" (2002: viii, his italics), which has preceded Husserl and which can be found across different traditions of thought. Throughout this work, I am concerned with the ways the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty addresses the relation between *genres* of (re)presentation and disciplinary modes of knowledge production.[52] In a sense, phenomenology as a *style of thinking*, can be understood as a genre of re/presentation.

This style of thinking, more or less consistently, challenges, engages, or takes as its own origin point the reflexive and thinking subject, grounding the Cartesian *Cogito*. In this work I take the *Cogito* as a cluster-concept indexing and referring to conscious and aware forms of subjective and intentional engagement with the world. However, how it has been suggested by Derridda's "*Cogito* and the History of Madness" (1978), the essay in response to Foucault's work on madness, the *Cogito* bears a constitutive relation with its own non-rational and non-reflective "other." Madness and an eluding core ground the philosophical "I think" (Cogito). In this sense, I take the *Cogito* as implying its "internal others": non-aware, non-intentional, and non-conscious forms of relation with the world.[53] This intertwined back and forth, this implication, this never splitting split, is the moving force of most of my conceptual and expressive interests.

As Merleau-Ponty writes referring to Husserl's contribution, phenomenology is mainly a method based on the *epoché* (suspension of judgment).[54] This method's main concern, for Merleau-Ponty, is the (descriptive) return to the *worldliness of the world,* intended as a milieu of potentiality that we perceive and punctuate in determined ways. Again, I am orienting the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty towards the problem of contact with a world in becoming (rather than only as a phenomenology of our habituated body and its familiarity with the world). The world, for Merleau-Ponty, is a pre-reflexive realm to which the reflexive *Cogito* belongs and with which the *Cogito* is in constant contact. In different terms, Merleau-Ponty defines our pre-discursive experience as "deep-seated set of mute "opinions" implicated in our lives" (1968: 3).[55]

The trafficking between a conscious *Cogito* and the world is an important element to understand. For the philosopher our body is the general "medium" through which we are anchored to the world (*ibid*: 169).[56] I consider the contact, the adherence of the *Cogito* to this realm, which Merleau-Ponty (1968) we already defined as "flesh," as a form of adhering

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[51]With the expression "a world of becomings" I am evoking the title of William Connolly's book *A World of Becoming* (2011), which engages with the temporal, affective, and creative flux of social and physical worlds.
[52]Although Merleau-Ponty didn't address "genres" as a word, his constant interest with painting and "expression" sustained my initial entrance within the realm of genre as a phenomenological question.
[53]Among others Slavoj Žižek offers a clear account the "adventures" of the Cogito from Descartes, to Kant, Husserl and psychoanalysis. I am thinking here of his edited volume on the *Cogito* and the unconscious (1998). Michel Henry contrasts the idea that psychoanalysis presents a different form of *Cogito* and locates Freud at the apex of his genealogy of the (reflexive and conscious) Cogito in Western philosophy (1993).
[54] Epoché is an ancient Greek term (ἐποχή epokhē) meaning "suspension."
[55]Here see also Vasseleu (1998: 23).
[56]He writes, "the body is our anchorage in a world" (2002: 167) as "the body is our general medium for having a world" (*ibid*: 169).

proximity to an affective force-field. Flesh as, Cathryn Vasseleu writes quoting Merleau-Ponty, is a "pre-discursive state of flux in relation to which perceptual experience is 'the insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity' (1998: 41-42).[57]

Thus, I take the phenomenological world as a cultural and contingent realm to which we are habituated as well as a milieu where affective forces and intensities travel. In passing, the existential adherence of our being-in-the-world to affective force fields brings us close to Martin Heidegger's idea that we are always already in a "mood" that affects and sustains our presence *to* the world (2008: 172-173).[58]

However, before developing the idea of an affective lifeworld, I will provide a few grounding images of my reading of phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's work. I call them images as I consider these propositional statement as composing and sustaining my imagination and my depictions of phenomenological worlds.

To enter the never ending motion of phenomenological beginnings we must agree to (or at least acquiesce) an initial image: there is a world-in-becoming out there and we are trans-passed by it; a world that makes us as we make it. We are (more or less) intentional subjects of history, and we are (more or less intentionally) in it, or better as Merleau-Ponty often wrote we are "*of* it" and "*at* it" (*être au monde*). This world in becoming always escapes us: it has the tendency to fade into the background, to elude us, to precede us. This world is given, which means it is present and immanent regardless of our capacity to grasp it, contain it, understand it. This immanence is folded within our perceptual and imaginative tradition. We dwell within this world. It is a world which we occupy and by which we are always already pre-occupied, while being inhabited by it. We should conceive these world/worlds as as a series of intersecting and emerging worlds in motion and becoming.

Beginning with first-person reflections on the ways the world is given to our consciousness, this phenomenology offers a line of flight, or at least a flip-side: at the core of the *Cogito* we will always find a network of contingent relationalities. The deeper we dig in ourselves as the originary milieu of our reflections, the further away from ourselves we can end. It is like falling asleep into your own bed thinking about your teaching schedule for the week and waking up realizing you actually are a Cambodian snake of the forest about to bite a meditating anthropologist in a monastery. I am interested in the genres of phenomenological journeys which begin with a first-person point of view and end without ever finding again the first-person "abode" they left behind. It is a worlds of vibrating others that traverse us and these journeys shall find their end within worlds of others. Other faces, other objects, other others. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world he knows himself" (*ibid*: xii). Drawing on Husserl's notion of the *lifeworld* as the empirical background sustaining our historically situated being-in-the-world (Heidegger 2008: 84), Merleau-Ponty most clearly defines the phenomenological mandate of the reflexive *Cogito*: "the *Cogito* must reveal me in a [historical] situation" (2002: xiv).[59] Again, I am taking the *Cogito* as a cluster-concept indexing our notions of intentional, aware, self-enclosed, and reflexive individuality.

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[57]She is quoting Merleau-Ponty (1968: 130).

[58]In a phenomenological anthropology of morality Jason Throop's work offers a sustained attention to "moods" and forms of (moral) attunement (see 2014).

[59]As Husserl writes, "The life-world, for us who wakingly live in it, is always already there, existing in advance for us, the 'ground' of all praxis whether theoretical or extratheoretical. The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world (1970: 142).

A second grounding image: the contingent unfolding of the *dimensions of history* (ibid: xx) are available to the *Cogito* because the situated subject is always already immersed in the world it attempts to explore.[60] In this sense the *Cogito* is also a subject of history (see Derrida 1978). However, the world we are in constant contact with precedes us: the phenomenological project is to "return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks* (Merleau-Ponty 2002: x). In this style of thought the figure of the "other-of" plays a capital role. The "other-of" what we experience consciously, the other-of language, the other-of subjective intentionality. The "other-of" is the promise of a world, many worlds in motion which exceed language while inhabiting and sustaining it.

Third image: we can partially access this world through the epoché, the phenomenological suspension of judgment. Husserl variously defined the epoché throughout his work as a suspension of judgment that "brackets," puts "out of play" our natural attitude, that is our habitual and habituated mode of relation with the world (see Husserl 1962: 97-98).[61] "It is because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world," Merleau-Ponty writes, "that… the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity, to refuse it our complicity… or, yet again, to put it out of play' (2002: xiv). This suspension sustains a form of "wonder in the face of the world," writes Merleau-Ponty quoting Eugen Fink (*ibid*).[62] Imagine yourself in front of an object. Imagine bracketing everything you know and you think you know about that object. Look at it, let your thoughts be progressively occupied by it, let it come towards you, let it tell you the multiple ways it appears in and to the realm of your consciousness. Suspend what you know and enter in contact with that object.[63] As Merleau-Ponty argued, most of the times our perception of objects always draws from an invisible side of the object we intuit and imagine. As I wrote, this imagination merges with our perception filling the gaps and "pulling out," as it were, invisible worlds out of the surfaces of being against which we "bump."

What interests me here, is to think that this suspension "slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world" and that "from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world" (*ibid*: xv). What is the unmotivated upsurge of the world? I understand it as indicating ever-changing and always moving lifeworlds which are, however, historically situated and culturally punctuated. These lifeworlds traverse, affect, and sustain our presence and forms of attachments to the world. Through a slackening of our habituated threads that attach us to the world we can imagine, experience, dream about, or maybe hallucinate a temporary

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[60]In a sense this follows Husserl's *principle of principles*: Every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing of knowledge, that whatever presents itself in 'intuition' in primordial form (as it were in its 'personal' actuality) is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself." (*Ideas*, 2012: 44)

[61]In this sense Alessandro Duranti suggests to call Husserl's "natural attitude" a "cultural attitude" (2010).

[62]The epoché has to be understood as a transformative experience which re-directs our attention toward something different. Imagine focusing your gaze for a long period of time on a water bottle. Slowly getting absorbed into the ways the object is given to your consciousness. "Perhaps," Husserl writes with a promising tone, "it will even become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such (Husserl 1970: 137). This existential transformation might just be a never fully delivered promise, but we know how far we can get following promises.

[63]As Henry Thoreau wrote "I must let my senses wander as my thought, my eyes see without looking… Go not to the object; let it come to you" (in Bennet 2010: xiv).

entrance within this milieu.[64] We can conceive of this slackening as an "experiment of experience" where we loosen our intentional and conscious relation to the world in order to develop forms of attention towards our embodied and sensuous registers of relation.[65] I suggest that we register the contingent upsurge of the world through affects which emerge in our encounters with other objects, other faces, other others.

Affects: Hypnosis

The notion of affects, as articulated through the work of Deleuze and Guattari, condenses my interest in the body as a medium that has the potentiality to affect and be affected by the presence of another body – be it a conceptual body, a concrete object, a vibration, another body. Affects are impersonal forces emerging from within contingent encounters between bodies; affects are trans-personal forces we imagine as having an intractable elusiveness in respect to the realm of language.[66] Deleuze's work on affects reformulates also Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677), where the philosopher conceived "affect: as a bodily state that provoked by an "encounter" between two bodies. This encounter has the specific capacity to either diminish or augment our capacity to act. Affect(s) thus, *happens* between bodies, emerging and texturing their encounter.

Spinoza famously defined affect(s) as "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained' (Spinoza 2005: 50). Our body-as-medium, then, has the modal capacity of affect*ing* and being affect*ed*.[67] Teresa Brennan, writing on the transmission of affects, opens her work asking "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere?'" (2004:1). This felt atmosphere is the force-field of an "impression" that our body registers (and, as I write, *refract*). Of course, as Sara Ahmed writes commenting Brennan's question, the "felt atmosphere," an encounter between bodies, is determined by our "angle of arrival" (2010: 37).

Affects, these circulating and material forces that our body registers, are the felt immanence of a relation and sustain our attachments to other objects, other situations, other fantasies. What interests me is to take the literature on affects in its potential to re-frame our understanding of subjectivity.[68] Indeed, the focus on the transpersonal and material immanence of relationships between elements, defines a quite im/personal property of affects. The anonymous, *qua* trans-personal, and human/nonhuman quality of affects resonates with Merleau-Ponty's constant reference to a certain "anonymity" traversing and affecting perception. As the

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[64]I have here in mind a fabulous (and fabulatory) sentence of Deleuze and Guattari: "Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness and excess." (1994: 41). This sentence sustains my conceptual and ethnographic attention towards hypnosis and dreamy states of knowledge production.

[65]Leonardo Piasere (2002) uses the expression "experiment of experience" to consider the ethnographic enterprise (my translation).

[66]I take the notion of the "intractable" from Roland Barthes (1978).

[67]For Spinoza, the affects triggered by this encounter are to be distinguished between actions and passions (2005). In the first case our capacity of acting is "aided," in the latter it is "restrained'. Think of how a determinate genre of music or soundscape (in this case an encounter with the vibrating body of sound) can radically change our capacity to think, write, read, re-act.

[68]Reframing and challenging self-enclosed subjectivities is by no means a way to "banish subjectivity" as Emily Martin's critique of affect theory suggests (2013).

work of Brennan has suggested, the epistemological and ontological importance of affect theory lays in its capacity to trouble our bounded notions of selfhoods and individualities (2004).

David Cole writes that affects "entail the colliding of particle-forces delineating the impact of one body o another… Affect create a field of forces that do not tend to congeal into subjectivity" (in Bennett 2010: xiii). I suggest that also the phenomenological tradition conceives of impersonal and non-subjective forces sustaining and affecting out pre-reflexive relation with worlds. However, through the literature on affects we are given the possibility to think more explicitly the immanent forces of encounters between bodies and thus ground a sensuous phenomenology of contact.

Selecting a few anchor points within the *mare magnum* of the literature on affects, this work is attached to affect theory through a few important points. Firstly, affects are considered as sensorially felt intensities that might or might not be registered by our conscious awareness (Massumi 2002).[69] Affects are given, they are immanent and material forces that are never fully folded within personal, intentional, and conscious subjective realms. This is how the notion of affects is tied to a virtual realm of potentiality and becoming. In this sense, affects are non-defined, pre-personal, potential, and fleeting sensed intensities and their elusive tangibility stimulates and sustains an explicit engagement with styles of presentation (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 14) and non-representational modes of writing theory (Thrift 2007; Stewart 2011).[70] The problem of style and genres is textured within affects as object of study – just as it is textured within the present reading of phenomenology (and just as it is textured within ethnographic genres of writing).

Secondly, I develop the idea that affective intensities circulate and are rendered available only within situated phenomenological lifeworlds. I understand lifeworlds as fundamentally affective milieus. With Deleuze and Guattari we can say that affects run through the nervous system of given lifeworlds (1989). It is important to read and think affects in relation to their milieu in order anchor our descriptive analysis in the historical contingencies of affective circulations and intensities. As I will argue in the first chapter, I consider affective intensities to emerge always in relation to an affective milieu. This milieu is the non-conscious affective background of a given (i.e. situated) present, which I consider as affectively felt and perceived (Berlant 2011). An affective background sustains the coming into being of our ordinary lifeworlds, and it is traversed by trans-personal forces that sometimes, in some conjunctions, come to the foreground.[71] Coming to the foreground, in this case, means that the intensity

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[69] In clear terms Massumi, introducing Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaux*, writes: "Affect/Affection. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies" (1989: xvi).
[70] Ruth Leys recently challenged the notion of non-intentional *intensities* in affect theory referring to the "rather opaque" (2011, 444;) and bio-centric conceptual apparatus sustaining such notion (see Massumi 2002)
[71] Our present is perceived first affectively (Berlant 2011, 4) and affects can be imagined as "literally moving things" (Stewart 2007, 5). William Connolly writes on the multiplicity of "force-field" that envelop human/nonhuman worlds (2011, 5).

becomes available to be consciously registered.[72] Always circulating within a given situation, affects are folded-in and transmitted through different mediums.[73]

In the next section I want to push further the idea of a "contact zone" between our body-as-medium and "other others" through an initial reading of philosophies of hypnosis. In different literatures engaging with trance-like states of affection I found a conceptual, imaginative, and experiential realm where to explore non-individual forces of attachment sustaining a relational *Cogito* and sustaining my imagination about a pre-reflexive and trans-personal realm of presence.

Hypnosis: Love

Hypnosis clusters and condenses heterogeneous imaginaries. The figure of Franz Mesmer (1734-1815) and his para-scientific theories of *animal magnetism* well represent the ambiguous thresholds of trance-like phenomena across scientific legitimacy, popular imagination, personal charisma, and symbolic efficacy. Perhaps one of the most common images is the one of stage (and staged) hypnosis where a passive and non-conscious individual is subjected to the injunctions of the powerful hypnotizer. The relationship between hypnotizer and hypnotized has received much attention through the notion of the magnetic rapport (*commercium magneticum*), which is an affective tie that can still be understood genealogically related to ideas of psychoanalytic transference.[74] Hypnosis as a form of suggestion where one person is "given over" to the other, emerges also in theories of "love" and the romantic tie, especially after Freud's elaboration on love and transference (see 2006).

Hypnosis, be it real, performed, or imagined – and we know in anthropology how ambiguous the difference between these adjectives can be – catalyzes the idea of an individual lowering of "defenses" or boundaries, the idea of a surrender that allows one person to be affected by another person. Hypnosis, like affect theory and the focus on in-between, offers a milieu to reconsider self-enclosed ontologies of the subject. The surrender of the "hypno-subject," if you think ethnographically, can be seen also as a form of affective participation in the lifeworlds of otherness (ethnography as hypnotic act of surrender?). Hypnosis can be generally understood as a combination of different cognitive and affective properties. As Laurence Kirmayer writes, "[t]he 'specialness' of hypnosis probably inheres not in any unique cognitive process but in the way common cognitive skills (including focused attention, absorption, imagination, and affective state-dependent dissociation) are combined to yield hypnotic behavior and experience" (1987: 521). While we should also focus on the social and cultural expectations connected to hypnotic phenomena (see *ibid* 1992), I am more interested in thinking hypnosis as an experiment of experience that provides the ground to consider the relationship between affects, phenomenology, and ethnographic forms of perception. Indeed, if we agree that we are always already affected by the lifeworlds we inhabit, theories and practices of hypnosis are fecund setting in which to explore affective forms of relation and imagination.

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[72]Critical readings of affect theory pinpoint the excessive reliance on an immediate realm beyond "signification and meaning" (Leys 2011, 443; see also Mazzarella 2000). However, in anthropology affects are most often considered as circulating through situated mediums of transmission. See Sara Ahmed (2010), Purnima Mankekar (2015), Todd Ramón Ochoa (2010), Anand Pandian (2015).

[73]I am here also following the vast work on mediality and affects. For example, the important work of Richard Grusing on "premediality" and affects (2010).

[74]I am here mostly referring to the work of Borch-Jacobsen on the "emotional tie" which links hypnotic phenomena with the emotional/affective transference (1992).

Historian of psychiatry Henri Ellenberger wrote a detailed history about the rise of "modern dynamic psychotherapy" (1970) locating it along a continuum of practices devoted to curing the "maladies of the soul" – from "primitive" forms of healing to animal magnetism (hypnosis) in the 18-19th century and, finally, to the emergence of psychoanalysis. I am interested by the fact that Ellenberger understands the 18th century emergent discourse on "animal magnetism" as informing later psychodynamic models of the mind based on the "unconscious." The unconscious, to put it simply, surfaces as a *sub-stratum* lying beneath the realm of consciousness (*ibid*).[75] This substratum manifested itself throughout the 18th and 19th century in the form of "waking somnambulism" or "automatic writing" (among other forms), phenomena which catalyzed the attention of the controversial founder of magnetism Mesmer and his "disciple" Puységur (1751-1848).

It is in this period that a discourse about the *commercium magneticum* (magnetic rapport) between the hypnotizer and the hypnotized identifies hypnotic phenomena as the emergence of a *liquid* and creative space of surrender and affection.[76] In this relational space, the hypnotizer provokes in the hypnotized a state of waking dream and of mild trance, where we can observe the emergence of an unconscious realm of imaginative and relational presence. Regarding this "magical relationship" (Hegel in Nancy: 1993: 32), Ellenberger mentions a certain Friedrich Haufeland who, in 1811, writes that "the magnetic rapport is the most intimate relationship that can exist between two human beings and the only one that bears comparison with that of the fetus in the mother's womb" (*ibid*: 153). It is within this space of affection that we can appreciate, following this *magnetic* trope, the emergence of the unconscious, both in its symptomatic and therapeutic form. Bringing in the conceptual infrastructure of this work, we can begin imagining the emergence of this in-between as a textural and carnal *entre-deux*.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen – in a volume called *Hypnoses* (1983) – take hypnosis as a conceptual field, considering the "stupor" of the soul (Nancy) and its relationship with the realm of affects and representation (Borch-Jacobsen). Problematizing and revisiting Freud's well-known rejection of hypnosis, their work re-establishes the therapeutic and theoretical interests in thinking about a relational realm lying beneath (and beyond) the structures and thresholds of the *Ego* (*ibid*: 87).[77] In what follows we need to understand the "soul" through the Greek notion of ψυχή (psyche), which means "breath, life, soul" and can be genealogically related to different theories of the "psyche" across Aristolelic, Islamic, and psychoanalytic traditions (Pandolfo, 1998; *forthcoming*).

Jean-Luc Nancy engages with a notion of the soul/psyche as an emergent space of affection, which characterizes the phenomenon of hypnosis. He elaborates this conception through a reading of Hegel's notion of *magnetic somnambulism* in his *Philosophy of Mind*. Nancy defines *animal magnetism* as an affective re-immersion into a "stupor" pertaining to an

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[75]Defining further the "unconscious," goes well beyond the purpose of this section. I take the unconscious as a represented realm of what slips away from representation and consciousness (see Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 123-154). For what seems to me a clarifying text by Sigmund Freud I rely on "The Unconscious" (SE, 14:161-215).

[76]Mesmer in 1779 theorized the presence of a "subtle physical fluid" that "fills the universe and forms a connecting medium between man, the earth, and the heavenly bodies, and also between man and man" (in Ellenberger: 1970: 62).

[77]In the psychoanalytic discourse we can understand Freud's concept of "transference," the "intense emotional relationship" (SE: 20: 42) between analyst and analysand. In the notion of "transference" Freud kept some elements of his originary work with hypnosis. Roustang reads transference explicitly in terms of an affective and hypnotic relation (in Henry: 1993: xxv-xxvi).

original "trembling of the soul" (1993: 30)[78]. The soul is for Hegel an in-different substantiality emerging within the space of the maternal womb (*ibid*). Before the distinctive and distinguishing world of language and representation takes shape, the soul (of the *passive* child) is immersed within an enveloping space of non-differentiation. The soul, in this figurative space, is not yet capable of undergoing an identificative process of differentiation: the "stupefied" soul is the coming to the life of the senses, happening through *its* unique (and sole) potential capacity of being-in-affection. The sound of a beat, the *fluid* movement of a rhythm, the "soul trembles" because her identity "takes place only in the alteration of [her] substance" (*ibid*).

In this space, the soul is traversed, penetrated by a (m)other who "transits, or entrances" it, triggering a generative trembling (*ibid*). This figure of the soul, thus, offers us the possibility to think about the space of the psyche, in the hypnotic discourse, as a relational space that is *always already* affected and always in *statu nascendi* (Borch-Jacobsen: 1984).[79] The soul begins, Nancy writes, "if it properly begins, in an affection confounded with the soul" (*ibid*: 18). In this sense, hypnosis is for Nancy "the truth of the soul immersed in the stupor of the life of feeling" (*ibid*: 17). The hypnotic state is the emergence of an imaginative space of affection that takes shape in a *pathos*-logical relationship between hypnotizer and hypnotized. (*ibid*: 19). *Pathos*, in this case, is precisely the scene of a passive surrender to a register of presence allowing for a sensuous surfacing of an aesthetic (and trance-formative) relation.[80]

This understanding of the "soul/psyche" and of the hypnotic space of affectedness bring us close to how Michel Henry revisits the Cartesian *Cogito* in affective and *passive* terms. For Michel Henry, the conscious *cogito* is always accompanied by a passive and affected cogito, which might correspond to an immanent and relational milieu of presence he defines as *life* in its originating and nascent state (1993).[81]

Due to my ethnographic work with contemporary Ericksonian hypnosis, my understanding of hypnosis, however, is mostly tied to the work of psychoanalyst and philosopher of hypnosis François Roustang, who draws creatively from his own experience as hypnotherapist, from the tradition of clinical hypnosis developed by Milton Erickson and from different historical, philosophical, and genealogical works like the seminal contributions of Léon Chertok (1966; see also Chertok and Stengers 1992).

I am interested in thinking with Roustang hypnosis as a form of "paradoxical waking state" (*veille paradoxale*) where the body seems to be sleeping while profoundly awake, revealing a creative capacity to develop its imagination and re-organize, as it were, its relationship with the world (1994: 18).

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[78]The essay originally appearing in the French edition of *Hypnoses* has been reprinted separately in an English volume of Nancy's essays (1993).

[79]Borch-Jacobsen uses the expression "in statu nascendi" in order to recall the always originating and nascent state of spaces across affective and non-conscious domains sustaining the birth of subjectivity.

[80]Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) has been the pioneering French neurologist who inspirted Freud to focus on hypnotic phenomena and related pathological experiences as hysterical symptom (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 113; Ellenberger 1970). In the same period, Hippolyte Bernheim (1840-1919), one of the fathers of the Nancy School, differently identified hypnosis as a "suggestive" phenomena and a means to cure the ill (*ibid*). Freud (and Breuer)'s psychoanalytic enterprise had its origins precisely with a deep engagement with hysterical and hypnotic phenomena (1985). Freud will detach his work almost immediately from the use of "hypnosis" from his *analytic cure*. This detachment from hypnosis, and Lacan's centralization of *speech*, could obfuscate the fact that "psychoanalysis is the heir of a long series of 'treatments of the soul' that begin with Mesmer's animal magnetism" (Borch-Jacobsen: 114). As Borch-Jacobsen writes via Léon Chertok, "psychoanalysis is nothing more than a chapter in the history of hypnosis" (*ibid*).

[81]Also in Borch-Jacobsen: 1993: 123-154

For Roustang hypnosis, which bears within its etymology *hypnos,* the ancient Greek for "sleep," should rather be understood as a form of attentive absorption and enhanced imagination. A state of shared affectedness between patient and therapist, the mild trance of hypnotic states sustains the coming to presence of a sensed affection. In my chapter on hypnosis I will offer detailed descriptions of different types of hypnotic inductions and resulting forms of affective and affected imagination. As I will suggest, hypnosis can be understood as a technology of presence which puts us in contact with absorbed forms of imagination and affective worlds in becoming. I will take hypnosis as a way to engage with affected forms of imagination and reverie that consider non-conscious processes of the ethnographer's body-as-medium.[82]

For Roustang, as in the type of clinical hypnosis I researched, at the core of most techniques of induction there is a *redoublement,* a doubling of consciousness where the patient is able to "think what he thinks" (think about different Zen practices where you are trained to *do what you are already doing* by thinking you are doing it). This doubling, I suggest, allows a phenomenological epoché where hyper-reflexivity leads to an affective opening. This opening, as I will suggest, is tied to a fundamental non-coincidence of the self-reflexive subject with itself.

To continue, Roustang suggests that the hypnotic form of attention reveals a state of "general attentiveness" (*ibid*: 44) where our imaginative and perceptive capacities are enhanced. Through different methods our "critical judgment" and conscious awareness is loosened up and a shared space of alteration and affectedness is rendered available. Hypnosis, Roustang argues, is a "potential opening" (*ibid:* 160) towards the worlds in becoming that inhabit and traverse us. This way of understanding hypnosis resonates with the phenomenological suspension of judgment which allows the philosopher to enter in affective *contact* with his milieu. Here *mi-lieu* is, again, literally the space in-between. I take contact with x-otherness as sustaining and providing forms of alteration registered through our affective sensorium. As philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy writes about hypnosis, "affection is nothing but the possession of alteration as a property (1993: 30).[83] Alteration, I would suggest, is the main element of the "work of affects."

The hypnotic "fourth state" (the others being waking, sleeping, dreaming) has been considered as a form of experiment with experience and imagination. An experiment which troubles our prevailing notions of reflexivity and of a self-enclosed and individual *Cogito.* As Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers write, the hypnotic space of affection provides a "narcissistic wound" to our epistemologies of the subject because it indexes, evokes and plays with essentially relational and trans-personal spaces (1992; see also Roustang 1994).

Through my work with Alicia, the Argentinean hypnotherapists who worked with me throughout my ethnographic research, I have attempted to explore thorough mild states of absorption and affection the production of images emerging within my body-as-medium.

It is precisely the connection between hypnosis, transference, affects, and forms of attachments that brings us closer to my work on affective ties and romantic relationships.

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[82]See previous footnote on dreams and ethnography.
[83]Affection could/should also be translated as "affectedness," but I prefer this translation as it keeps the Latin root more explicit.

Surfaces of contact

Through different conceptual detours, I have been describing forms of contact and relation between worlds, bodies, surfaces, and mediums. My interest in formulating the question of the body-as-medium, of affective relationships, and of visual technologies from within a phenomenological tradition is also grounding the attempt to overcome the common idea that phenomenology only conceptualizes "subjective" lived bodies. With the same spirit I aim at troubling the idea that the psy-subject is always already a self-enclosed bounded unity docile to neo-liberal forms of discipline and power.

I have shown how Merleau-Ponty's ontology of vision attempts precisely to move away from the subject/object division, considering the presence of a common flesh texturing processes of differentiation.

In a sense I consider intimate relationships indicating the impossibility of an intimate relation without a play between mediating surfaces. It is precisely through an affective ontology of vision that we can follow Merleau-Ponty's "ontological rehabilitation of the surface on which appearing shows itself" (Carbone 2015: 64). The surface, here, is not considered an agent of concealment but rather as a "screen" that is the very condition of possibility of vision (*ibid*). As Nietzsche writes, "we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the *veils* are withdrawn" (2001: 8).

In effect, I am interested in pushing farther the description of affective attachments and relationships as a *contact through surfaces*. The setting of this research offers itself to be read precisely as an optic apparatus of surfaces that mediates and produces a never fully enclosed therapeutic subject of the (post/late/never-been) modern subject.

As a last important point, I would like to linger over Bruno Latour's definition of the body as "*an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements*" (2004: 206, original emphasis). The body, continues Latour, is "not a provisional residence of something superior – an immortal soul, the universal or thought – but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of" (*ibid*). Latour contrasts this notion of the body with a phenomenological attention to the "lived body." However, as I have been arguing, in the work of Merleau-Ponty we already have a phenomenology of folds, embodied surfaces, and intimate exteriorities which allows to consider the body as a registering medium attached to an affective and technological milieu. At the same time, as I have been suggesting through the literature on hypnosis, we can consider also the psyche as a fundamentally relational space of affectedness.

In this work, thus, I articulate descriptions of "contact zones" between bodies (as surfaces) and surfaces (as bodies).[84] This contact zones (through surfaces), re/present the way I understand the structured logic of contemporary attachments between couples, but also between ethnographers, therapists, and their respective milieus.

In a quasi-ironic outcome, I am here taking seriously Yanina's – my wife, partner, and colleague – recurring exhortation to think about things *in un senso molto piú profondo*, in a much deeper sense. However, the deepest I can get is to consider the virtual depths appearing through surfaces and to understand such surfaces as the culturally conditioned vectors through which we sustain our affective ties…

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[84]I have her in mind Kathleen Stewart's suggestion to create a series of "contact zone[s] for analysis" in order to develop "a close ethnographic attention to pressure points and forms of attention and attachment" (2007: 5).

in a rhythmic and enchanted repetition of the couple form.

Vision, imagination, relation: work's outline

This work consists of four chapters. The first chapter describes the model of systemic psychotherapy and its visual epistemology. I explore the role of vision in systemic therapy and its relationship with the Argentinean context. Disrupting the intimacy of psychotherapy, the systemic model is a privileged setting to consider the relation between the *optic apparatus* and theories of the gaze. Michel Foucault's panopticon has been central for understanding how the "gaze of power" disciplined and shaped the modern subject. Anthropology and surveillance studies, however, have troubled panoptic readings of contemporary optic regimes. In this chapter, I question the one-way panoptic model of/for vision and I describe the multi-directionality of gazes within the systemic clinical setting. On one side, I ask what it means to take seriously forms of therapeutic care mediated by visual technologies. On the other, I draw from the optic apparatus of the systemic setting to argue, with Merleau-Ponty and Lacan, in favor of a non-coincidence between the panoptic gaze and the therapeutic subject.

The second chapter, considers the circulation of affects in the systemic setting. I suggest that affect theories offer a new frame for revisiting the (now classic) question of writing genres in ethnography and explore the ways affect theory calls for specific genres or registers of presence. I focus on one team of therapists I have been following for one year and provide different close-ups in the phenomenological genre of description. Specifically, I describe one session of couple therapy where the leading therapist undergoes an affective breakdown. The breakdown of the therapist punctuates an intensity related to multiple economic crisis in Argentina. Describing how the team behind the screen and the ethnographer get caught in an atmospheric sense of crisis, I explore the imaginative role affect can play in ethnographic genres of writing and presence. In this intimate ecology of spectatorship, I imagine the ethnographer and his milieu as refractive mediums of affective transmission and trace the temporal and spatial transformations of circulating intensities.

The third chapter, is the most conceptually ambitious part of this work. I offer phenomenological descriptions of video recorded sessions of couple therapy and I use theories of cinema and the image to distinguish the *couple form* from the *couple-image*. While I take the couple form as the heteronormative structure of intimacy that orients our desires, I propose to consider the couple-image as a virtual in-between that "shows its face" in the *present tense* when captured by the eye of the camera. Considering the resonance between this video-recorded material and the genre of "new Argentinean cinema," I describe a constitutive logic of *intimate exposure* within the therapeutic production of the couple. The couple's restaging of its own crisis in front of the camera, I suggest, is what creates the "temporal folding" that produces the virtual couple-image. This image refashions circulating imaginaries of romantic relationships while rendering available (in the present tense) new forms of affective imagination.

The fourth chapter, "From Reflexive Modes to Refractive Moods," considers the role of the ethnographer's non-conscious in the production of ethnographic data. Applying the conceptual apparatus developed through the dissertation, I consider the ethnographic "first person" as never fully coincident with itself. I take from Merleau-Ponty and Bergson the idea of a refracted "inner life" in which the self-reflexive ethnographer undergoes imaginative and sensorial changes between mediums and temporalities in order to produce qualitative insights. I

provide an exploration of Ericksonian hypnosis, where I undergo video recorded sessions as a patient/researcher. In the space of these sessions, the hypnotherapist and I share mild trance-states and investigate the emerging images related to my ongoing field research on couple therapy. I thus consider the relation between mild states of absorption, affective attachments, and ethnographic forms of perception.

Generally, I develop narrative descriptions close to humanistic traditions of writing in anthropology, affect theory, and phenomenology. In anthropology, I am finding a similar sensibility in the "fictocritical" work of Michael Taussig (2009, 2015), in the existential phenomenology of Michael Jackson (1998, 2013), in the literary phenomenology of Robert Desjarlais (2011, 2016) and in Kathleen Stewart's attention to ordinary scenes where each "scene is a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening – something that needs attending to" (2007: 5). Similarly, I draw from the sensuous scholarship (Stoller 2010) of Anand Pandian (2015) and from Lisa Stevenson's *iconophilic* expressivity (2014). /In particular, however, I draw from the phenomenological first-person perspective as developed in what I have called Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *expressive phenomenology* in order to consider the ways the empirical and the analytical emerge and merge within the ethnographer's lifeworld.

As Kathleen Stewart writes, within these genres of writing we can find a desire "to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us" (2007: 4).

I. Affected Gazes, Refractive Screens

When through the water's thickness I see the titled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if I saw, without its flesh, the geometry of the tiles, then I would stop seeing the tiled bottom as it is… this inner animation, this radiation of the visible…

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" (2007: 371)

Figure 2. The flare, the stain (edited screenshot, Buenos Aires 2013).

Seeing relations: vision and systemic therapy

Buenos Aires, Argentina. February 2013. I am sitting in a dark room with three family therapists in training. We are all less than three feet from the glass of the one-way mirror. The surface of the mirror occupies most of the wall separating our dark room from the room where Brenda and Claudio are having their second session of couple therapy. "Look at him," Brenda says, "he looks like an abandoned dog (*un perro abandonado*)." Claudio is looking at the floor, caressing the contours of the tiles, searching for a reply. "I just want her to learn," he says. "To learn what?" asks Marisa, the therapist. "*A no ser tan boluda,* not to be so stupid," he says in a disaffected voice.[1]

Silence drops in their room. As therapy unfolds slowly, I glance through the mirror at the window on the wall of the other room. It's pouring. Thick raindrops are hitting the window with rhythmic violence. The brief moment of meteorological distraction is abruptly interrupted by the sound of the main therapist in the other room. She is knocking against the surface of the one-way mirror.

"Come here, Hernan! And bring your notebook," Marisa says from the room where therapy is held. The thump of Marisa's knuckles against the mirror's surface triggers an instant of fright that brings me back to my ethnographic present. I see Brenda and Claudio looking at the mirror behind the therapist. I am behind the mirror behind the therapist.

They can only see their reflected figure, but I can I see them. I *see them seeing themselves* in the mirror, and I feel their gaze touching mine. Hernan, the trainee on my right, picks up his notebook, leaves our room, and enters their room. I quickly jot down a note for my future self about the porosity of the surface. The one-way mirror, I think to myself, is also called two-way mirror in English because a real one-way mirror doesn't exist. The lighting needs to be "right" for patients in therapy not to *see me seeing them seeing themselve*s reflected in the mirror. Too much light in the observatory room and patients would see me. How many eyes and gazes pass through the fragile stability of such optic surface?

The *systemic* model of psychotherapy is a form of therapeutic expertise that utilizes visual technologies of observation. During my ethnography I have been behind one-way mirrors and in front of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) screens observing hundreds of hours of therapy. These visual technologies allow teams of psychotherapists and students to observe and participate in ongoing sessions of therapy. Teams participate when debriefing with the leading therapist when they take a break during the live session of therapy, or when the team calls the room where the therapy is held using the interphone present in all such systemic therapy rooms. At the same time, video recordings allow therapists to revisit the sessions in preparation for the upcoming ones.

In the first part of the chapter, I outline the historical relation of the systemic model of therapy with visual technologies. I then contextualize its circulation within the Argentinean milieu. The second part will engage with questions of vision and care within this setting. The core argument is that this setting exemplifies and literalizes non-reflexive forms of (inter)subjective formation.

In the "cybernetic era" of post-war America the widespread epistemological interest in self-regulating systems of information grounded the development of the systemic model of

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[1] The Argentinean slang word "*boludo/a*" can be translated in many ways according to the context. From a more insulting "jerk" to a playful "silly."

psychotherapy.[2] Gregory Bateson's application of cybernetics to communication theories greatly contributed to this approach throughout the 1950s and 1960s at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto (California).[3] Cybernetics, in Bateson's reading, implied circular causality rather than linear causality and thus became a model to understand social interactions in terms of feedback loops rather than in terms of a linear stimulus-response model (Bateson et al. 1956; Watzlawick 2011).[4] In simpler terms, instead of trying to identify how the person A produced the effect X in person B, circular causality understood the effect X as a product of interactive loops between A and B and their relational context (the family and society at large). Consequentially, the psychoanalytic identification of the (often traumatic) "origin" wasn't considered therapeutically relevant.

In respect to the psychoanalytic model, thus, the cybernetic approach implied also the abandonment of an intra-psychic and psychodynamic perspective. If psychoanalysis was interested in internal, libidinal, and unconscious processes of the psyche, this model favored the analysis of interactive, external, and visible interactions between individuals.[5]

It is in this sense the model would focus on interactions happening in the *present tense* rather than undertaking an exploration of the patients' past (e.g. Ceberio 2006). Along this radical shift of interests, we can identify the development of a specific "interventionist" imaginary, that led the formulation of a variety of strategies and techniques to be used by the psychotherapist to "interrupt," as it were, dysfunctional loops of interactions (e.g. Nardone and Watzlavick 2006).[6] Through the influential work of the so-called Milan school/group (Italy), for example, the one-way mirror became an interactive and strategic technology through which to articulate strategically and paradoxical interventions – such as "prescribing the symptom" or bringing patients behind the one-way mirror to observe session of their own family members (Selvini Palazzoli et al.1985).

This visual imaginary intertwined with the idea that the process of therapy needed to be "opened up" and rendered more democratic through the participation of multiple therapists on the same session.[7] The often quoted title of Peggy Papp's pedagogical video, *Making the Invisible Visible* (1974) is paradigmatic.

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[2]Deborah Weinstein offered the most compelling history of the systemic model. See also Heims (1991) on cybernetics in the United States.

[3]The foundational article has been written at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto, California. In 1956 Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland offered a cybernetic interpretation of schizophrenic symptom formation relating it to dysfunctional interactions within the family of the patient (1956). In parallel, family therapy also developed at the Family Institute in New York, and at the Philadelphia Children's Hospital. The work of the Milan Group (Italy) further contributed to family therapy with the use of strategic and paradoxical interventions (see Palazzoli et al. 1985).

[4]Norbert Wiener defined cybernetics as "a theory of control and communication that integrated the problems of control engineering (including feedback mechanisms) and communication engineering (including modes of transmission) around the 'much more fundamental' concept of the message, defined as 'a discrete or continuous sequence of measurable events distributed in time'" (in Weinstein 2013: 151; see Wiener 1961: 8).

[5]See Freud's *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* for a clear formulation of his psychodynamic epistemology and ontology of the psyche (Freud 2006, 1-63).

[6]One of the first, and most famous books in this regard is, indeed, called *Change. Principles of problem formation and problem resolution* was written by a team of therapists working at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto (Watzlawick et al. 1974) The book employs Bateson's interests in Whitehead and Russell's theory of "logical types" as developed in their *Principia Mathematica* in order to define how individuals get trapped into paradoxical reiterations of the problems there are trying to solve (*ibid*).

[7]See Janet Malcom's "The One-Way Mirror" ([1992] 2013) and Minuchin (1967, 1974).

The radical shift of interest towards visible relations is intertwined with the fact that the main object of intervention of this model, since the 1950s, has been the family. The family, whose interactions were observed *in vivo*, was considered as a relational system that could cause the symptomatic emergences in one or more members. Individuals, in this sense, were understood as the result of their relationships within system of relations. In a historical sense, the systemic setting participated in the construction of *visions* of family life. During the same period, in effect, the family acquired a central visibility especially in North American movies, TV shows, and weekly magazines as *the* moral milieu where things could go "wrong." As historian of science Deborah Weinstein writes, in post-war America the family and romantic couples were emerging as a "theatrical and visual" (2013: 148) public object of exposure while falling under the therapeutic gaze.[8]

In this regard, the work of Don Jackson on *family homeostasis* (1965) is a good example. The psychiatrist who joined Bateson's team at the MRI, indeed, conceptualized families as self-regulating systems "registering and counteracting deviations or fluctuations from a particular range or norm" (in Weinstein 2013: 59).

As I will write in the second chapter, this therapeutic setting literalizes and materializes the relationship between therapeutic genres of witnessing and the emergence of an "intimate public" (Berlant 2000). At the same time, it displays the family and the couple as the visible milieu to which fantasies of good (or bad) life are attached.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, to continue, systemic family therapy enthusiastically endorsed the use of recording devices, one-way mirrors, and CCTV as technologies offering a pedagogical, therapeutic, and research potential.[9]

As Nathan Ackerman, a pioneering figure of family therapy, writes in 1966, "[t]he value of permanent recording of therapeutic experience in motion pictures is self-evident. It is, in my view, the only known method to date that provides a satisfactory permanent record of a Gestalt, a merging of the image of face, voice, emotion, and bodily expression" (ix).[10] The idea of an emerging Gestalt strangely recalls what I wrote in the introduction about Merleau-Ponty's understanding of vision as a process granting access to an invisible flesh of situated lifeworlds.

In one of the therapeutic institutions where I conducted part of my fieldwork as an intern, the main task of first year trainees is, precisely, to learn how to *see* and learn how to observe the ongoing session. As Eloise, a Venezuelan psychotherapist, would often tell me "*Hay que aprender la mirada antes de todo, la terapia sistémica es, literalmente, la mirada sistémica*. You have to learn the look/gaze before anything else, systemic therapy is, literally, the systemic gaze." In this regard, Deborah Weinstein quotes Jay Haley: "an important early phase in the training of a family specialist will involve teaching them *how to look*" (2013: 154).

I am interested in considering the epistemological and therapeutic centrality given to the literal possibility to *see* therapy through one-way mirrors or CCTV. As I will suggest, we cannot separate the development of this model of psychotherapy from its *optic apparatus* and the therapeutic subjects it produces. The setting of systemic therapy does not produce a "peculiar"

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[8]Here and elsewhere I draw on the Weinstein's work, which has been an incomparable source of reflections and critical historiography.

[9]Among others, see Cloé Madanes' *Behind the One Way Mirror* (1984) regarding the optic desire to *see* the display of a family's interaction through visual technologies.

[10]Also in Weinstein 2013:146. If we recall my introduction on Merleau-Ponty's idea that to see is to "see farther than one sees" (1964: 20), we can understand what grounded my initial curiosity towards this therapeutic model.

subject that is nowhere else to be found. Rather, it renders explicit and exteriorizes processes of subjective formation that are exquisitely modern.[11]

I take the notion of the "apparatus" from Giorgio Agamben, who widens Michel Foucault's already heterogeneous use of this notion (2009). What I am writing, in the conventional style of making an argument, might seem to be *against* Foucault's thought and the necessity to balance such a move grounds my choice to use the notion of the apparatus through an explicitly Foucaultian lens.

For Foucault the apparatus is to be considered as "a set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements" that responded to a certain governmental urgency (in Agamben 2009: 2). An apparatus, Agamben writes, is "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gesture, behaviors, opinion, or discourses of living beings" (*ibid*: 14). More importantly, the apparatus, for both Foucault and Agamben, is the set of determined technologies through which a subject comes to be constituted as such. The apparatus, then, "is first of all a machine that produces subjectifications" (*ibid*: 20).[12] In this sense, the apparatus has been understood also in Film theory as an exquisitely ideological machine (Baudry 1976).[13]

At the same time, I take from Friedrich Kittler the preference for the term "optic" instead of "visual." Focusing on the *prosthetic* role of technologies, Kittler wants to underline the physical properties of optical media rather than only the cultural and psychological ones. The optical spectrum, that is, has a much broader analytical (and physical) range in respect to the visual (2010: 3). Kittler's wide analytic range on optic media allows me to consider the constitutive role of *private* technologies like Closed Circuit Television as relevant to our understanding of technological apparatuses (*ibid*: 32). At the same time, I take from Kittler the idea that we knew nothing about our senses and perceptive organs until media (in the widest sense) provided models and metaphors (*ibid*: 34). As will be clear, the *optic apparatus* is here a metaphoric and material milieu where to conceive relational, affective, and intersubjective forms of presence. In other words, I use the notion of the optic apparatus to consider this ethnographic setting as exemplifying the formation of relational subjects within the scopic field. Moreover, the wider notion of optic will ground also our understanding of different "optic registers" which are, literally and metaphorically, produced by the systemic setting.

In systemic therapy the literal visibility of patients within such optic apparatus, has disrupted since its origin the psychoanalytic and private space of therapy.

Many therapists I have interviewed recalled that when the systemic model begun circulating in Argentina in the mid-1980s there was a sense of encountering a model that offered a radical break from the solitary dimension of psychoanalytic therapy. "It was such a relief to know that your colleagues were behind the mirror, that they could see what you missed… I incorporated their perspective as therapy unfolded, they provided emotional containment and support," said Elsa, a therapist in her sixties recalling the "heydays" of systemic therapy.

For the systemic literature, the one-way mirror or the eye of the camera also materialized a social gaze projected over the family behind the mirror. Salvador Minuchin, a founding father

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[11]See farther.

[12]I am not doing justice to Agamben's theological genealogy connecting the notion of the *dispositif* to Hegel's *positivity* as 'historical element,' the Greek *oikonomia*, and the Latin *dispositio* (2009 : 8-15).

[13]See also Joan Copjec (1996: 20) on the concept of apparatus in film theory and its relation to the work of Gaston Bachelard.

of family therapy, writes in this regard that "the consciousness of being observed is an intermediate step in the process of introspection. *The participant observed in himself what he assumes the unseen observer is focusing on.* This sense of being observed indirectly brings the observer's role to the participating members as well" (1967: 268-269, original emphasis).[14]

It is hard to read these words without thinking about Michel Foucault's internalization of a "panoptic" gaze materialized through the optic apparatus (1995). In Foucault's reading of Jeremy Bentham's utopic *Panopticon*, we are offered the image of a prison allowing an in/visible surveillance.[15] Such surveillance produces an unidirectional gaze incorporated by the disciplined prisoner. This gaze, as Michel de Certeau writes, also implies an "exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive" where "the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (de Certeau 1988: 92).

In the second part of the chapter, I suggest that such view of the gaze does not take into account the multiplicity of gazes that the optic apparatus can host, reflect, diffract, and refract. At the same time, a panoptic reading of this setting overlooks the role these visual technologies play in producing therapeutic forms of care. In Elsa's quoted words we can already imagine that, from the point of view of the therapists, being "watched over" constitutes a form of care-full support offering affective containment and sustaining professional self-development. As I will show, this also applies to the patients who are observed through the one-way mirror.

Before engaging with these questions, however, I contextualize the circulation of the systemic model in Argentina's psychotherapeutic milieu. The systemic model, as we can imagine, underwent deep reformulations throughout the decades, especially during the constructivist era of the 1990s where, for example, so called "reflexive" teams of therapists allowed patients to listen to their conversations behind the one-way mirror during their breaks (see Andersen 1990). Feminist critiques within systemic therapy also criticized and reformulated the "monocular vision" of the white and heterosexual "moral standard" of family therapy (McGoldrick et al. 2008).

The model, in all its declinations, is circulating globally within different therapeutic environments and cultures.[16] In Argentina, in particular, the model developed in a stark opposition to psychoanalysis which is still the dominant model. As I wrote in the introduction, this dominance is often perceived as explicitly "hegemonic."

Through interviews with contemporary practitioners of systemic therapy in Buenos Aires, I have found a shared enthusiastic attachment to a model attempting to break free from the psychoanalysis. In line with the systemic priority given to the *present tense*, I am not providing a thorough history of the model in Argentina. However, I am interested in providing some orienting traits to ground future reflections on the specificity of the Argentinean context. My

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[14]See farther for a quote that complexifies Minuchin's perspective. Salvador Minuchin is an Argentinean family therapist who worked in Philadelphia (Child Guidance Hospital) and New York (Family Studies Institute). He contributed to the development of family therapy with an explicitly interventionist approach behind the one-way mirror and a structural understanding of family relationships (1967).

[15]I write "in/visible" because if one one side Bentham's "tower of power" was visible by the inmates, the impossibility to really see the presence of a supervisor inside the tower rendered power also invisible (see Foucault 1995: 201). Throughout, I write "in/visible" to underline reversible, paradoxical, and always incomplete process of visibility and invisibility.

[16]Preserving the strategic and interventionist approach at different levels and intensities, nowadays flourishing schools of systemic therapy are in Barcelona (Instituto Sistemico de Barcelona) Buenos Aires (Escuela Sistemica Argentina), Italy (Centro di Terapia Strategica, Arezzo) among other places.

focus on the present tense, I suggest in the next chapter, gears around a methodological attention towards affects and what I will call a *present in-tense*.

Systemic Buenos Aires

In the introduction I have described the proliferation of the "psy-idiom" in contemporary Argentina and I have suggested that the country presents a pregnant viewpoint to consider processes that shaped the (post/late/never been) modern subject. [17] In the social sciences, to reiterate my main point, the "psy-disciplines" have been critically understood as having participated in the creation, disciplining, and flourishing of individual modern subjects (Illouz 2008; Rose 1998, 1999). The autonomous, psychic, and emotional subject of will, indeed, is most often understood as the result of a post-Enlightenment disciplining of the subject *qua* psychic entity (e.g. Foucault 2006) which enters the modern era also as a *reflexive* identity (Giddens 1991). The modern subject, that is, has been rendered docile to and shaped through therapeutic technologies of the self (Foucault 1988, 1995). These technologies supported the development of a self-reflexive (and self-controlling) gaze determining the moral production of contemporary selfhoods (see Taylor 1989). Argentina's psy-culture, then, provides an intensified milieu where we can ask questions about modern subjectivity in relation to the psychotherapeutic apparatus.

The systemic model, I wrote, troubles the idea that *all* psy-disciplines fostered an individualizing and self-reflexive approach to the therapeutic subject. [18] We have seen how since its origin in North America the model defined itself in stark contrast with psychoanalysis. The main points of departure, in the "systemic narrative" have been directed against the psychoanalytic attention towards the past, the unconscious, and the individual self.

How does an anti-psychoanalytic model circulate within the world center of/for psychoanalysis? I wrote that the systemic model needs to be considered as a form of "minor literature" circulating in the *mare magnum* of therapeutic models in Argentina. [19]

As a consequence, the scholarly focus, from sociology to history, has mostly focused on the history or the present of psychoanalysis in Argentina, with few exceptions (see Macchioli 2012, 2013). [20] Nonetheless, I have suggested that in some ways the systemic tendency to disrupt the privacy of therapeutic treatments through the optic apparatus and therapeutic teams is in resonance with socially engaged and collective approaches that developed after the impact of Henri Pichon-Rivière's social psychology. [21]

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[17]See also my introduction. I am here referring to the multiple "time adverbs" through which contemporary forms of modernity are addressed. From the now less common "post" (see Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1991) to a more current "late" (see, among others, Jameson 1991; Povinelli 2006), to a "never been" (Latour 1993) modern. I say "contemporary" thinking with Paul Rabinow "the contemporary" as a "*a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (nonlinear) space that gauges modernity as an ethos already becoming historical*" (2007: 2, original emphasis).

[18]As the work of Stefania Pandolfo shows, also the psychoanalytic tradition offers a para-modern venue where to conceive non-reflexive and relational identities (1998; *forthcoming*)

[19]I take the concept of "minor literature" from Deleuze on Kafka (1986). Moreover, the plurality of models is often co-present in the therapeutic trajectories of patients who can easily undergo individual psychoanalytic treatment while going to systemic couple therapy.

[20]See introduction for a review of relevant literatures on Argentina's "psy-world."

[21]See introduction.

In this section I draw from thirty non-structured interviews I undertook with different therapeutic practitioners informed by the systemic model in Buenos Aires.[22] Most of these practitioners are part of the Asociación Sistémica de Buenos Aires, the main Argentinean association gathering most of the institutions offering systemic therapy.[23]

Due to the dominance of psychoanalysis the first and second generation of systemic therapists working today in Buenos Aires seems to have received, at different levels and intensities, a psychoanalytic training.[24] On one side, then, there is an explicit attempt of the practitioners to define the systemic model as radically divergent from psychoanalysis. On the other, their psychoanalytic training can still potentially inform their practice.[25]

The model of systemic therapy started circulating in Argentina after the end of the *dirty war* (1976-1983), when many psychoanalytically trained therapists who flew the country and went to the United States (or Mexico, Colombia, or Europe) discovered the then flourishing model of systemic family therapy.[26] At the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, the presence of the Argentinean psychotherapist Carlos Sluzki probably played an important role in the diffusion of the model in Argentina giving the possibility to many Argentinean therapists to be trained in California.[27] In passing, the mentioned pioneering figure of family therapy, Salvador Minuchin, was also born and raised in Argentina.[28]

As many therapists I have interviewed recalled of that period, there was the sense of encountering a model that finally sidestepped the main impasses of psychoanalysis, like the length of treatment, the attention to internal psychic factors, and the priority given to interpretation (over solution-focused interventions). "I loved reading Freud and Lacan so much… but I didn't know what the fuck (*que cazo*)[29] to do it with! In my clinical space, patients needed solutions, not a silent and cold practitioner," told me one therapist, explaining how he espoused the model in order to finally work with his patients "face to face."

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[22]All 30 psychotherapists (14 females and 16 males, ranging from 35 to 75 years old) are still practicing systemically informed therapy.

[23]ASIBA has been publishing since the late 1970s *Sistemas Familiares,* the main Journal for the diffusion of the systemic model in Argentina and Latin America.

[24]From strictly Freudian, Jungian, Kleinian, or Lacanian approaches to psychoanalytically informed psychotherapies. I consider "first generation" the therapists that started following the systemic model since its arrival around the mid 1980s.

[25]Among the therapists I interviewed (all occupying relevant positions in their home institution), the older generation (now in their 60s and 70s) mainly received a Freudian and Lacanian training at the University of Buenos Aires (although four of them where also trained in Kleinian psychoanalysis). The younger generations tended to have received either a Lacanian training (now in their 40s-50s) or was able to opt directly for a non-psychoanalytic training (in their 30s), especially through the choice of graduating in private universities in Buenos Aires, where the influence of psychoanalysis seems to be less inevitable.

[26]As Florencia Macchioli argues, there was also a solid tradition of family therapy in Argentina before the arrival of this specifically North-American model. Her doctoral dissertation explores in depth the history of family therapy in Argentina (2012). Amidst the therapists I have interviewed, the ones who left the country during the dirty war (1976-1983) did it for different reasons (from being personally/politically at risk, to having the possibility to leave the country), thus making it impossible for me to formulate a political understanding of such temporary migrations.

[27]Carlos Sluzki, MD, was trained in psychoanalysis in Argentina and successively migrated to the U.S., where he became the Director of Training and then Director of the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto (1976-1983).

[28]Also the quoted Cloé Madanes is an important figure of family therapy in the U.S. but was born and raised in Argentina. At the MRI in Palo Alto, on of the main therapists bringing forth the systemic tradition is also Argentinean.

[29]*Cazo* is an expression coming from the Lunfardo an old slang from Buenos Aires and Montevideo that preserves a direct relation with late 19th century Italian (in this case *cazzo* means "dick" in Italian).

Throughout the interviews the narrative was consistent: the systemic model offered a profoundly relational and practical understanding of therapeutic work. Most therapeutic problems could to be understood through interactive and communicative patterns to be interrupted, reframed, or identified. At the same time, as the vast majority of the therapists I interviewed observed, this model offered them a break from the solitary dimension of psychoanalytic therapy, providing them with the opportunity of working together on the same case. Along with the anti-psychiatric moments developing around the world, systemic therapy was perceived as a more "democratic" model allowing for different therapists to work together and offering patients more practical solutions, to participate in the team's efforts, and to be able to consider also social and cultural factors within systems of interactions.

One of the main narrative trajectories through which this model presents itself (and was presented to me) is in terms of its capacity to offer practical and short-term solutions, while diverging from a *negative* model of the unconscious that wouldn't allow patients to change.[30] A negative model, as I understood it, would entail the consideration of the unconscious as exclusively the repository space of repressed drives. Of course, this is a very partial and somewhat biased view of the unconscious as understood by Freud or Lacan.[31] The most common idea regarding the unconscious is that it should rather be considered (if considered at all) as a positive force operating in the present.[32]

Regarding the possible impact that psychoanalysis had in the reception and declination of this model, I haven't gathered or developed a clear idea. How to measure the entanglement between therapeutic models? "I don't know, if ten years of Lacanian training are affecting the way I do therapy… I don't think so, but… I suppose it is hard to say that it doesn't…" said Ernesto, one interviewed therapist. "I was a Kleininan therapist," mentioned Elsa, "but, working mainly with kids… nothing seemed to be working so… yes I still think sometimes about, you know, 'object relations' and things like that, but they have proved so useless in my practice that I suppose they don't show…?"

In a conversation with Gerardo, a psychiatrist and family therapist, we tried to unpack the question of the Argentinean translation of the systemic model. Whereas the systemic model originally focused only on communicative practices and models of intervention, in his view the Argentinean reception of the model was heavily influenced by a psychoanalytic milieu and immediately "loosened up" such focus incorporating also an attention to emotions and smoothening up many protocols developed by North American systemic therapy. Systemic therapy, like many institutional models of therapy, developed a series of protocols and strategic techniques to be undertaken in order to formulate a good intervention – these protocols included an explicit attempt to avoid any exploration of emotional states during sessions. In Gerardo's narrative, this was due to the fact that Argentineans couldn't avoid taking into consideration emotions. He continued semi-ironically: "*somos Argentinos, Tano, no podemos olvidarnos de las emociones!* We are Argentineans, *Tano* [a 'nickname' for Italians], we can't forget about emotions!"

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[30] This is one of the main reasons for which the model is chosen by a new generation of students today.

[31] As I understand it, in the work of Sigmund Freud, the unconscious is also much more than the simple repository of repressed drives. In Lacan as well, the unconscious, the *it* that *does,* can also be understood as a creative (linguistic but not exclusively) force. Among many other sources I am thinking here of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* ([1899] 1998) and Lacan's *Four Foundamental Concepts* (1998)

[32] As I mentioned in the introduction, this view of the unconscious might historically come from the role played by the hypnotherapist Milton Erickson informing the developments of the Palo Alto school of systemic therapy.

"Muy rigidos, che, muy rigidos los Yanqui, Very rigid, man, Americans [were] so rigid" commented Almibar, explaining how the systemic model was immediately rendered more flexible once it touched the Argentinean soil.

I suggest that on one side the particular history of Argentinean social psychology and the psychoanalytic tradition might have created a different receptive milieu. On the other side, the "rigidity" of the systemic model as remembered by many therapists can be framed as a quite common attempt to normativize and protocol a developing model.

In a sense, then, while I am taking the systemic model as an object of inquiry, we have to imagine that in its practical and clinical declinations the model undergoes multiple variations. The most stable element, I would say, can be identified in the presence and use of the *optic apparatus* in the systemic setting.

As I explained in the introduction, Argentina presents a a cultural milieu where different therapeutic genres cluster and intersect (see Marsilli-Vargas 2016; Plotkin 2003). The optic apparatus of the systemic model, as I see it, emerges as a *medial* transfer point to consider the relation between the optic apparatus and the production of therapeutic subjectivities. Within the porous space of the Argentinean intimate publicity of psychotherapy, that is, I formulate a series of questions on the passage between mediums, on the incessant "remediations" (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of the intimate that conform to, confirm, and trouble the individual boundaries of the (post/late/never-been) modern subject.

In what follows, I am interested in considering the ways the optic apparatus of systemic therapy "remediates" (from medium to medium) a therapeutic genre of care while offering a pregnant counterpoint to panoptic models of the gaze.

The *x*-opticon: surveillance in times of care

I return now to the scene of Marisa knocking on the one-way mirror, and my encounter with the gazes of the couple in therapy on the other side of the mirror. As I mentioned above, for an ephemeral instant I caught myself "sensing" that we were looking at each other while separated by the boundary of the one-way mirror. This scene has oriented my attention towards the porosity of the mirror's surface, and the multi-directionality of gazes, glances, and looks its hosts. I consider the one-way mirror as a porous boundary because while it provides a material boundary it also mediates different "instances of crossing" where affects, therapeutic modes of care, and diverging gazes pass through and circulate.[33]

This idea is not extraneous to the *emic* perspective of the systemic model itself. In one of the classics of systemic family therapy, Minuchin consider the affective participation of the therapist behind the mirror and writes that "[t]he one-way mirror acts as a semiporous membrane (1967: 266).[34]

In this section, I take the optic apparatus of systemic therapy precisely as a material and metaphoric boundary orienting different *optic registers*. I take the register as a range, a limited field within which certain visual regimes or optic orientations can circulate. For example, while in one register the optic apparatus delivers visual forms of surveillance, in the other it allows for a peculiar form of attentive, or better, *watchful* care. At the same time, the optic apparatus

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[33]Emily Ng, who provided innumerable suggestions, also offered the expression "instances of crossing" when commenting on a previous paper.

[34]The notion of a porous membrane, I suggest in the third chapter, is also a metaphoric way to understand how Merleau-Ponty defines the *entre deux*, the in-between the two.

mediates different orientations of the gaze, such as the patients seeing themselves (in the mirror) being seen by invisible viewers, or the observers seeing the patients looking in their direction without directly encountering their gaze. All registers mingle, intersect, and are co-present.

In the setting of systemic therapy, my ethnography is necessarily located within the perspective of therapists and ethnographers behind the one-way mirror or in front of the CCTV screens. Observing the observers, we can say I practiced a form of *observant participation* where I participated in the therapeutic and pedagogic (in case of supervisions) practice of observation.[35] At the same time, I mentioned, the systemic model also entails a participation of the observing team during the live sessions (through interphone calls, or debriefing breaks during the session). Observing *their* observant participation, I was also occasionally participating in their exchanges and interpretive processes about the observed material.

My visual relation with patients in therapy, as a consequence, has developed through non-reciprocal registers of the gaze: I saw them, they didn't see me. When patients gave their consent to be observed and video recorded by the team and the ethnographer, however, I often had the impression that, from our own viewpoint, we were all looking at each other "being seen" by the other while mediated by the optic surface. In a sense, I felt that patients were seeing *through* me when glancing at the eye of the camera or watching themselves reflected on the one-way mirror.

Michel Foucault, in the description of Bentham's *Panopticon*, suggests that the panopticon dissociates the dyad of "seeing and being seen" because "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing [while] in the central tower one sees everything without ever being seen (1995: 200-201). My experience behind the one-way mirror, where I could see without being seen, engages with this dissociation in different ways, especially when I had the sense of being seen by the patient's *seeing themselves being seen*.[36] As I will suggest further, if we follow Jacques Lacan's idea that the visual field hosts a constitutive split between the seeing eye and the invisible gaze of the Other ([1978] 1998), then even a panoptic setting might exceed a strictly "disciplinary" hermeneutics.

Foucault's vision of the disciplining gaze has been challenged in "post-panoptic" surveillance studies in light of present forms of participation and control within visual media and regimes. On one side, these studies are showing how plural orientations of multiple gazes trouble the very possibility of a stable form of visual control. Following the intensification of surveilling strategies after 9/11(Lyon 2003), these literatures underline the importance of understanding the proliferation of "surveillant assemblages" (Ericson and Haggerty 2000, 2006) as structuring forms of power that cannot be attributed to one single "Orwellian Big Brother" overseeing a "massive monitoring effort" (*ibid* 2006: 4). Surveillant assemblages need, in fact, to be understood as a composition (and de-composition) of different elements that mediate a plurality of gazes moving across manifold registers and directions.

Moreover, the intensification of *visibility* through all forms of mass media has created a rather "synoptic" infrastructure, where the many are watching over the few (*ibid*). The "synopticon," that is, seems to be a more actual denomination of certain features characterizing

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[35]I have encountered the expression "observant participation" in "applied anthropology" literatures looking at specific forms of expertise, like NGOs or corporations (e.g. Moeran 2009; Mosse 2011).

[36]For a recent use of the expression "seeing oneself seeing oneself" see Hoon Song (2006, 2011). This or similar expressions bring phenomenological self-reflexivity *to its own limit*. They appear in Lacan, who is quoting Paul Valéry's "*Je me voyais me voir,* I saw myself seeing" (1998: 80) and Merleau-Ponty, as in his "touching myself touching" (1968: 9, see also 2002).

our "societies of control" (Deleuze 1992). In fact, if we consider the present use of social media we should think of an optic infrastructure where the many are watching over the many, a "*peri*opticon," if we take the Greek preposition "*peri*" to indicate something that is "all around, from all sides."[37]

On the other side, recent studies consider how visual or non-visual monitoring technologies for medical patients entangle everyday surveillance with forms of care delivery allowing (rather than thwarting) individual agency, self-development, and home care (e.g. Dubbeld 2006). Through ethnographic accounts of therapeutic, clinical, and home nursing spaces, these works show how "caring practices include technology" (Mol et al. 2010: 14) and thus challenge the idea that surveilling technologies cannot deliver forms of care (see López et al. 2010). As Peter Lutz (2015) suggests, in the post-panoptic moment "care as mediation," through the telemonitoring of the elderly for example, "challenges the idea of surveillance in care" (2015: 146).[38] Similarly, Gad and Lauritsen describe the intertwining of surveillance and care in the inspection of Danish fisheries, showing the everyday entanglements of both dynamics as performed by the work of the inspectors (2009).

The panoptic model, in other words, has recently been taken as insufficient to understand the different regimes of surveillance and visibility (see Lyon et al. 2012). Troubling the panoptic utopia of vision from the perspective of Actor Network Theory (ANT), Bruno Latour proposes the notion of the "oligopticon" to read contemporary settings as cities, scientific laboratories, courts hall, or trading rooms. Oligoptica, Latour writes, "do the exact opposite of panoptica: they see much *too little* to feed the megalomania of the inspector or the paranoia of the inspected, but what they see, they *see it well*" (2005: 181, original emphasis). While the stable all-seeing panoptic gaze fulfills an absolutist fantasy to reach a total overview, the oligopticon's optic register is made of close-ups and partial views that are, nonetheless, connected to a series of "wholes." This partial vision, while allowing forms of magnification and intensification, presents a structural fragility. Even the "tiniest bug," Latour writes, "can blind oligoptica" (*ibid*). Following this idea, for example, Lauritsen and Bøge, provide an ethnographic exploration of the practices that the Danish police perform in order to install fragile and unstable "oligoptic" systems of surveillance as Closed Circuit Television.[39]

Considering the many instances during my fieldwork where the observing psychotherapists had to go into the room where therapy was held in order to re-adjust the camera, change the microphone, or ask patients to change position, I am prone to read the systemic setting in "oligoptic" terms. However, the multiplicity of registers, as I am describing, cannot be stabilized through only one term. Indeed, in the systemic setting optic registers constantly shift from a potential panopticon (the observing team and the patient's incorporation of the observer's gaze), to an oligopticon (the magnifying view produced by the camera and the fragility of the optic apparatus), to a synopticon (the many, the team, viewing the few, patients in therapy). The videotaped material, watched by therapists, ethnographers, patients, and *re*presented in my work can also be understood as fundamentally "perioptic." In this sense, I am provisionally considering this setting as an "*x*-opticon" that enfolds and entangles multiple optic (and scopic) registers.

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[37]I am thinking of a social app called "Periscope," which allows you to see from your phone live streams of other users.

[38]Lutz suggests the use of the term "care-valence" in lieu of the term surveillance (2015).

[39]"Building an Oligopticon – a study of video surveillance in Danish police work" (*n.d.*)

Before approaching the question of the split of the seeing/being seen dyad, I describe how the "logic of care" (Mol 2008) is technologically mediated through the porous boundaries of screens, cameras, and one-way mirrors. I take Annemarie Mol's idea of the "logic of care" in order to focus on how the material setting of therapy delivers everyday forms of care that imply the setting itself as part of the therapeutic and clinical process.

Care-full vision, porous screens

Throughout my ethnographic research, I have encountered numerous "instances of crossing" that both trouble the panoptic separation between observers and observed but also outline the role this optic apparatus plays in providing forms of care. In the interviews I conducted with systemic practitioners in Buenos, visual technologies emerged as a material structure of care. As one example, Micol, a psychotherapist I had been following for a year, told me more than once that "*el equipo me da mucha contención*"– the team [observing her sessions through the CCTV] contains/supports me a lot). The notion of *contención* condenses in this context both the idea of "containment" and therefore the action of keeping something potentially harmful within limits or under control, and also affective support and care. The optic apparatus provides a setting that "screens" and protects the therapist's affective life and profession.[40]

As Maria, another systemic therapist, told me in an interview, "*El equipo contiene tus errores, viste?* The team limits/contains your mistakes, you know?" As she continued, she explained that most of the time when she realized she was going in the wrong direction while leading a session of therapy she felt supported by being observed and also by knowing that she could re-watch the session and talk it through with her colleagues. At the same time, she noticed how she was more present when she felt the team of therapists was behind her. Imagining herself being seen grounded her therapeutic self-development.[41] In a different conversation, she made explicit she felt "taken care of" (*el equipo me cuida*) when being "watched over." The notion of containment and care entangle with the optic apparatus which channels surveilling gazes while providing an affective boundary that absorbs the therapist's professional anxieties.

On the other side of the screen (in the case of CCTV) or the one-way mirror, I have also observed forms of attentive absorption and care. Through hundreds of hours of therapy I have observed, I noticed how different teams of therapists participated in the ongoing session, embodying the role of "affected spectators," from being fully caught by the session while taking notes, to reacting and commenting the session as if watching a televised show in which they were personally involved.[42] Commentaries like "Why did you ask her that?! Oh, no... I think she is having an affair! Why is he so mean? Too much, this is too much for both of them! They need to separate! C'mon man (*flaco*) stop being so childish!" indicated a strong "spectatorial" commitment which, as it is common in the systemic model, also oriented the team's intervention through the interphone. At different moments, the therapeutic *público* "viewing public" was caught in affective states that ranged from boredom to excitement to tears.[43] The team behind the

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[40]Interestingly, the image of *contención* surfaced multiple times also in relation to couples in therapy. The more I developed a fragmented and refracted model to understand this setting, the more I noticed the how *contención* was also used to describe couples in therapy. For example, Micol often said "*No le da contención,* s/he doesn't give him/her contention" or "*Necesita más contención,* s/he needs more contention."

[41]On self-development, expertise, and confessional technologies of the self see, for example, Mark Cole (2006).

[42]On observation and affective vulnerability see Ruth Behar (1997).

[43]I take the translation of *público* as "viewing public" from Eleni Kefala (1996)

screen, that is, is "touched" by what it sees. In this sense, this type of vision bears the capacity of becoming a tactile modality of being absorbed into a world behind/beyond the image itself (Taussig 1991).[44]

The role media play in the production, mediation, and circulation of affects has been explored, among others, in the work of Steven Shaviro, who writes that media are "*machines for generating affects*" (2010: 3, original emphasis).[45]

The phenomenological work of media theorist Vivian Sobchack has shown how techno-visual mediations are always already received through our lived and embodied experiences (2004). In light of these literatures, I take the optic surfaces of systemic therapy as mediating mediums producing and articulating the transmission of affective forms of care and participation.

I am interested specifically in the role of surfaces (from the screen to the mirror) as they materialize the idea of the boundary while allowing forms of vision and communication. In this sense, Sobchack considers screens not only as mediums where something is displayed but also as boundaries of a system, the concrete materialization of its limit (2014: 94). As she writes, the screen is an "in-between," an interface and a "permeable boundary" that filters while limiting our relational boundaries (*ibid*: 92).[46] In one sense, then, the intimate setting of therapy is here put on *display* allowing forms of exposure that provide support to practitioners.

What about the patients? While it is easier to imagine the affective and professional utility of live supervision or of groups of colleagues taking turns behind the mirror and working together, it can be harder to claim that this setting provides through its *x*-optic apparatus forms of care to the patients.

Maybe surprisingly, none of the couples in therapy expressed the desire to meet face to face with the team or the ethnographer, while in numerous instances we have been addressed directly or called in through direct glances towards the eye of the camera.

To take a few specific examples, at the end of a session Ruth and Eliseo, a couple in therapy, both laughingly addressed the team behind the one-way mirror saying "*gracias por cuidarnos… y Feliz Navidad!* Thank you for taking care of us and… Merry Christmas!" After one member of the team called into the therapy room to make a commentary to the leading therapists through the interphone, I remember Juliana (a patient) jokingly saying "*Que pasen! Come over!*" addressing the team and smiling to the eye of the camera. At the end of ten sessions of couple therapy Simona, who was in treatment with her husband Enrique, looked straight at the camera and thanked us (the team) for the support and "contention" provided throughout the sessions. Even though she addressed the camera directly, when the leading therapist asked if she wanted to meet the team, she did not take up his offer. She thus engaged the team precisely as an in/visible entity, as they had been throughout her sessions, even when given the opportunity to shift optic registers at the closing of her therapeutic engagement.

While these are micro-instances (with which, nonetheless, ethnographic assemblages are constructed), I can say that most patients feel "taken care of" when being "watched over." In a sense, the "comfort" with such a setting can be related to the copious circulation of psychological treatments within the Argentinean milieu. Even if patients weren't familiar with the systemic

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[44]On the life of images and their affective pull on our being-in-the-world see W.J.T. Mitchell (2005).

[45]In the second part of this chapter I will explore with more ethnographical depth the relationship between affects and media.

[46]She quoting Sudeep Dasgupta, who takes contemporary screens both as "permeable surfaces through which our location in contemporary life [is] negotiated" and as "the discursive filters through which out experience of everyday life is and our relation to it is mediated" (in Sobchack 2014: 92).

model, they were familiar with the possibility of a wide range of therapeutic options, models, and approaches.[47] "What an honor and a waste! Five therapists listening to our little problems/bullshit (*boludeces*)," exclaimed Stefano, who had been in analysis for fifteen years but wasn't familiar with the systemic model of therapy.

The *x*-optic setting of systemic therapy, in other words, is to be considered as a clinical venue where forms of techno-care are delivered. (see Mol et al. 2010). As I am suggesting, this form of care emerges as explicitly tied to multiple optic registers that assemble systemic psychotherapy.

I am particularly interested, however, to frame this setting also in more philosophical terms. I want to suggest that the systemic setting materializes a series of optic/scopic/visual processes that have been widely explored in psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories of subjectivity. In order to consider the systemic epistemology from an emic standpoint, I do not wish to claim that the therapeutic efficacy of this non-psychoanalytic model is grounded on a psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity – even if the hegemonic circulation of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires might arguably make psychoanalysis an "emically available" hermeneutic frame.

Without assuming that the therapists I worked with would agree with this theorization of their practice, I read the intrinsically optic properties of the systemic setting with Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of vision, in order to consider potential notions of vision helpful for rethinking ethnographic praxis.

The eye and the gaze

In this section I draw from my material on couple therapy, which is described in the following chapter, in order to suggest that the systemic setting of therapy materializes and re-presents a "split" between the "seeing and being-seen" dyad. This scopic split calls for a psychoanalytic and phenomenological reading beyond Foucault's panoptic reading.

The "scopic care" experienced by the couples in therapy, I wrote, emerges through their explicit comments. I also have observed another aspect within the care-full observatory apparatus: the couples' request and desire of/for "being seen." At an explicit level, for example, Ruth and Eliseo, a couple whose sessions I followed for nine months, addressed multiple times the observing team in order to make a point. In the midst of a violent fight, to offer a scene, I recall Eliseo screaming at the camera "Do you see?! Do you see!! It's like this, everyday, everyday! Now at least someone can see!" To "be seen" here opens the possibility to confirm the ways couples see themselves in the everyday. To be seen is having the empowering possibility to call in an "eye witness," a "third" that interrupts the arguments of the dyad. In various cases, moreover, I have observed grimaces directed at the camera made by one partner while the other partner was talking. In most of the videos of live therapy I have revised, I found innumerable instances where one of the partners seeks for a sympathetic eye behind/beyond the surfaces of the camera's lens or the one-way mirror.

These gestures sought an optic confirmation from the invisible observers. The in/visible eye of the team seemed to provide a confirmation that patients could not have obtained from the leading therapist who was present in their room. Such glances, looks, stares, glimpse addressed a space behind (and beyond) optic surfaces.

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[47] It is interesting to note that the only couple who refused being video recorded had lived for more than twenty years outside of Argentina (in a European country).

The anonymity of the *hidden* gaze delivered through the camera or the one-way mirror, I suggest, allows patients to engage with an "excess" in respect to the witnessing role of the therapist in the room. In the work of Jacques Lacan "screens" can precisely be understood as inter-mediating surfaces absorbing the excess through which the subject is constituted within the "visual field" (1998).[48]

In the next chapter, I take the couple as *given over* to the therapeutic assemblage, and consider this setting as a literal yet metaphoric milieu in which to observe the relationship between romantic couples and visual registers of "intimate exposure."[49] The couple form, I write, has been considered as the privileged milieu where subjects of the modern develop and sustain their (heteronormative) identity (see Giddens 1992; Povinelli 2006) and I add that the optic apparatus – in the widest sense – plays its part in the constitution of such identity.

As Dr. Almibar told me in one of our interviews, "the only thing I can say for sure is that the couple is the space (*lugar*) where we find confirmation of our identity. We want to see ourselves in the other." This is in resonance with the most common refrain I have heard across sessions of couple therapy: "*no me registra,*" s/he doesn't register me, or, to read in terms of my concern with mediation here, "s/he doesn't provide the surfaces through which I can see myself." Dr. Almibar suggested that to see oneself in the other is the main affective vector sustaining the everyday of certain couple forms: vision and the couple form intertwine in a co-constitutive dance between elements.

Most couples in therapy, in effect, explained their crisis precisely as an impossibility to see themselves in the "eyes" of the other. Or better, what they saw of themselves through the eyes of the other was mostly a destructive distortion of what their own "identity" should have *looked like*.

Here I am interested in taking the presence of screens as intermediary optic operators that offer a "gaze-filled" line of flight for the couple-in-crisis. When you cannot seem to see yourself in the other, to have the possibility to (literally) see yourself reflected on the surface of the one-way mirror *while* being seen by an in/visible third can provide a narcissistic platform with therapeutic effects. It is a form of refracted narcissism as a third element (the invisible observer) is anonymously present and provides a transfer point, an interruption of one's own reflective gaze. The splitting interruption created by the surface/boundary troubles a direct reflection and reflectivity of the gaze.

Referring to Lacan's notion of narcissism, critical theorist Joan Copjec writes that "[s]ince something always appears to be missing from any representation, narcissism cannot consist in finding satisfaction in one's own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that *one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image*. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image" (1996: 37, my emphasis).[50]

Jacques Lacan, more broadly, has described human subjects as constituted in the "visual field" through a split between the eye and the gaze which sustains what he called the "scopic drive" (which has to be considered similar to the other drives, like the oral or the anal drive). In this, Lacan was inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "reversibility of vision"

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[48]As Lacan writes, "in our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, *something slips, passes,* from stage to stage and is always *to some degree eluded in it* – this is what we call the gaze" (1998: 73, my emphasis).

[49]As mentioned above I owe the concept of being "given over" (and become "available") to multiple conversations with Lawrence Cohen (see 2007).

[50]See also the introduction.

(1968). For the French phenomenologists humans are both subjects and objects of vision as, while seeing, they are also objects of vision and therefore also always already seen. Merleau-Ponty often referred to this "being seen" as an anonymous (and historically determined) gaze within which every act of vision is generated (*ibid*). Reformulating this idea of the reversibility of vision, Lacan identified the anonymous gaze as having an ontological precedence over the act of seeing (the eye). For Lacan this is the "pre-existence of a gaze," where "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (1998: 72). Interestingly, the anonymous gaze (of the Other) that constitutes the subject in the visual field, cannot be seen by the subject: "it is what the subject does not see and not simply what it sees that funds the subject" in the visual field (Copjec 1996: 36).[51]

In Lacan's ontology of the psyche, then, the subject (in the field of vision) is constituted by the gaze of the Other.[52] At the same time, however, the subject is "*cut off from it*" (*ibid*, original emphasis) and the gaze of the Other does not "look back" nor it can be directly faced. There is a constitutive split, that is, between the gaze through which the subject is constituted and the subject itself. In this precise sense, the subject never fully coincides with the gaze.

If we rethink through this perspective Foucault's panoptic gaze and the coincident incorporation of such gaze by the disciplined *subject of vision*, we can understand that Lacan (through Merleau-Ponty) presents a quite different optic ontology. Following this orientation, Joan Copjec troubles feminist readings in film theory of the "male gaze" that assume a coincidence between the eye and the gaze in psychoanalysis, without taking into account the idea of a constitutive split between the subject and the gaze that (in)forms it (1996).

In this context, I consider the optic surfaces that assemble the setting of systemic therapy as rendering explicit (metaphorically and literally) a series of splits at the heart of subjective formations in the visual field. I suggest that while this optic apparatus produces forms of gendered and unidirectional vision (the "male gaze"), it also provides a refractive split between the seeing subject, the gaze, and the object of its vision.

I refer to a "refractive split" because I am seeking an image that can trouble the idea of reflectivity. As I have suggested, reflective processes in this setting are interrupted and deviated by different optic mediums. In the next chapter I will engage with the image of refractivity in relation to affects and mediums. In physics, refraction describes the change in the direction of propagation of a wave when passing through mediums with different densities. The wave changes direction (bends) as it travels at different speeds through different mediums. In this setting, the presence of a series of "thirds" (in/visible observes, optic mediums…) redirects (or queers) most of the reflective (metaphoric) process of patients and practitioners.[53] The reflexive fantasy of seeing yourself seeing yourself is always interrupted by a mediating and often anonymous third.[54]

In what follows, I take a similar notion of the radical non-coincidence between the subject of the gaze and itself. Thinking-with the work of anthropologist Hoon Song, I ask: What

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[51]Lacan suggests that the anonymous gaze cannot *look back* when narrating a joke of a fisherman playing with a young Lacan (see 1998: 95). Buci-Glucksmann provides a fabulous engagement with both Merleau-Ponty and Lacan's reformulation of the former's ontology of vision in a book about the madness of vision, gazes, and *baroque* aesthetics (2013).

[52]This continues the French tradition of the "gaze" and the "Other" inaugurated by Sartre (see [1943] 2012).

[53]In the next chapter I will explore the image of a "queer" gaze that is oriented "slantwise" when mediated by the optic apparatus. See also Sara Ahmed on seeing "slantwise" (2006).

[54]Between anthropology and quantum physics, Karen Barad examines the epistemological breaks between reflection, refraction, and diffraction (2007).

are the methodological consequences for a self-reflexive anthropology if we take seriously the idea of a fundamental split between the subject (of reflection) and itself?

Refracted reflexivity

I take anthropological "reflexivity" as a disciplinary attempt to render explicit the contingencies of knowledge production.[55] However, such attempts assume the capacity of the ethnographer to unveil the in/visible gaze of power allowing ethnographic knowledge. I am interested in how Hoon Song renders explicit the intersections between the motif of the "power-full gaze" in the Foucaultian anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s, the "reflexive turn," and what he calls (via Annalee Newitz) "self-loathing white nihilism" (2006).

Song points out that the North American formulation of self-reflexive anthropologies has assumed a total *coincidence* between the ethnographer, *qua* reflexive subject, and the gaze of power it attempts to unveil in a "humbling gesture of self-exposure" (*ibid*: 480). With Jacques Lacan, we can say that this self-reflexive subject of reflection implies a Cartesian *cogito* through which the subject apprehends itself as "thought" and emerges as the "legitimate owner" of its own representations (1998: 80-81).

However, the self-reflexive subject of Francophone anthropology and philosophy implies a constitutive "self-loss and self-division" (Song: 2006: 472; also 2011).[56] The subject of reflection, that is, holds at its core an intractable negativity, an ever-present dis-possession with respect to itself. In a psychoanalytic sense, the subject of reflection does not (and cannot) fully own itself.[57] This is how we should read the Lacanian split between the eye and the gaze, but also how we intuitively understand the anthropological subject of the social and the cultural. In anthropology, that is, we more or less agree on the idea that the social and cultural practices somehow escape the subject's awareness while constituting it.

In the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to take one example, the self-reflexivity of the philosopher is never fully realized. For the French phenomenologist, in fact, the subject of reflection and of vision is also an object to itself and to the gaze of the other. I am seeing while being seen, and I am thus split within reversible but never fully coincident positions. To be reflexive, in this view, is to engage the consequences of a radical impossibility and non-coincidence of the subject with itself (1968, [1945] 2002).

Such non-coincidence has been more or less directly taken up through different strands of anthropology promoting a focus on the imaginative, non-conscious, and emotional processes of the ethnographer. Turning to what "escapes" the reflexive ownership of the ethnographer *qua*

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[55]See Dominic Boyer (2015), who offers a reading of different generations of "reflexive" anthropologies before and after the so-called reflexive turn. The latter was characterized by a post-colonial (and in some instances "textualist") revisiting of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rabinow 1977; Rosaldo 1993). Recent experiments in anthropologies of the contemporary (Rabinow 2003; Rabinow et al. 2008), anthropology of expertise and design anthropologies (Boyer 2008; Faubion et al. 2009) are reformulating the stakes and methods of the ethnographic enterprise.

[56]The "French tradition" refers here, partially, to Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and the "other" Michel Foucault (superficially I refer to the Foucault who engaged more directly with questions of subject formation through technologies of the self).

[57]I take this idea also from Stefania Pandolfo's reading of psychoanalysis and anthropology (*forthcoming*).

legitimate venue of knowledge production, these literatures challenge our imaginaries about self-reflexivity.[58]

In contrast, the panoptic desires of "reflexive" social sciences have often assumed the existence of a "fully formed" subject of knowledge that renders visible the contingencies of knowledge production because of an implied *coincidence* between the reflexive ethnographer and the panoptic gaze of power (*qua* social, historical, cultural set of contingencies). In this sense, Song writes that "anthropological reflexivity leaves the principle of the Panoptic gaze unthought," when rendering its own gaze an object of inquiry (*ibid*: 481). "Historicizing itself," that is, "anthropological reflexivity fails to theorize the very (Panoptic) "point of exception" from which the coincidence between "seeing and "being seen" is rendered visible" (*ibid*).

Following this orientation, I consider reflexivity not exclusively as an anthropological attempt to render visible the contingencies of knowledge production. The reflexive ethnographic subject of knowledge production, that is, always implies a resistant kernel, an intractable element which makes reflexivity also a project of self-displacement rather than self-identification. The visual apparatus of my research and its *x*-opticon provide the ground to trouble panoptic readings not only of this setting but also of possible self-reflexive enterprises.[59]

Describing different optic registers within the systemic setting, I trouble a one-way analytics of the gaze that would consider the systemic setting (including the ethnographer's eye) in terms of surveillance.

As explained, we can consider the peculiarity of the Argentinean to context in terms of its incessant remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and mediatization (Marsilli-Vargas 2016) of a never fully self-coincident therapeutic subject. In the passage between venues and mediums beyond the space of the clinic (see introduction) the therapeutic subject is here displaced, captured, and dispossessed through optic mediums in real time. I argue in my third chapter that this apparatus illustrates the production of what I call the *couple-image*.

In what I have presented, it precisely the passage between optic mediums that materializes, as it were, a radical impossibility to ever find a (therapeutic) subject co-incident with itself. Friedrich Kittler, among others, points out how we can explore our models and metaphors of the – always technologically mediated – human self precisely (and only) through technological mediums (2010: 34). I have argued that the systemic setting provides both a metaphorical and a material venue where therapeutic subjects emerge as the result of an optic apparatus that splits, refracts, and transforms reflective (and reflexive) processes.

I have been exploring a specific entanglement between optic registers of care, surveillance, and a related non-coincidence of gazes. Such non-coincidence, I suggested, points towards a constitutive excess of human (and nonhuman) forms of presence and subjectivity – the question becomes how to research and how to describe such excess.

In this work I directly and indirectly use this setting as a metaphorical venue to consider the reflexive ethnographer. In this sense, in the next chapter I take the "conceptual persona" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) of the ethnographer as a *refractive living medium*.[60] Indeed,

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[58] I am referring to works that consider the role of the (psychoanalytic) unconscious in ethnographic research, from the classic work of George Devereux (1967), to more recent works on the inter-subjective and ethnographic role of dreaming, dream-interpretation, and reverie (e.g. Borneman 2011; Miškolci 2015; Mittermaier 2010; Pandolfo 1998; Proudfoot 2015). I also refer to recent turns to emotions (Davies and Spencer 2010) and sensuous scholarship (Stoller 2010) and to anthropologies of the image and the imagination that consider non-linguistic forms of knowledge production (e.g. Desjarlais 2016a, 2016b; Stevenson 2014).

[59] *Cogito interruptus*, as it were.

[60] In the second and fourth chapter I engage in depth with the ethnographic conceptual persona.

thinking of an incessant non-coincidence of gazes and optic registers, I consider my own embodied presence as a mediating surface that articulates spatial and temporal transformation of what it sees. The role of imagination, it seems to me, is fundamental in defining how we imagine ourselves (i.e. our body-mediums) inhabiting such displacements.

I take up this question mostly from the first-person point of view of the ethnographer, whose body I want to consider as a surface that absorbs and refracts different affective intensities. As I explained in the introduction, this is part of a phenomenological concern which takes our always already affected being in the world as a legitimate milieu of qualitative knowledge production. The imagination, as I wrote engaging with Merleau-Ponty, turns into a linguistic and imaginific medium to access a certain depth, a certain flesh of the visible that is given to us both as phenomenon and as phantasy (see Desjarlais 2016).

II. Refracting Intimacy

When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being of latency, and a presentation of a certain absence is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant…

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968: 136)

Figure 3. Intimate Exposure (Screenshot, Berkeley 2015)

In this second chapter I develop ethnographic descriptions in the genre of phenomenology, and affect theory. Engaging with a first-person point of view I describe the ethnographic phenomenologist as an affective medium. While in the next chapter I will focus on couples in therapy, here I am mainly concerned in considering affective spaces and intensities that circulate through different mediums in the systemic setting.

I am recursively captivated by the genre that intertwines intimate, personal, first-person descriptions with explicitly conceptual intentions. I am thinking, for example, of the ordinary images created in the works of Roland Barthes.[1] In this genre of works, I find a phenomenological and literary intention and *in*tension (as in an embodied tension-towards) to assemble and build an empirical analytics through the creation of sensuous images that describe the ways in which the carnal eye is pulled towards specific details.[2] At the core of these genre I find the awareness that our sensuous relation with the world can constitute a form of phenomenological knowledge which is substantially sustained by our embodied imagination. Finally, these work render explicit a stylistic awareness that a certain play with writing genres is necessary. I define such sensibility as constituting an *empirical poetics of vision*.

In anthropology, I find a similar sensibility in the "fictocritical" work of Michael Taussig (2009, 2015), in the existential phenomenology of Michael Jackson (1998, 2013), in the literary phenomenology of Robert Desjarlais (2011, 2016) and in Kathleen Stewart's attention to ordinary scenes where each "scene is a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening – something that needs attending to" (2007: 5). Similarly, I draw from the sensuous scholarship (Stoller 2010) of Anand Pandian (2015) and from Lisa Stevenson's *iconophilic* expressivity (2014). In particular, however, I draw from the phenomenological first-person perspective as developed in what I have called Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *expressive phenomenology* in order to consider the ways the empirical and the analytical emerge and merge within the ethnographer's lifeworld.

The play between the empirical and the analytical, or the abstract and the concrete grounds the scope of this chapter. I am thinking with Brian Massumi who, "fluidifying" (2002: 6) Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, plays precisely with the idea that to follow to concrete movements of the body and of our worlds in becoming we actually need to understand *how abstract* the concrete is. As he writes, "to think the body in movement… means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body* (*ibid*: 5, original emphasis). Such incorporeal dimension is the relation of the body with its own *indeterminacy*: "a body is an immediate, unfolding relation to its own potential to vary. That relation… is real but abstract" (*ibid*: 4).

The realm of the indeterminate, I suggest, is similar to what Merleau-Ponty defined as the "invisible," an empirical *presence* that our body inhabits while often eluding our reflexive awareness (see 1968). The relation with the indeterminate, which in this chapter I will take as a fundamentally affective realm, can be reproduced, brought to light, through a play with the imagination and with writing genres. I take this image of real/concrete but abstract, thus, as a call for our imaginative capacities that can potentially describe, sense, or imagine the relation between what is given within localized lifeworlds and different forms/genres of knowledge production.

In other words, this *givenness of the given* is always already encountered by our imaginative capacity to fill the gaps, to reach the invisible depth of what is *present* (Merleau-

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[1]I am thinking, specifically, of *Camera Lucida* ([1980] 2010) and *A Lover's Discourse* (1978).
[2]See Vivian Sobchack on the carnality of vision (2004).

Ponty 1968).[3] I am referring here to a *phenomenality* of vision that entangles with our phantasmatic imagination (see Carbone 2010). In this sense Robert Desjarlais explores the etymological resonances between the *phenomenon*, coming from the Greek *phainein, "*to bring to light, to make appear" and the *phantasm*, which evokes our spectral imagination (2016: 406).[4]

As I previously wrote, the phantasmatic play between the visible phenomenon (the *datum*) and an invisible *flesh* is at the center of my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the visible. He writes, precisely, that "[w]hen we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being of latency, and a presentation of a certain absence'" (1968: 136). Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty is not aiming at uncovering the our projections but rather to develop an *affirmative* phenomenology that reaches what is given *within* such projections.[5]

I open this second part with a personal and intimate description of the *equipo* (team) of the institution, which I will call here *Mañana*, where I have conducted most of my ethnography. The *equipo* I describe is composed by four psychotherapists I call Dr. Almibar (the head of the team), Clara, Wanda, and Micol.[6] The team meets weekly to develop together their therapeutic profession. When I understood they would play a central role in my ethnography I wondered for some time how I would re/present them.

One day I was sitting with them during a break and after looking at them I begun playing with a form of *absorbed imagination* zooming in and out of specific details I felt pulled towards.[7] Each detail, I noticed, condensed both my pre-existent imagination and fantasy about their character while revealing something about them (the phantasmatic of the phenomenal). Each singular detail revealed to me the affective and existential thread that connected me to the person I was looking at. Following these threads, I begun considering the relationship between knowledge, affects, and absorbed forms of presence. When I came home I wrote out the result of such micro-experiment. I realized I had written something close to an erotics (in the widest sense of a sensuous play of the imagination) of partial objects. What better way to describe a group of psychotherapists discussing the crisis of romantic relationships?!

I leave some repetitions regarding the setting of systemic therapy in order to offer a better idea of the way this specific *equipo* practices systemic therapy.

Following the upcoming scene, I alternate the description of one session of couple therapy where Micol has an affective breakdown with theoretical concerns on affects and ethnographic genres of re/presentation. There is a progressive and phenomenological "movement of showing" (Heidegger 1977) that I try to deliver through different ethnographic descriptions and close-ups. The close-up, following what I wrote in the past chapter, can be read as a performance of an affective "oligopticon" (Latour 2005) which sees *too well and too closely* to actually be able to see the general picture.

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[3]See my introduction on the presence of the in/visible in Merleau-Ponty.

[4]In a similar sense, Barthes writes that what appears in a photograph is the *spectrum,* thus evoking both the ghostly and the spectacular dimensions of the (visual) phenomenon (2010: 9).

[5]See my last chapter for an engagement with the "crisis of representation" and the anthropological method.

[6]I often leave "Dr." appellation because he was the only one of the team with a medical degree but also to outline the fact that he was the head of the team and play with the gendered consequences.

[7]See John Borneman on absorption and intersubjective daydreaming during fieldwork (2011).

This first scene (back)grounds the close-ups that follow, where I consider more what it means to develop an ethnography *of and through* affects.[8]

Meeting the *equipo* (through an erotics of partial objects)

February 2014

"I don't have this vision of the unconscious, Wanda, I don't think Eliseo said it to show us he doesn't have any decisional power in the couple. He is just trapped into a sequence", says Dr. Almibar addressing Wanda. "No, no, he wanted to tell us right away that whatever he says… she doesn't care!" Wanda replies.

I am in a room with four couples and family therapists forming the research team I am following in Buenos Aires. The *equipo* has been meeting every week for almost 15 years now. In their meetings, usually, one therapist is attending a couple in the "therapy room," while the others follow the ongoing session in another room, through a screen where the session is projected (there is a video camera filming in the therapy room).

While the session unfolds the therapists in the group take notes and comment the unfolding session and occasionally interrupt it calling through an interphone and talking to the leading therapist. Every session includes a break, where the psychotherapist in the therapy room comes debriefing with the team about the ongoing therapy.

One couple just left. Wanda and Almibar are discussing the first session she had with a new couple. Meanwhile, Micol, Clara, and I are silently following the debate. Almibar disagrees with Wanda's interpretations about the opening of her session. Openings and closings (of sessions) are of fundamental importance for the *equipo*. Another session will start soon but the heated debate doesn't seem to fade out. A series of conjectures and reflections weave a web of pragmatic possibilities around me. Maybe Eliseo "wants out" from the relation, maybe she had an affair when they went to Mendoza, maybe he is really burned out from his work.

It's February, I am half way through my fieldwork and sometimes I sense I am dwelling within the narrative horizon of a soap opera; an horizon made of couples in crisis and minuscule yet essential details. While I slightly loose track of what the team is discussing about, I abstract myself from the situation.

I focus on my being-present and I slip into an absorbed register of presence. Voices fade in the background, my gaze lands over Micol's red lips. She is sipping her Sprite Zero. She is about to say something, she laughs, and she drinks again. She dries her lips with a quick movement of the right hand. She is smiling like a child following the plot of her favorite cartoon. How is this story going to end? Do they still love each other after thirty years? What can we do? Micol knows it is not *really* about love, yet she likes to talk about love.

Her presence is brightening up the atmosphere, while her lips unveil her curious desire to learn always new something about stories, about couples, about broken relationships. *Romance* is also the telling of a story. Micol is committed to help couples find a story again. Be it a story of a separation or of renewed companionship. She loves couples and families; she loves love and loves loving her patients looking for a lost love. Micol suffers every time she is unable to find affective fragments to pick up in a session and redistribute to her patients. Every time she realizes there is nothing left to do – if not to facilitate a separation – Micol, after a decade of

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[8]See the introduction for theoretical engagement with the notion of affects.

practice, is still caught by a fleeting sadness as if it was her first therapy session. Trained in psychodrama, family therapy, and gestalt therapy, Micol does not stop learning new ways to be a therapist. She talks about her patients with a worried yet optimistic vein. It *is* possible, people *can* change the *will* learn how to cope with their ordinary challenges. I am here to offer them *contención*, as she often says.

In her therapeutic space couples come to find the lost threads of a narrative that vanished into thin vapor, leaving only an affective toxicity keeping them, rather than together, *attached*. Her committed to love turned into a therapeutic desire to put me, the *unloving* ethnographer, in contact with my own emotions. "I see you are finally getting in touch with your emotions," she told me once. As I land on Micol's cheek with my gaze I realize that this how we relate (the reversible projections of encounters between people): the cold ethnographer, the warm therapist. She knows what an anthropologist might think of "love" and "therapy" and how critical I am with her romantic optimism. Nonetheless, she stubbornly wants me to experience love and therapy, her love for therapy and the exhausting work she performs in these therapies of love. *Meet Micol, a blue flower of the spring.*

I close my eyes for few seconds, I hear Almibar's voice commenting that Eliseo is acting out because Ruth is draining him out, because she keeps asking for an affective containment he is not willing to give her. *Contención* (containment): how many times I have heard the term throughout the year? After some months I learned to understand Almibar's way of thinking picturing the movement of *circular causality*. This circular movement passes through and pierces every element of his sentences: *he does it because she does it because he does it because she does it*. As he is talking, my gaze lands over his left ear. "The listening-machine of therapeutic efficacy," I ponder.[9] I then notice how perfectly shaved he is. I can smell the shaving cream just by looking at his face. What is a face? While I am getting caught into this thought I intentionally move away from the face as site of reference. *As if* the face could tell me more than the ear. While my imagination reproduces the smell of his shaved beard I realize that I relate to Almibar as an old school man in his 60s. He sings fragments of Tango every time he can relate some lyrics to the ongoing therapy; he is a passionate and gifted amateur painter surrounded by figures of couples, Italian migrants, and tango-like landscapes. He laughs at old jokes and finds therapy sessions exhausting, amusing, and refreshing. The head of the *equipo,* he attends to couples with an open hilarity and sophisticated interest about their stories. Trained in Freudian psychoanalysis (which he has been also practicing for some years) and in systemic family therapy, he doesn't follow any specific therapeutic model with couples: after almost 40 years of work attending mostly couples he thinks that the most important thing to do in session is to put yourself – as therapist – into the "drama." *Hay que meterse en el drama!* (You have to step into/enter the drama). When he comments about his sessions with couples he is often fascinated and amused by them. He finds couples particularly entertaining. *Meet Dr. Almibar, a warm laughter for windy winters.*

How long have I been abstract-minded? I look around; I realize Micol is asking Wanda about her plan for the next session with Ruth and Eliseo. I wonder what is the *sense* of me being in this group without listening to what they are saying but shifting into transitory states of absorption. Sitting close to me, Wanda crosses her legs.

I am drawn toward her right foot. She is wearing open shoes and I notice her dark red nail polish. I realize, for some reasons, in Argentina I developed a warmhearted affection towards

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[9]Here and farther I engage with the image of partial body parts, as pulsional machines of desire following Deleuze and Guattari's imagery of partial objects in the schizo-walks of their *Anti-Oedipus* ([1972] 2009)

older women. The scent of a clumsy and silent tango I timidly danced with an old woman a couple of weeks ago. I ruminate about culture and fantasies, fantasies of culture and the cultivation of fantasies across worlds of meaning and genres of experience. I think about her age, late 60s, and her passion for this work, the work of therapy. She is also a trained psychoanalyst who abandoned psychoanalysis in favor of a non-analytic model. "I wanted results," she once told me. The redness of the nail polish offers thickness to the memory I have of her voice and her jokes about couples and Argentina's economy. For her, there is nothing more ridiculous than Argentina's economic situation. She finds it sadly hilarious. She often laughs in session with her patients. But her laughter has a different texture than Almibar's. What *is* laughter? How to deliver the different thickness of the same word, "laughter"? Devoted to a form of positive psychology, she rejects any interpretative attempt during session: couples need to snap out from the toxic interactions they are trapped into, in order to find relational oxygen and decide what they want to do about their relationship.

Wanda's foot touches my leg. The foot/leg machine of transmission. I look at her while she is speaking to Almibar. The first time we met she told me, *"Nosotros no fabricamos emociones!* We don't fabricate emotions! Wanda is aware that if there is no affection there is nothing a therapist can do to reestablish the couple form. I feel the narrative and affective tie linking me to her: her cutting remarks, her sharp commentaries about my act of taking notes, her passion for knitting and weaving threads around my questions. *Meet Wanda, the witty and edgy feline of summer.*

Some jokes she made about Argentina before her session bring me into another plane of thought. I wonder, I wonder how am I supposed to understand something of this situation just by being present to it. I realize in this moment of absorption how many times I hear them saying *Nosotros Argentinos,* We Argentineans or *in Argentina.* I reflect about how they might be performing a cultural spectacle for the ethnographer's eye, while we all look at psychotherapies behind the screen. Where the couple might also be performing a relational spectacle for our eye. Screens and culture, screens and therapy: what is representation? Then I realize this is old news, and…

Micol is pointing her finger at me. I come back to listening-presence. *"La próxima pareja la atiende Samuele!* Samuele will/should attend to the next couple!" We all laugh, but I can feel my heart beating faster. Should I convince them to let me lead a session? Ethics and research, ethics and aesthetics, research and codes of conduct all intermingle with my excitement. A couple of times I wished I could actually try it. Somehow, I am sure the *equipo* would also have been curious about it. What is to participate? What is to observe? I think of the couples behind the screen, the couples I have never met. I think of how many times after a difficult session Almibar or Micol would tell me: "being on the other side of the screen is another thing!" Again: screens and truth, or the end of the copy. Yes, it is different. Or, at least, yes, I believe them.

I let my thoughts fade away, eager to find back my absorbed presence, to try to take in and their presence through partial details, in order to refract their presence into a different medium. To make their presence into something else, something that slips out. The plunder of the other's presence, flipped into another medium. From flesh to concepts, from flesh to the conceptualization of the flesh as always-already conceptual. How to be fair to them while making them into figures, abstractions, proxies for an in/finite surfing between planes of immanence and synthetic fantasies? I am open to be affected by their presence, a form of (in/tensional) willingness *towards* the flesh, an attempt to take them with me on a series of

conceptual planes. To take them and populate a plane of thought in order to produce a strange form of screen through which to look back.

I slip back into a lived yet abstract cloud and notice that Clara is looking at me. The oldest therapist in the room, also psychoanalytically trained, she is dressed like an elegant art curator of a small art gallery in Palermo.[10] I am caught by her brown hairs as a feeble breath coming from the air conditioner moves them gently. She smiles at me, maybe letting me know she knows I am absorbed into some elsewhere of presence. Always with some Bach's flowers in her purse, Clara gives me constant occasion to venture in discussions about therapeutic efficacy, reincarnation, aura-therapies, and recommendations about the "best" chiropractor in town. The hair-machine is moving in space like a fading color. Clara goes through every session as if it was a new musical project. As I see her hair moving almost rhythmically, I imagine her at her piano, softly playing some Erik Satie. Just like her hair, Clara follows the relational winds of each session without planning or imposing herself. "Most of the times I don't know where I am going with my questions to the patients," she told me once. "But, somehow, I know something will lend somewhere, like with hypnosis," she continued. Every session is a variation over a theme, every session a different composition to be understood, and a different score to be interpreted. I look at her hair and recall seeing her coming out of a session the previous week, with red cheeks and an exhausted spirit. Every session is an adventure, every question an opening into the unknown. *Meet Clara, the autumn leaf falling in between piano strings.*

Clara is now staring at me and I sense I should say something to make my way back into the group, to make my presence heard. I wonder for a last second what does it mean to "observe" this group, to "participate" in their meetings while observing their work.

"And… he is also a bit obsessed with this idea that everything needs to be a spontaneous adventure with her… no?" I realize I don't know why I said what I said, but I am back into the discussion, with the *equipo*.

Refracting intimacy

November 2013

Wanda, Almibar, and I are sitting in a room of *Mañana*. Micol is standing in front of us. Her right hand is shaking, her eyes are red. She smiles at me sadly while she slowly dissolves into tears. I am caught in the affective intensity of this situation. Micol's salted tears sustain an incipient thought about the arid landscapes of a relationship in crisis. Simultaneously, my peripheral vision is registering the flickering of a screen behind Micol. I glance at the screen and notice that Micol's two patients in the other room are patiently waiting in silence for their therapist to come back. I am suspended in a disjointed temporality. I am between my affected presence in one room, my ethnographic imagination about the couple in therapy in the other room, and the density of a sense of crisis in the atmosphere. While sensing that I am captured in this threefold temporal plane I stare at the screen, thinking of how to think of my presence in this refracted present tense where multiple temporalities unfold and enfold me. How do we consider this disjointed temporality within the circulation of affective intensity? What is an intensity? Surfing the planes of this open ended lived abstraction, I anticipate the formulation of a question: what type of medium registers such intensities? What are the spatio-temporal transformations

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[10]Palermo is a middle (middle-upper) class *barrio* of Buenos Aires. It is known for its bars, art galleries, and restaurants.

these intensities undergo when passing between different mediums? Is the ethnographer a living sensorial medium among other mediums?

In this chapter, I am interested in exploring the way affective intensities are registered and refracted by living/nonliving mediums. I consider affective intensities to emerge always in relation to an affective milieu. This milieu is the non-conscious affective background of a given (i.e. situated) present, which I consider as affectively felt and perceived (Berlant 2011). An affective background sustains the coming into being of our ordinary life-worlds, and it is traversed by trans-personal forces that sometimes, in some conjunctions, come to the foreground.[11] Coming to the foreground, in this case, means that the intensity becomes available to be consciously registered.[12] This availability of difference sustains a temporal punctuation and demarcation between an affectively sensed "now" and a "before."

An affective intensity, thus, is given over, circulates, and becomes available travelling through different mediums of transmission that register its passage.[13] This affective and temporal difference is registered *qua* difference and sustains conceptually embodied qualifications and judgments (e.g. when I write that I sense an atmosphere of crisis).[14]

Thus, in the "genre of the emerging event" (*ibid*: 5) I want to take "affective intensity" as the occurrence, circulation, and availability of a "difference which makes a difference" (Bateson 2000: 459) within a shared affective milieu.[15] In this context, I want to consider the conceptual work that affects (in the plural) *do* in ethnographic theory rather than to find ways to better define affect (in the singular). The main work that affects do, I suggest, is to orient our attention towards an an elusive "other of" in the realms of (self)reflexive consciousness, anthropocentric individuality, and subjective intentionality.[16] Affects are non-defined, pre-personal, potential, and fleeting sensed intensities. In this sense, their elusive tangibility stimulates and sustains an explicit engagement with styles of presentation (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 14) and non-representational modes of writing theory (Thrift 2007; Stewart 2011).

However, once we take affects as channeled through various mediums of transmission, how do ethnographers imagine their embodied and heuristic capacity to be attuned to such intensities? If the non-representational features of affects are the moving force of experimentations with genres of writing, I suggest they also imply an imagination about *genres of presence* that have the capacity to render available through sensory forms of imagination affective milieus.[17] With Lauren Berlant, I take "genre" as providing an "affective expectation of

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[11]Our present is perceived first affectively (Berlant 2011: 4) and affects can be imagined as "literally moving things" (Stewart 2007: 5). William Connolly writes on the multiplicity of "force-field" that envelop human/nonhuman worlds (2011: 5).

[12]Brian Massumi writes of non-conscious intensities and their availability to be registered by our consciousness (2002). Critical readings of affect theory pinpoint the excessive reliance on an immediate realm beyond "signification and meaning" (Leys 2011: 443; see also Mazzarella 2009). However, in anthropology affects are most often considered as circulating through situated mediums of transmission. See Sara Ahmed (2010), Purnima Mankekar (2015), Todd Ramón Ochoa (2010), Anand Pandian (2015).

[13]I am debt to Lawrence Cohen for the figures of "availability" and being "given over" (see Cohen 2011).

[14]Affects, Teresa Brennan writes, are always entangled with judgments (2004: 5).

[15]This is how Gregory Bateson defined the elementary unit of information (*ibid*). See also Eduardo Kohn (2013, 100) on difference and semiotic ecologies. I consider difference in temporal terms and think with Gilles Deleuze that "intensity is difference" (1994: 223).

[16]Anthropocentric individuality contrasts with a recent turn to anthropocenic ontologies and interests in open forms of (non)subjective formation.

[17]Rubin (2012) comments on a panel dedicated to the question of how to research affect ethnographically.

the experience of watching something unfold" (2011: 6). An ethnography of affects sustains heuristic expectations related to our embodied presence in the field as capable of sensing, grasping, and registering trans-personal affective realms. I understand this genre of presence, then, as tied to our sensuous imagination about what might be happening to our body and its milieu.[18]

In the first chapter I have introduced the image of "refraction" to consider how the *optic apparatus* of systemic therapy refracts the therapeutic subject displacing it. As I suggested, I take the non-reflexive apparatus of systemic therapy as a model also to imagine the ethnographic genre of presence as fundamentally refractive. Refraction is the change in the direction of propagation of a wave when passing through mediums with different densities. The wave, which is here morphed into an affective intensity, changes direction (bends) as it travels at different speeds through different mediums. The problem of intensity, then, intertwines with questions of temporality, mediumship and transformation.[19] With art historian Hans Belting, I take a "medium" as a "vector, agent, *dispositif*" which functions as a "support, host, and tool" (2001: 5).[20] While Belting is thinking of the circulation of "images," I take what is circulated to be affective intensities and follow the idea that "our bodies themselves operate as a living medium by processing, receiving, and transmitting [intensities]" (*ibid*).

I am interested here in how mediums actualize temporal transformation that determine the conceptual availability of affects. A wide literature explores the role media play in the production, mediation, and circulation of affects. As mentioned in the past chapter, Steven Shaviro writes that media are "*machines for generating affects*" (2010: 3, original emphasis). The relation between affects and temporality has also been explored by Gilles Deleuze's work on cinema which I will engage in the next chapter (1986, 1989). At the same time, Vivian Sobchack also explores our embodied being-in-the-world in relation to visual media (2004).

However, my focus here is on the explicitly ethnographic issues that emerge when we attempt to study and research the circulation of affective intensities in the present. This is why it is necessary for me to think of the ethnographic body as also a "machine" for generating and registering affects. It is in this precise sense, then, that I want to take the ethnographer as a *refractive living medium*. Bruno Latour has defined the body as "*an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements*" (2004: 206, original emphasis).[21] Here the body of the ethnographer, suspended between abstract and concrete phantasmatic phenomena, is a refractive interface that absorbs and transforms (through writing genres and genres of presence) what it "bumps against."[22]

In what follows, I will describe a specific therapeutic session I have observed. In the session I will present, Micol undergoes a temporary affective breakdown that is transmitted to the team behind the screen and travels across different temporal planes and mediums. I will

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[18]I am here thinking with Kathleen Stewart's attempt "to create new spaces for thinking about and imagining what might be going on" (2011: 445).
[19]Recent works on religious experience and spirit possession provide new perspectives on mediating mediums (and media) in relation to the production of immanence/presence. See Birgit Meyer on the paradoxes of immediacy (2011); Rosalind Morris on dis-embodied mediums (2002), and Bruno Reinhardt's "refracted" charisma in a Pentecostal church in Ghana (2015).
[20]Here, interestingly, we have a different use of the term "dispositif" I provided in the first chapter. However, it can be interesting to consider the medium itself as an apparatus producing specific forms of subjectifications.
[21]See the introduction for a comment on Latour's limited understanding of the "phenomenological body."
[22]The idea of the "bumping against" already recalls the notion of affects as an encounter between material bodies that "bump against each other."

provide descriptive close-ups written in the present tense and in the genre of the ethnographic description with a first-person narrative focus on the ethnographer's sensorial imagination and the situation s/he refracts. These close-ups intertwine with notes I jotted down *in vivo* and ethnographic observations *a posteriori* (where I re-imagined myself in the scene).

At the narrative center is the intensification of what I call an "atmospheric crisis" enveloping the couple in therapy and progressively affecting the leading therapist, the team, and the ethnographer. This specific atmosphere of crisis condenses an affective sense of exhaustion, toxicity, and impossibility. Simona and Enrique, the couple in therapy, are trapped in the repetitive return to a couple form that is thwarting any imaginative temporal horizon (see Crapanzano 2004).[23] At the same time this sense of crisis intertwines with the couple's experience of Argentina's economic crisis in 2001-2002, where the country collapsed under the largest sovereign debt in history. At this crucible, their crisis will *get to* Micol, who is the leading therapist of this session. This atmosphere will trigger an affective breakdown bearing the memories of Micol's own experience with a previous and more domestic economic crisis. Different temporalities, then, are folded within a present that channels and refracts travelling intensities.

An atmosphere, to think with Kathleen Stewart, "is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves. It is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect – a capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event" (2011, 452).

More generally, this atmospheric crisis can be thought as an incorporeal cloud, abstract yet concrete, that is *"hanging over"* people's head and always on the verge of being actualized within the interstices of ordinary lives.[24]

In treatment: Micol's breakdown

After flickering for a few seconds the screen stabilizes the image. Almibar, Clara, and I are sitting in a room of a psychotherapeutic institution offering couples and family therapy. We are all eating some *facturas* (sweet pastries), while installing ourselves in front of the LCD screen that will soon project the upcoming therapy session, which will be held in the adjacent room. Dr. Almibar, the head of the team of therapists, looks at me: "Doing well, dear?" As I start responding, Micol arrives: she is the psychotherapist in charge of the upcoming session. She peeks into our room and then goes to the therapy room. She turns on the camera. Simona and Enrique, the two patients in the other room, appear on the screen. It is their eighth session of systemic couples counseling. Clara, the psychotherapist sitting close to me, pensively picks up

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[23]As written, all names and major details have been changed. Simona and Enrique agreed to be observed by the team and the ethnographer. I changed the names of the psychotherapists to further protect their privacy, although they might have preferred to be identified. I provide my translation from Spanish to English of the therapy sessions and the interviews. I am not providing the original Spanish in the footnotes. To keep a sense of the translation I have decided to leave in italics certain words in Spanish. The italics, thus, do not indicate "code switching."

[24]This sentence bears the traces of Deleuze's notion of the "virtual" as a real yet abstract "cloud" not completely belonging to the present and that can never be fully actualized (Deleuze 1990; Deleuze and Guattari 1987); of Veena Das' notion of the "ordinary" as a spatio-temporal dimension where historical intensities "descend" (2006); and of a focus on the ordinary as an affect-filled social space (Berlant 2011; Stewart 2007).

her notebook. Spectators of Simona and Enrique's affective crisis we dwell along an ethical threshold of therapeutic care and (pan)optic participation.[25]

The image stabilizes after a sunbeam hitting the lens of the camera darkens the screen. I glance out of the window and clouds are coming and going in the grayish blue sky of the capital. Our room is completely cloudy while the dark screen indexes the presence of the sun in the other room as sunbeams are reaching the lens of the camera. As I look at the screen I am absorbed into an incipient thought on the "distant proximity" I have with the couple in therapy. We might be of the same space, but not of the same light, I think to myself.

After adjusting the brightness for a few seconds the closed-circuit camera's image on screen is clear. Simona and Enrique are sitting on two white armchairs. Simona is smiling at Micol, while Enrique is looking down at his shoes. He is wearing a crisp button-up blue shirt. "How elegant!" says Micol to open the session, while finding a comfortable position in her armchair. "*Bueno*," she continues, "how is the couple doing?" Simona looks at Enrique with a sardonic grimace, "*Y*…Bad, very bad, very bad. No?"

"Yes, very bad," Enrique confirms.

Simona peers at Micol, as if hoping that this session of therapy would vaporize the couple's recursive crisis. "We did slightly better," she says, "but now we are still doing really bad. These two weeks I felt really alone, sad… I cried a lot… spontaneously, it was coming from my anguish. I was alone, sad, tired… I don't even remember why." Simona continues explaining how things went poorly the past two weeks. Fight after fight, Simona and Enrique's week is an endless succession of missed encounters. She temporarily concludes, "I don't know what to do, every day I think things would be different but it's more of the same, more of the same, *entendés*?"

Simona is exhausted and she keeps saying she cannot take it anymore, and that she cannot find a way to escape the "more of the same" in which she feels stuck. She keeps coming back to the narrative promise of having *a* life with Enrique but the present tense of their couple form doesn't "deliver" the promises it holds captive.[26] Enrique has been in between jobs since the economic crisis of 2001-2002, he has lost all his small investments and he is more and more angry and frustrated. Simona wants to help him but he closes into himself. He comes back home and feels alienated from family life. "In my home, in the house I built," he says.

Like other men I observed in therapy, Enrique seemingly symptomatizes his frustration by losing himself in the city. He wanders around, comes home late, forgetting the temporalities of the couple form. "I waited for him… then he comes late and he doesn't even know why he was late," says Simona in a whisper. [27]

 "Where were you when Simona was waiting for you?" Micol asks with a maternally irritated tone. "I don't know, I was just… I don't know, I was walking then I forgot what time it was, you know, at work, they are just driving me crazy." Wandering through Buenos Aires as an exhausted dweller of a recursively almost-collapsing everydayness, Enrique enters the therapeutic space and his intimate relationship floating through an atmospheric crisis that *has* him, without really being something easily identifiable. "I don't know, I don't know what I have

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[25]On the role this model of vision played in the development of the "family form" in the U.S. see Deborah Weinstein (2013). See also Orit Halpern (2015) on vision and communicative objectivity.

[26]For Lauren Berlant's *cruel optimism* is a (melancholically) recursive return to clusters of promises that thwart any further flourishing (2011).

[27]I am thinking with Arlie Russell Hochschild the avoidance of coming back home in order to avoid "more work" in a reversal between home and work (1997).

to do," he often says tiredly. Trapped in a job he is not trained for, frustrated by an object-less dissatisfaction, Enrique distractedly observes Simona's attempts to break through this crisis-scape and reach something else, anything else.

While Micol, Simona, and Enrique share a fleeting moment of silence, I sense an increasingly dense atmosphere in the room where we are sitting with the team. I register the static arrival of an atmosphere of impossibility, exhaustion, and impasse. The air seems thicker as I breathe in a shared silence in our room. Almibar takes a deep breath and Clara emits a whispered "*uff...*"

Affects are non-individual and fleeting intensities that travel in relational milieus. The difference between a vague "now" and a "before" is sensed and refracted, it is temporally transformed into an attuned abstraction mediating my being-in-the world (Heidegger 2008).[28] My embodied presence registers a sense of exhausted impasse actualized by Simona and Enrique's narrative. I am a thinking-medium following incipient thoughts while being drawn and folded within my ethnographic present. Transforming an affective intensity through images and thoughts I am at the threshold of different temporalities.[29]

While absorbed into this situation my ethnographic imagination compels me to pay attention to the atmosphere. I am suspended between intentional selective attention and a non-individual affect that *gets to me.* An affective realm beyond my intentional hermeneutics, sets in motion my ethnographic imagination. The abstract yet concrete crisis enveloping Simona and Enrique's "coupled malaise" seems to be descending in our space as an immanent force being refracted through different mediums. The screen, the camera, their bodies, our bodies. How do you measure atmospheric exhaustion?

I glance at Almibar jotting down notes about Micol's session. Clara is sitting at my side, also writing down notes while looking up at the screen. They are silently absorbed, while looking worried. Two doors and less than thirteen feet are separating Simona, Enrique, and Micol from us. Thirty years together, twenty years of doubts, more than ten years of economic difficulties, are all intermittently delivered over Micol while circulating toward *us*, through the screen. Am I the only one registering and refracting this circulating intensity? What does it mean to *adhere* to the flesh of a given affective milieu?[30] Where is the heuristic threshold between registering something and transforming it conceptually into a difference that makes a difference?

I will now offer two more close ups of the therapeutic session in question. Again, I am writing in the genre of the ethnographic description and in the present tense. The present tense is at the heart of what I am calling the ethnographic genre of presence where the ethnographer's body is imagined as a living medium absorbing and transforming circulating intensities. In this sense it is an abstract and concrete "present *in*tense."

In treatment (second close-up)

Enrique is looking down*,* talking loudly while shaking his head. After many years trying to find a stable position, he is always in between jobs. Simona interrupts her husband, saying that

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[28]See Kathleen Stewart on "atmospheric attunements" (2011); also Jason Throop's engagement with moods (2010, 2014), and Jarrett Zigon's ontologies of attunement (2014).

[29]William Connolly writes about "multiple zones of temporality" in our world(s) of becoming (2011: 7). Throop also writes about temporally pregnant "intermediary forms of experience" (2009).

[30]I am evoking Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idioms of "adherence" and "flesh" in relation to our *être-au-monde,* being-*toward*-the world (1968).

she loves her work and that she loves growing professionally day after day. Then Enrique interrupts her while complaining about his current job as electrician and the rough situation he faces daily with wholesale dealers. Their voices overlap for a few seconds.

Like many sessions I have observed, the couple overlays and intertwines narratives about quotidian problems and relationship issues. Enrique explains how he is building some outdoor stairs in the patio only because *she* asked for it. "But… we were talking about how you didn't show up at your nephew's birthday! This has nothing to do with anything!" interjects Simona seeking Micol's complicity. Micol's voice breaks through the screen. She interrupts Enrique's account of his latest problems with the building of one house's electric system. "During the last session you both mentioned," she says, "that your relational crisis might have accentuated some years ago after various economic issues… what happened?"

There is something here. We seem, in the other room, to prepare for a potential opening, all leaning in toward the screen, waiting. In the present tense of anticipation. An atmosphere of crisis intensifies while a breach is opened by the affective undertone of the question. A force, an affect, a potential something passes through the screen.

After a moment of silent suspense, Enrique looks at Simona, then looks at his shoes. He is murmuring, "the crisis… it is all my fault. I had a family business, a restaurant, and… don't get me wrong! I knew I had to sell it, but I did it all wrong". Enrique hints at a difficult relationship with his father who left him a small restaurant downtown Buenos Aires, concluding he should have made a clothing store out of that *maldito* restaurant. The restaurant failed during the 2001 crisis, bringing Enrique and Simona, with their three kids, to an economic collapse.

"Una crisis fatal, a fatal crisis" Simona continues, "I was at home with the kids and…" She starts crying, "without a *peso*, not even to buy some milk". They had two kids at the time, and they had to move out of their house and live with Enrique's parents, with no money, not even to buy milk, and an unquantifiable amount of debt. The devaluation hit their situation hard, leaving them with nothing from one day to the next.

Their individual story stems from a shared sense of the past economic crisis of 2001-2002, where Argentina collapsed under the largest sovereign debt in history disrupting a decade of glorious fantasies of modernity and economic growth (see D'Avella 2014; Muir 2015).

Enrique's interpretation of the event emerges as an individualizing etiology without ever being discharged over external (e.g. social, political, economic) factors: "the crisis, it was my fault," he repeats.

Simona suspends her narrative. She breathes in while welcoming a Kleenex from Micol's rapid reaction. Simona takes her time. She takes her time to cry in silence while shaking her head and gently covering her mouth with the wet Kleenex. Enrique keeps staring at his shoes, while drawing an imaginary ellipsis with his right foot. We, on the other side, are fully drawn into this moment. We are all performing a sort of "scopic tip-toeing" around her outline appearing on the screen, silently circling around her affected state. Something is circulating. This is not due to quite common tears-in-therapy (so many times we witnessed tears without being caught in their resonances). Something is there, and here, and in-between us. We sense it, we are caught in it, and we are *of* it. I glance at Clara, her eyes are filled with gentle tears. The desertic landscape of intimate crisis absorbs her saline affect. Almibar's cheeks are warmly red. (*Uff*…)

Simona recounts their experience of the economic collapse. After being deprived of the "middle-class" fantasy of upward mobility and stability, she began selling used clothes in the

streets while Enrique was unemployed.[31] She then slowly made her "way up," gaining more credit and credibility with the *mayoristas* (wholesalers), until she started selling clothes to shops around the city. "I was working all the time," she says with a broken voice, "and he would rarely help me. He was at home, depressed, sad, he couldn't find a job. He tried, he tried, but nothing came up." Trying to navigate through the storm, Simona kept the family together, taking care of the children while progressively professionalizing herself, thus carrying the burden of both emotional and economic work (see Cooper 2014; Hochschild 2012). The event of the economic crisis, I hypothesize, left Enrique stupefied, while he was experiencing the floundering of his gendered expectations about household economics.

The couple-form has been considered as fundamentally complicit with the formation of a self-governing subject in democratic and modern public spheres (Giddens 1992) and as clusters of liberal fantasies (Povinelli 2006). In this scene, the team and I witnessed the collapse of the modern promise in both economic and relational terms. Enrique's *bad choices* foreclose the fulfillment of gendered imaginaries of household polarizations. He stutters while he makes off-handed remarks about Simona *at work*. "She shouldn't be working that much," he keeps saying, while blaming the collapse of middle-class (heteronormative) fantasies on his own bad managerial choices.

The floundering "intimate couple," thus, is a refractive and intensive "key transfer point" where "liberal imaginaries of contractual economics, politics, and sociality" and "liberal forms of power in the contemporary world" (*ibid*: 180) intermingle with gendered imaginaries, expectations, and performativities (see Butler 2011).

Micol passes Simona another tissue and Simona dries her tears only to welcome new ones. "Slowly… slowly", she whispers, "*con eso fuimos saliendo*" (we managed to rise up). Micol listens attentively then says with a firm tone, "It's 13 years that you, Simona, are 'doing it' (*venís remándola*) all by yourself! And you, Enrique, how did you feel?" Enrique looks down, mumbling something about how he should have sold the restaurant. "I didn't know what to do, I didn't. I didn't want to see her working, and I had nothing. Look at her now, at her work, she still works too much…" Enrique seems to be getting lost in details as Simona keeps crying enveloped in the memories of these economic difficulties. We are drawn to the screen, listening. Micol's voice delivers a nervously emotional response, "Enrique, how do you take the fact that today Simona is still sustaining the 80% of the household?" Micol is now speaking with an almost provocative tone. At the same time, she sounds tired. Her voice trembles, producing waves across rooms.

She decides to take a break to come debrief with the team. I hear her leave the room and close the door down the hall. She abruptly opens the door of our room, and then attempts to close it gently. "When I passed through the door I thought 'this couple needs to separate'," she tells me. "You see," she adds, "I am losing my optimism." I know she is talking to me in reference to my "critiques" of her "therapeutic optimism," but she seems to be addressing someone else.

Almibar-the-psychotherapist reacts more promptly than me, the slow ethnographer: "What's going on, *querida*?" he asks her. Micol mumbles something bringing her right hand

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[31]The Argentinean "middle class" is an ambiguous and "residual" category (Adamovsky 2014: 115) for the majority of the Argentinean population recognizes itself as being part of it. Tied to nationalistic "origin stories," the Argentinean middle class catalyzes a moral imaginary of white and modern migrants of European descent who "built" the country (see Visacovsky et al. 2009). The "middle class" emerged in the public discourse as the main protagonist of the 2001-2002 crisis (Visacovsky 2014: 224). On one side actively engaged in the *cacerolazos* (spontaneous street protests), on the other called out for its neoliberal practices of consumption that metonymically represented the "sins" of the nation (see Fava and Zenobi 2009).

over her lips. Her trembling lips visibly announce copious tears to come. Drop after drop we are all thrown into a fluid space of circulating affectivities.

While an affective thickness of this enfolding atmospheric crisis was swallowing Micol, she stormed out of the room. Micol, we would discuss later, came to the realization she had to help the couple separate, rather than try to improve their relationship. She had an attachment to the couple form that was affecting her therapeutic work with Simona and Enrique as she was trying to "save the couple." Simona and Enrique's crisis is a quotidian return to a never-fully collapsing couple-form intertwined with the therapist's attachment to the intimate couple as *the* relational form channeling normative flows of desire and attachment.

In treatment (third close-up)

While Micol is trying to hold her tears, I am frozen in the armchair, unable to move, to mutter, to react. My body shows an initial intent to write down something; I stop myself. While I refract the circulation of an intensity, a force, I am thrown into a temporal divergence, as I relate conceptually to the unfolding event. "The therapist is falling apart," I think, "this moment is just…" My thoughts slip away as Micol breaks into tears. She cries.

While Almibar asks if she experienced something similar in her personal life, I am confused and excited (the perverse pleasures of ethnographic modes of presence): the therapeutic setting has moved from the room across the screen to our room behind the screen. Simona and Enrique are silently waiting for Micol to come back. Micol starts talking, amidst circulating tears.

The affective atmosphere containing the vapor of overlapping crisis grew thick and heavy enough to turn into rain. It is the passage from atmospheric affective states in the background to eventual intensifications, qualifications, and definitions.

While Clara is giving her a tissue, Micol says she identifies with Simona and her suffering as a mother who was scared of being unable to feed her children. Micol shares her *projective* pain while acknowledging she cannot look at Enrique as he triggers an uncomfortable rage in her. Enrique's passive stupor is the signifier of an unbearable and gendered intensity.

Performing an actual therapeutic intervention within another ongoing therapy Almibar unfolds a series of quietly formulated questions directed at Micol. She tells us she grew up in a very similar situation, with an absent father and a struggling mother. The *longue durée* of the Argentinean crisis descends, or condenses, in the interstices of her words. Here, Micol worked through her intensity, while defining it hermeneutically.

She is trembling, surprised by the emergence of an intensity related to her past economic struggles during a therapy where she is the leading psychotherapist. Enrique *is* her father, Simona *is* her mother, but also herself, as a woman. Micol is the decompressing valve of this thick, historical, and present atmosphere, she is refracting the social struggle of the late insertion of women within the working and professional world in Argentina (see Halperin Weisburd et al. 2011) and common fears of hyperinflation (see D'Alessandro 2013); but also the story of collapsing couples and families when hit by an economic crisis (Cooper 2014) and of women like Simona who gained economic independence after the crisis due to a radically new mobility.

I am transforming through images and incipient thoughts the transmission of a non-subjective atmosphere that *has us*, while realizing that we might be all inhabiting different temporal folds. I am inhabiting an ethnographic form of presence and attention while realizing that I have been holding an image of my mother in law's migration to Italy from Argentina,

during the earlier crisis of the 1990s. Simona and Enrique are caught between their past and their recursive present, Micol is caught in a different past (she is not talking about the same economic crisis) while struggling to be present. Almibar and Clara, as I will discover later, had been only partially affected by the economic crisis that Simona and Enrique are referring to and are mostly worried for Micol. Everybody, I realize while holding my tears, is elsewhere (or rather in the here-else of disjointed temporalities in a shared atmosphere).

After a few minutes, the therapy inside the therapy fades away. The rain is evaporating back into the background, becoming an affective cloud again. With an almost invisible deep breath Micol wipes away her tears.

We all look at the screen: Enrique and Simona are waiting for their therapist to come back. They are immersed in silence and pierced by it. Simona is drying her tears and readjusting her hair. He is looking up to the ceiling. They both seem exhausted, worn out citizens of collapsing coupledoms. Micol smiles at us apologetically: she is ready to go back.

Opening one door, closing it, opening the other door, then closing it. She is back on screen, back in the therapy room. Micol sits down and looks straight at Simona, with an almost severe yet motherly tone and asks, "Until when… how many more times you will give Enrique chances? Until when?" The atmosphere is tense. The affective dimension circulating through the emergence of a public and intimate intensity seems to have worn everyone out. I glance at Clara and she seems to be crying. I soak in the density of the air. I breathe slowly while Micol formulates her last sentence: "I will leave you now with a question I want you to think about in the next two weeks: 'how will this couple continue? How?'"

Refractive imagination

I have offered first person close-ups in the genre of ethnographic description. I intentionally refrain from providing a critical hermeneutic in respect to Micol's breakdown, thus leaving the temporal and emotional genre of her intensification open. My attempt is to deliver a *sense* of an atmospheric crisis that circulates and is refracted travelling across different temporal planes.

In closing, I want to consider ethnography as a genre of presence and presencing (via writing) in relation to modes of knowledge production. The representational demands advanced by non-subjective (and para-representational) affects call for a re-imagining of what it means to be an embodied (and self-reflexive) ethnographer. As affective forces are thought to be registered and to travel at the threshold of conscious and non-conscious forms of awareness, we are challenged to specify the temporal and imaginative work of transformation from sensorial differences that make a difference to the creation of ethnographic images, descriptions, and concepts. In the present moment of the discipline, an interest in an anthropology through images has emerged alongside a recent turn to nonhuman worlds of/in becoming and anthropocenic ontologies.[32] While these interests are not necessarily related thematically, they bring to the fore a methodological tension between genres of presentation and genres of presence in/to the field. The attention to non-subjective and nonhuman forces, that is, requires a certain undoing of the first-person at the core of reflexive ethnographic knowledge – which does not mean a

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[32]In conversation with Stefania Pandolfo I read ethnographic engagements through images as a form of attuned "dream-work" (see 1998; *forthcoming*). Regarding nonhuman ontologies, I am thinking of recent works on forests and sylvan thought (Kohn 2013), spacey spaces and deterrrestrialized porosities (Howe 2015), sand storms and atmospheres (Choy and Zee 2015), plastic and the plasticene (Pandian 2016).

"banishment of subjectivity" (cf. Martin 2013). This undoing is more a call for *play* with genres of presentation and imagination. I suggest that the imagination is playing a crucial role in allowing us to think-with nonhuman and non-personal worlds. It is an imagination about the ethnographer as a sensorial medium able to enter in some form of relation with worlds in becoming that might not speak the same type of language. In this sense, I am fascinated by an anthropology through images (Stevenson 2014: 14), which develops sensuous genres of presence and writing (see Pandian 2015) and turns to expressive modes of presentation that trouble discursive modes of knowledge production.[33]

"Refraction" allows me to conceptualize the presence of affective intensities and the qualitative transformation they undergo when being registered and channeled by mediums with different densities. The metaphor of refractivity bears another set of consequences. On one hand, it helps avoiding the reflexive impasse (post crisis of representation) where the "other" is at risk to become essentially "re-invented" by the ethnographic machine. As Viveiros de Castro writes, reflexivity and the post-colonial "crisis of representation" set forth a series of impasses where the ethnographer was imagined as capable of (re)inventing the "other" (De Castro 2014: 40).[34] In this sense I use Merleau-Ponty's focus not on our "projections" but rather on a "being of latency" (1968: 136) a presentation of a certain absence that, through our abstract yet concrete affective imagination is caught into some*thing* that is, despite everything, *some*thing empirically given within localized lifeworlds.

The ethnographic living medium is here affected by localized intensities that are *given* within specific milieus (i.e. there *is* difference and there *is* otherness, be it human or anything else). These intensities undergo spatio-temporal transformation sustaining the conceptual work of ethnography.

On the other hand, it is a tentative framing of a constitutive non-coincidence of the reflexive subject with itself which is at the core of my understanding of "(self)reflexivity." As explored in the first chapter, Hoon Song reads the "reflexive turn" in the social sciences in conjunction with the diffusion of Foucault's model of the panoptic gaze and the emergence of a self-loathing "white nihilism." The author argues that the French self-reflexive model implies an always already social/cultural sense of self-loss and dispossession. Precisely in this sense, reflexivity can never be imagined as a possible co-incidence rendering visible the ethnographer's gaze and the contingencies of knowledge production. The reflexive ethnographic subject of knowledge production, I argue, always implies a resistant kernel, an intractable element which makes reflexivity a project of self-displacement rather than self-identification. [35]

Following this idea, I also take from different strands of anthropological literature promoting a focus on the imaginative, non-conscious, and emotional processes of the ethnographer as a legitimate milieu of knowledge production.[36] The notion of the ethnographer

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[33]See Lisa Stevenson writing on the relation between the "imaginistic" and discursive realms of knowledge (2014: 10). See also Robert Desjarlais ongoing engagement with images and sensory ethnography (2003) and a recent AAA double panel, "Image as Method" (Denver 2016; see Desjarlais 2016).

[34] However, in the same period there has been also an attention to the role of affective modalities of "getting caught" by forces in the field (Favret-Saada 1981; Pandolfo 1998; Rosaldo 1993).

[35]In a similar vein Karen Barad explores the epistemo-ontology of quantum physics examining the breaks between reflection, refraction, and diffraction (2007).

[36]See my first chapter. I am here referring to works that consider the role of the (psychoanalytic) unconscious in ethnographic research, from the classic (and still pioneering) work of George Devereux (1967), to more recent works on the inter-subjective and ethnographic role of dreaming, dream-interpretation, and reverie (see, for

as a refractive medium, takes the first person ethnographic persona also from the view-point of non-conscious, affective, and textural processes sustaining the anthropological imagination. At the same time, it considers the temporal consequences of an incessant passage between mediums of affective intensities. I will explore this theme in depth through my experiments of experience with hypnosis in the last chapter.

Coda

Almibar promptly turns off the screen. It is "us" again: we all peer into each other's eyes. It is a subtle passage from the dry eye of the camera to our wet eyes. Almibar comments briefly on the session, saying that Simona is progressively gaining her independence and that she will be ready to leave him, *if she wants to*. Micol comes back into the room. She tries not to cry for a few seconds then starts crying again, even more deeply. I am still frozen in the chair as I stare at her, unable to say anything. She breathes in deeply, and then runs to the bathroom to cry. Almibar seems incredibly calm, but his cheeks are burning red. I rub my eyes squeezing out a teardrop while caught in the circulation of an affect, the fragments of multiple temporalities entangling personal and non personal histories. Micol comes back in the room, having exhausted her tears. She sits down, takes a deep breath.

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example, Borneman 2011; Pandolfo 1997). I also refer to recent turns to emotions (see Davies and Spencer 2010) and sensuous presence (Stoller 2010) in the field.

III. The Couple-Image

And by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing - an existence placed halfway between the "thing" and the "representation."

Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (2010: 5)

Aunque ya no sientas mas amor / por mi solo rencor / yo tampoco tengo nada / que sentir y eso es peor/ pero te extraño / mi amor te extraño/ no cabe duda que es verdad / que la costumbre es mas/ fuerte que el amor
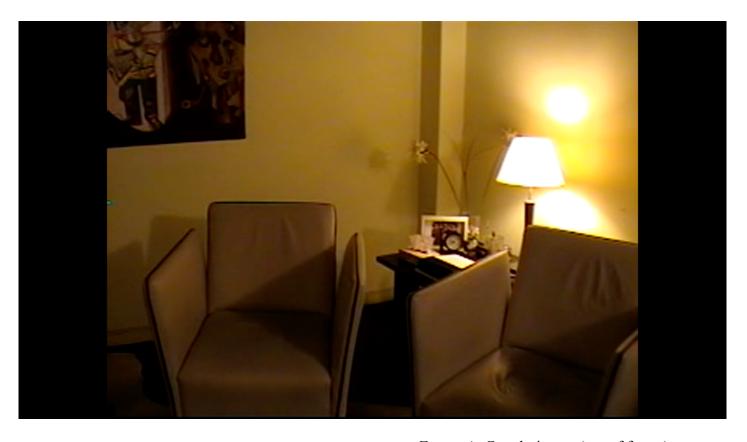
Juan Gabriel, *Costumbres*[1]

Figure 4. Couple-image (out of frame).

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[1]Even if you don't feel love anymore / only rancor / I also have nothing to feel / and this is worse / but I miss you / my love I miss you /there is no doubt, it's true / that habit is stronger / than love

The couple image (phenomenal phantasies)

In this chapter I circle around a series of philosophical evocations that, rather than proposing a critical theory, are in the genre of ethnographically grounded conceptual exercises. I will use two terms that distinguish two aspects of the romantic couple: the *couple form* and the *couple-image*. It is important to understand their difference not as ontological but rather as a phenomenological variation produced by the ethnographic eye, the optic apparatus, and the abstract and concrete "phantasmographies"(Desjarlais 2016) their encounters produce.[2]

I have explored the ways in which the therapeutic subject is given over to the optic apparatus. Here I want to bring to the extreme the idea that the romantic couple, as historically determined and embodied structure of relationality, is always already available to the realm of the image.[3] I will take the historically contingent structure of the couple as the couple form. This form, I will suggest, once becoming available to the optic machine shows its "photogenic" side. At one level, this photogenic side captured by the eye of the camera is the surface, the visual manifestation of what I will call the couple image.

Through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Henri Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze I take the image as an empirical yet abstract milieu from which to consider questions related to temporality, in-betweenness, and therapeutic efficacy. My first most ambitious claim is that the couple-image[4] is a textural membrane in-between the partners of the couple that emerges, among other places, within the therapeutic encounter between the couple and the optic apparatus. Such an image sustains the repetition of affective attachments *in the present tense* of the couple form. My second claim, in fact, rephrases psychotherapeutic common sense: the refractive mirroring produced through the optic apparatus illustrates a possible theory of therapeutic change. To see the image *as image*, I will argue, is what couples need to do to re-imagine their relationships. In the case of Ruth and Eliseo, one of the couples appearing in this chapter, the question of the image and the imagination will explicitly emerge during one of their last therapeutic sessions.

I have written about Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *flesh* as an in-between the two, a texture of differentiation that is neither object nor subject but that sustains their relationality (see also Carbone 2015; Vasseleu 1998). The flesh, I wrote, is for Merleau-Ponty the invisible in-between, the hidden but present side of things, a virtual background that escapes vision while constituting it.[5]

Despite Merleau-Ponty's critical and sometimes dismissive engagement with the philosophy of Henri Bergson, I am interested in foregrounding an intersection between the two philosophers.[6] In particular, I find in both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty an explicit attempt to

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[2]See my previous chapter on the phenomenon and phantasy and on Desjarlais' "phantasmography" (2016). In the next chapter I explore in depth the relation between the imagination and the phenomenal.

[3]As in previsou chapters I am here (ab)using the figures of "availability" and being "given over" taking them from conversations with my mentor Lawrence Cohen (see also Cohen 2007).

[4]I am using interchangeably the hyphenated and non-hyphenated "couple image."

[5]If we think the *medium* as an in-between and a go-between (Mitchell 2005: 204), then the flesh is the medium, in a certain sense.

[6]Merleau-Ponty, for example, criticizes Bergson for seeking a coincidence (through intuition) between the reflexive subject and the object of its introspection (see 2013: 63). However, this might not be a correct reading of Bergson's restless attempt to consider the diagrammatic work of abstraction in relation to the unfolding of becoming. In fact, Bergson writes that the perception of our inner life consists "in a sort of refracting of pure duration into space, a refracting which permits us to separate our psychical states, to reduce them to a more and more impersonal form and to impose names upon them – in short, to make them enter the current of social life" (2010: 100). See my next

describe the "presentation of a certain absence" (1968: 136), the empirical presence within forms of lived experience of a real but abstract (Deleuze 1990) *texture of being*. As I wrote, such texture is what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh of the invisible, which entangles the phenomenal with the phantasmatic.

Merleau-Ponty's intellectual horizon has been recursively haunted by different attempts to overcome what were considered by him dualistic philosophies separating subjects from objects, the empirical from the speculative. As Gilles Deleuze underlines, Bergson's "frankly dualistic" (Bergson 2010: 1) philosophical vocabulary intensifies polarizations between elements to such an extent that he also recursively troubles binary forms of thinking (Deleuze 1990). I suggest that Bergson was seeking, like Merleau-Ponty, to conceptualize a *third space* between poles, an abstract yet real in between. In the introduction of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson writes that matter is an "aggregate of images" and by image he means "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation,* but less than that which the realist calls a *thing* – an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation'" (2010: 5).

The notion of a presence half-way between thing and representation resonates with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the *flesh* which, as Mauro Carbone suggests, is to be understood as "Visibility" and the flesh of images (2015).

As becomes evident in Deleuze's conceptualization of the "time-image" in post World War II cinema (1989), the question of the image in Bergson sets forth an explicitly temporal aspect that it is somewhat underplayed in Merleau-Ponty's work on the visible. The image for Bergson is a "present state" bearing the temporal trace and weight of the past and the future. The image only partially coincides with the heterogeneous quality of the moving present (2010: 77).[7] This moving present, Bergson's *duration*, is a continuous flow "in which we pass insensibly from one state to the other: a continuity which is really lived, but artificially decomposed" (*ibid*: 100-101). What interests me here is to understand this moving present as always already mediated through the image, which is a virtual retention of the past *in the present* or, using Merleau-Ponty, a presentation of a certain absence.

How to describe and conceptualize such spaces? As in the past chapter, I will develop descriptions merging the imaginative and the phenomenal, running after the emergence of an invisible membrane, the flesh images, the presentation of a virtual in-between.

Romina and Julio's last therapy session

Romina and Julio are looking at Almibar, their psychotherapist.[8] Romina sniffles. She sniffs again, and again, and again, thus offering a vaguely rhythmic cadence to a momentary silence. Silence expands and contracts, punctuating the poles of the therapeutic triangle appearing on the screen. Silence, in its aural dimensionality, seems to make and mark relational spaces between Almibar, Julio, and Romina. Julio is staring at the therapist while nervously tapping his right hand on the armchair. Julio, like Romina, seems to be keeping time. Tap after tap he is offering to a pervasive silence a series of rhythmic interstices in which to hide.

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chapter for introspective refraction and an engagement with Merleau-Ponty's idea of a fundamental non-coincidence between the reflexive subject and itself.

[7]However, Deleuze argues that *duration* is "not merely lived experience" (2006: 37).

[8]Lawrence Cohen noticed the inverted reference of Romina and Julio's names with the names of Romeo and Juliet. However unintentional, the reference is useful to understand couples in therapy through a cinematic and performative lens. Romance is, first of all, a narrative genre (see Giddens 1992).

Romina's sniffing and Julio's tapping *look and sound like* a musical rendering of their off-beat relational metric. The silences they share, that is, compose an aural texture of their rhythmic discounters. Relationships, they remind the viewer, are also arranged by relational metrics that sometime cannot find a common beat, a commensurable rhythm to riff on.[9]

Suddenly, Almibar's whispered sigh pierces the silent bubble with a closing question, "*¿Nos quedamos así?*" (Shall we leave it here?) Neither Julio nor Romina reply. However, Julio quickly stands up from the armchair with an affirmative gesture. Romina nods to Almibar but dwells longer in her position as if composing a figure, the stylized figure of herself contemplating for a last moment the evaporation of a relational space she shared with Julio during a few years.

Almibar stands up as well and Julio is reaching for his wallet to pay for the session. They step both out of frame. The camera is still running, as if filming the end of a movie showing: lights are turned on and in the theater spectators gather their belongings, still half caught into what they have seen, but already elsewhere.[10]

We hear Almibar and Julio leaving the room. Romina is still in the frame, sitting on the armchair. After a few seconds she steps out from the contemplative pose she seemed to be impersonating. Romina emerges as the spectator of her own figuration, while offering the silent embodiment of herself to the eye of the camera, to the eye of a potentially anonymous and in/finite gaze.[11]

Giving her back to the eye of the camera she reaches a box of Kleenex and picks up a few tissues. She looks at her armchair and collects a few other tissues that absorbed her recent tears. She seems to be looking at herself reflected in the wall, but we can see only her shadow and we are left to imagine she is visually caressing the contours of her own shadow. She looks around the room, as if distractedly looking for a last thought. She leaves.

The camera keeps running, now recording a still life of the therapy room. We see two armchairs, a coffee table with a round table clock covering a postcard reproduction of a painting by Almibar, a dim light, a painting on the wall, a wall.[12] In the recording, we hear the sound of a closing door, we hear the reverberation of Romina's steps recorded by the camera. Step after step the sound brings a temporal dimension to the visibly crystalized immobility of the room. *Sound is the temporality of the visible*. Step after step Romina walks away from the camera and from

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[9]I am thinking with Henri Lefebvre's attention to rhythm as a pulsating cadence *making* and *marking* socio-relational and embodied spaces (2013). At the same time, I am approaching rhythm as a "productive repetition" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 314) that emerges from and interpellates *a* milieu. Deleuze and Guattari's rhythmic imagination suggests that there is a relationship between refrains (as rhythmic differential repetitions) and territories (1987: 326-327). What interests me in this context is to consider the relationship between the couple's refrains and the relational milieu the are "acting out" when in therapy. For a rhythmic attunement to the lifeworld of Tamil film makers see Anand Pandian's recent work (2015)

[10]I am here playing with an inverted image in Merleau-Ponty's work who writes about the *necessary* obscurity for the clarity of the spectacle in relation to the body as a background of and for action: "[bodily space] is the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out…" (2002: 15).

[11]I am underlining the performative aspect of Romina's "poses," like in dance poses or when posing for a photograph, implying both *a* practice and *a* spectatorship. The idea of the pose, foregrounds the fact that Romina is never alone in this scene: the camera is recording and *we* are watching. At the same time, I want to anticipate (see further) the idea of a private spectacularization of one's own intimate exteriority. I am especially conceiving of the ambivalence of the intimate sphere with Lauren Berlant who writes on the ways institutions of intimacy are folded within contemporary therapeutic cultures which, as witnessing genres, sustain clusters of public intimacy (2000:1)

[12]The painting on the wall is made by Almibar and it is the rendering of the lyrics of a famous tango.

the therapy room. She walks away from a last session spent trying to save a collapsing relationship with Julio. And this time, as far as we know, this is the end. We hear another door closing. She is out of the office.

The intimate spectacle of *data* (as "that which is given")

Three weeks before my departure from Buenos Aires, Dr. Almibar gave me three different sets of video recorded therapy session that he thought I would find interesting for my research once back in Berkeley. Specifically, he suggested for me to watch the five therapy sessions in one of the DVDs. *Éstas en particular te van a gustar, son muy interesantes,* he said.[13] I was able to bring some of the video material with me and I let more than one year pass before I decided to watch Romina and Julio's five sessions.

Romina and Julio's sessions were recorded in 2013, a little before my arrival in Buenos Aires. Considering that Almibar wanted me to watch this particular short series of sessions, I always assumed they contained a success story where the tangled affective knots of a relationship in crisis were wisely untied by the couple therapist's intervention. I was far from the truth: the DVD contained the descending trajectory of a progressive separation between Julio and Romina. The couple's affective crisis intertwined throughout the sessions with an escalating conflict between Almibar and Julio.[14] What did Almibar want me to see?

In the final minutes of Romina and Julio's last recorded session, I encountered something. This "something" was offered and produced by the video camera itself rather than by Almibar's more or less explicit intent to make me a spectator of a separating couple in therapy. In the last minutes of the video, that is, the camera kept running after the end of the therapy session, thus capturing for some minutes the empty therapeutic setting after Julio and Romina's departure. This footage has immediately reformulated my question: what did the camera want me to see?[15]

Asking this question means to think of the camera as a "desiring-machine" (Deleuze and Guattari 2009) producing and registering audiovisual invitations.[16] One one side, I am invited to displace my gaze and follow the camera's desire to show me the therapeutic lifeworld from the camera's perspective. On the other, the invisible trace of this mechanical desire puts on display the peculiarly cinematic features of my ethnographic material.

Regarding the first invitation, I take the cinematic machine as capable of cognitive (and thought-like) forms of recording and expression (Deleuze 1986; 1989). Thinking-with the desire of the camera, that is, suggests us to conceive of the "optic-machine" as having similar properties to what Dziga Vertov defined the *kino-eye*, a mechanical eye capturing "that which the [human] eye doesn't see" and having the "possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear"

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[13]You will like these, they are very interesting.

[14]Julio felt "aggressed" in various instances and thought that Almibar "unprofessionally" sided with Romina's perspective. Romina had kissed a friend of hers and confessed it to Julio after a few months. Julio was angry and felt "forever" betrayed. Almibar had suggested Julio that if he wanted to keep being with Romina he would have had to accept what she did. Julio did not accept that Almibar could take Romina's side.

[15]This question references the title of W.J.T. Mitchell's work on the surplus value of images, *What Do Pictures Want?* (2013).

[16]I am here giving to the camera the burden to fulfill Lawrence Cohen's invitation to be more "invitational" in my writing. In a sense, image after image, the camera invites me in a dance of compulsive invitations.

(1984: 41).[17] As Jean Epstein writes, the cognitive faculty of this "automatic eye" lies in its capacity of recording, 'think-out,' express, and imagine the infinite movements of the real (2014: 13).[18] Stanley Cavell has been similarly fascinated by the cognitive and expressive faculties of the automatic eye producing the filmic medium and writes about its capacity to offer *a succession of automatic world projections* ([1971]1979: 72, original emphasis). In this sense, Cavell is also conceptualizing the lifeworld that the automatic eye brings into being (Trahair 2014: 136).[19] This capacity of the automatic eye to capture a lifeworld bringing it into being leads us to the second invitation regarding the cinematic aspect of my ethnographic data. If the kino-eye captured a lifeworld that escapes the recording capacities of my "anthro-eye," the question is what type of lifeworld has been recorded and what is the (filmic) genre of this recordings.[20]

To begin with, I consider the videotaped material as audiovisual "data" in the most literal sense: as the Latin nominative plural of *datum,* "that which is given."[21] Building on Cavell, the "that" which is "given" in this material is a phenomenological world of couple therapy in Buenos Aires. Couples and therapists, as I have suggested, are *given over* to the optic apparatus which refracts their lifeworld (thus producing a specific type of therapeutic subject). In this sense their bodies-medium become available to the anthropological eye.[22]

In the present tense of my writing horizon, the video recordings of the live sessions of therapy position me as a temporally disjointed private spectator. It is precisely in this temporal disjuncture that I can follow the invitations of the camera's eye while reflecting on the way a certain lifeworld is refracted through and within the videos. I have watched these videos over and over again. I have paused, accelerated, and slowed down the images.[23] The positioned distance of private spectator it to be imagined as a form of distant proximity that still allows for a phenomenological and affective form of engagement with the incessant murmurs of the moving image.[24] The position of distant proximity is a form of "*jonction à distance*," junction/relation at distance, as Merleau-Ponty would write (1964: 265). It is in such spatio-temporal position that I developed a cinematic sensibility towards the material (an intimate spectator of someone else's exteriorized interiority).[25]

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[17]Dziga Vertov was a Soviet pioneer film maker (1896-1954) whose seminal work influenced both cinema and cinema studies.

[18]Jean Epstein (1897-1953) was a widely influential avant-garde French film maker and visionary writer about and from cinema. Recently his work on the intelligence of the cinematic machine (2014) and his most influential essays (2012) have been published in English.

[19]The literature on this topic is overwhelmingly vast. In anthropology, the recent work of Anand Pandian (2015) represents a sharp starting point to consider the cinematic features of the ethnographic enterprise in relation to non-subjective forms of cognition and affection. Amidst the many pedagogies of seeing and thinking cinema, I am mainly drawing from Gilles Deleuze's work on cinema (1986; 1989), which also mediates my reading of André Bazin (1967) and Jean Epstein ([1921] 2012).

[20]For a parallel between the brain and cinema see Deleuze's chapter "Cinema, body and brain, thought (1989: 189-224) and his interview "The Brain Is the Screen: Interview with Gilles Deleuze on "The Time-Image" (1998).

[21]See also my introduction on "data" as phenomenological givenness.

[22]Here and throughout this chapter I owe the figures of being "given over" and becoming "available" to Lawrence Cohen (private conversations. See also Cohen 2007 on "bio-availability").

[23]On the "slowing down" Of the filmic image through memory see Cavell (1979).

[24]On temporal disjuncture(s) and ethnography see, among others, Cerwonka and Malkki (2007); Clifford and Marcus (1986); Fabian (2002); Pandian (2012).

[25]This relation at distance, is made possible precisely by the capacity of mediums to produce "close distance" (Mazzarella 2004) and "distant intimacy" (Ng, *A Time of Lost Gods*, n.d.).

Of course, these videos are not (explicitly) scripted nor edited. However, in this chapter I will argue that the romantic couple form, as an historically determined structure of intimacy, reveals a particular cinematic talent when given over to the optical apparatus. This "photogenic" feature will evidence the visual and performative kernel of intimate relations and especially of intimate relations in therapy.[26]

The cinematic features of the ethnographic material lead me to have in the back of my eye, as it were, a series of traits characterizing the so called "new Argentine Cinema" that developed in Argentina throughout the 1990s and that was heavily influenced by the crisis-scape of hyperinflation and the neoliberal reforms of the then president Carlos Menem (Page 2009).[27] Although this wave of cinematic productions constitutes a rather fragmented and hardly programmatic moment in Argentinean cinema (Andermann 2012: xii) which shouldn't be essentialized, there are a series of traits that seem relevant in this context. With the return of democracy in Argentina (1983) came a period of historically and politically engaged film productions working through the past national horrors.[28] Then, in the crisis-scape of the 1990s, emerged a young generation of film makers that turned its attention to present day Argentina. Such generation, of the so-called *hijos de la hiperinflación* (see D'Alessandro 2014), captured the everyday life of crisis in domestic, suburban, marginal, and rural spaces.[29] In the midst of an economic recession and thus with scarce financial resources and limited technologies new Argentine cinema developed a form of *artisanal domestic realism* where the social crisis was somewhat folded within the technological quality of the medium itself.[30] In this form of (post)neo-realistic cinema, reality "is never directly and naively 'encountered'… different strategies of refraction and staging are at work in order to acknowledge the filmic image's difference and deferral with respect to contemporary reality (*ibid*: xiv).

In this chapter, then, I want to leave open the resonance between an aesthetic moment that circulated and is currently available in Argentina and the filmic genre of my data. In both cases, there is a turn to the "threatened domestic interior" (*ibid*: xvi) of middle-class society captured by available technologies.[31] In both cases, fiction and a renewed interest in the genre of the documentary intermingle and merge into zones of indiscernibility troubling also the private/public divide of a lost national narrative (*ibid*; Page 2009). The strongest resonance is precisely in the way new Argentine cinema refracts the social sphere without representing it directly and turning to spaces of crisis in the intimate relations of ordinary life.

Considering that in Argentina the therapeutic genre is culturally available across social spaces, I might venture to imagine the psychotherapeutic venue I describe in terms of an ordinary

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[26]Or *praxo*genic (from *praxis* as action) as rather than "looking good" on camera they "act good" on camera.

[27]In 1991 and under Menem, the minister of economy Domingo Cavallo took the nefarious decision to peg the Argentine *peso* to the US dollar to restore economic confidence and fight hyperinflation. After a decade of neoliberal restructuration, plundering, and dismantling of the Argentinean state this economic decision had a strong part in the Argentinean economic crisis of 2001-2002 (see Page 2009; D'Avella 2014; Visacovsky 2010).

[28]On the relation between the public sphere, civil society and the post-dictatorship period see Vezzetti (2002). Regarding the cinematic productions, I am thinking, among others, of Luis Puenzo's award winning *La Historia Oficiál* (1985). See also Eduardo Jakubowicz and Laura Radetich on the relation between Argentinean history and cinema (2006).

[29]See Anderson (2012), especially in reference to Caetano and Stagnaro's *Pizza, Birra y Fazo* (1997), Rejtman's *Rapado* (1991) and Perrone's Ituizangó trilogy (1994-1998).

[30]I refer here to Joanna Page's work on the relation between Argentine cinema and recursive economic crisis (2009).

[31]See my note in the second chapter for a critical reading of the notion of Argentinean middle-class (Adamovsky 2009; Visacovsky and Garguin 2009). However, the idea of "middle class" society and culture can still be useful to frame a certain turn to the intimate sphere in relation to the rise of a bourgeois pubic (see Habermas 1989).

intimate space.[32] Of course, it is an uncanny ordinary space within a private therapeutic scene where the presence of the optical apparatus troubles the intimate intimacy of a (now cinematized) couple. I am not suggesting that there is an ontologically prior *private subjectivity* that is here troubled by the optic apparatus, but rather that this setting brings to visibility the always already public kernel of intimate spheres (and the always already relational imaginary at the hearth of subject formation).[33]

The setting that allowed the production of the videos I will describe, thus, concretizes and expresses the troubling ambiguity at the core of contemporary intimacies and their related institutions (see Berlant 2000). This ambiguous intimacy, which again resonates with a new Argentine cinema turning to the *interior,* the domestic, the intimate, but also to the internal part of the country (*el interior*), brings forth the public and private dimensions of intimacy.

The term intimacy, from the Latin *intimus* (the superlative of *interior*), means the "most inner." In addition, the term is related to the verb "to intimate" thus bearing within itself an intimation, a hint, a gesture of making known that entangles the inner with a certain degree of exteriority. In this sense Nancy Yousef writes that intimacy "crystallizes a tension between sharing and enclosing" (2013: 1). In a quite specific way, then, I am here observing and describing an intimate spectacle of therapeutic ordinariness at the threshold of filmic genres, local cultures, and relational imaginaries. In these videos, that is, the "inwardness of the intimate" meets "a corresponding publicness" (Berlant 2000: 1). The chiasmic intertwining[34] between this inward intimacy and its corresponding publicness is, following Habermas, at the hearth of a modern subjectivity that, "as the innermost core of the private," is "always oriented to an audience" (1991: 49).[35]

The audiovisual data capturing intimate scenes of therapeutic publicity call for a specific "witnessing genre" (Berlant 2000) and a specific writing genre. As in previous chapters, I am engaging with the genre of ethnographic writing at an ambiguous threshold of descriptive spectatorship, imaginative abstractions, and analytic evocations. Following an optic imagery, the gaze I develop throughout cannot be exclusively descriptive nor preeminently analytic. The audiovisual images offer themselves to the viewer inviting him to get closer, then further. They invite him to guess, interpret, imagine, fantasize, over-read or under-read.[36] As I wrote in the previous chapter, this gaze is sustained by an empirical entanglement of the phantastic with the phenomenal. More than anything, however, the filmic medium invites us to engage with a textural *flesh* of a performed, deformed, and always already culturally informed lifeworld.

As will be clear, the cinematic sensibility I developed watching these videos allowed me to imagine the emergence of a central image in the *present tense* of the couple form in therapy and, seemingly, in sustaining coupled attachments.

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[32] A problem rises here in relation to the genre of this writing. What is the relation between the phenomenological descriptions throughout this work and Argentinean forms of magical or hyper-real realism?

[33] I am indebted for most of my references to chiasmic internal exteriorities at the hearth of subject formations to Stefania Pandolfo's work (1998; forthcoming) and her engagement with Jacques Lacan's notion of "extimacy."

[34] I am here evoking Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining –The Chiasm" (1968)

[35] Also in Berlant and Warner 2000: 324. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner followed the flickering ambiguities of these intimate publicities and public intimacies underlying the normative background sustaining worlds of attachment (2000). For a discussion of the always already heteronormative background of the couple-form, see further.

[36] I use "him" in reference to the gendered version myself.

Romina's vanishing steps (the sound of time, the insistence of the dyad)

The camera keeps running. While Romina's steps are now only an acoustic trace in the eyes of the viewer, the video is still capturing and producing a temporalized image: the room is a crystallized composition, but we can hear the white noise produced by the camera intermingling with almost inaudible sounds coming from the outside world. Buenos Aires is murmuring a nocturnal and dystonic lullaby that flows through the empty spaces of this temporalized image and is inscribed in the video.

The two armchairs emerge as the main figures of this picture. Quite literally, the chairs invite us to image two people sitting there. But this picture provides a further invitation: it invites us to imagine a gaze having as origin point the armchair themselves.[37] If we can follow the orientation of these two imagined gazes, we can instantly grasp a third focal point where both gazes converge. The focal point of the two gazes (the point at which waves/rays intersect after being reflected or refracted) is outside of the frame.[38]

The two chairs are not looking at the camera, nor at each other. Of course, this third focal point is the chair of the psychotherapist, but it also constitutes the absent/present convergence and magnetic pole of the two gazes.[39] We can say that this absent magnetic pole makes the two gazes *come together* (is this a displaced presentation of this setting's *jouissance*?).

If we follow the rhythmic intertwining of the play of gazes the still nature acquires motion, despite the fact that this is an image intrinsically in motion: time unfolds, as it is a still life produced by a running video camera. The crystallized *spectrality* of the image is troubled by the irrupting flow of time.[40] However, movement is still half-frozen by the material immobility of the armchairs. The temporal dimension is thus predominantly presented by the acoustic texture of the video. The video runs for a few more minutes. The camera records the passage of time while an im/mobile form insist, persist, and resist within the visual image (the image within the picture is not *literally* visible). Something flickers, as if suspended between a table clock marking time and the insistent stability of the two armchairs. Something flickers, as if suspended between this still nature in motion and the vanished (and always vanishing) sound of Romina's steps. The words of Nathan Ackerman, a pioneering figure of family therapy, acquire here a particular salience: "[t]he value of permanent recording of therapeutic experience in motion pictures is self-evident. It is, in my view, the only known method to date that provides a satisfactory permanent record of a Gestalt, a merging of the image of face, voice, emotion, and bodily expression" (ix).[41]

Then the screen turns blue. The camera has turned off, after speaking and recording its own murmurs. Time Elapsed 1:40:43.

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[37]Throughout, I am following W.J.T. Mitchell's idea to consider the image from the viewpoint of the image's desire and therefore the image's *lack* which provides, among other things, the possibility for a hermeneutics (2005).

[38]The focal point is also the point from which diverging rays or waves appear to proceed.

[39]We can "gaze upon" these gazes through the eye of the camera (a forth gaze composing this image). The viewer is a fifth gaze, the writer a sixth, the reader a seventh… Of course, we are here arbitrarily and temporarily assuming that each entity possesses only one gaze.

[40]I am here also alluding to Barthes image of an *eidolon* emitted by the object in the photograph, a spectacular ghost, a *spectrum*. The latter, he writes, "retains, through its root, a relation to 'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead (1981: 9). Here the deadly spectrum is vitalized through the (always already cinematographic) injection of time.

[41]See Chapter One.

The couple image (as the present tense of the form)

I have been caught by this scene to the point of cutting out the last nine minutes of this video to watch it again, and again, and again. In this scene I am interpellated and seduced by an invisible image haunting the unfolding still nature captured by the eye of the camera. At the end of this therapy session we are spectators of the end(ing) of Romina and Julio's relationship. They offer us, on screen, the performance of the last minutes of their relationship in therapy. It is their last session, but also their last attempt. But there is something even more mesmerizing in the moment in which the camera keeps running after the session has ended, after Romina has left the room. The still nature of the therapy room, mainly occupied by the two armchairs, presents two hollowed shapes still containing the trace of the couple but already available to a different pair, a different therapy session, a different con/figuration. Romina's vanishing steps and the sound of the closing doors express a troubling relationship between the armchairs, the play of gazes that emerges from their hollowed structure, and temporality. Romina (and Julio, who anticipated her) is a vanishing and moving sound destabilizing and giving temporal depth to the apparent immobility of the still nature.[42] The still nature acquires motion through the imagined gazes it indexes.

The structural (and str*i*cturing) presence of the two armchairs comes to the foreground after having been in the background when Julio and Romina where sitting on them, occupying them. The table clock between the chairs, in addition, materializes the insistently temporal texture of this image. As we will see, a stylized temporal repetition can be found at the hearth of the couple form especially when it appears on and through the screen.[43]

In different words, this video renders explicit, or rather per*forms*, a potential split between a temporary visibility of the couple (the two armchairs) and a non visible dimension somewhat sustained and suggested by both the play of gazes emerging from the chairs and by the aural temporality of the video's sound.[44] The eye of the camera displaces the *incarnated* couple (Romina and Julio have left the frame) and forces me to visualize the couple through an image related but not fully enclosed within an infrastructural understanding of the couple form.[45]

This image, indeed, emerges when the incarnated couple has left the frame, rendering explicit the fact that I am seeing the couple *slant-wise* through the eye of the camera. Quite literally, I am not seeing the couple straight. As I have written in my previous chapter, the screen of the video is a refractive medium articulating a series of spatial and temporal transformation determining the conditions of heuristic and aesthetic availability.[46] In this context, however, there is a more important element related to the idiom of "straight" or "slant" that will ground my understanding of the couple form in relation to the couple image.

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[42]Here we can consider the difference between thinking through photography and thinking through cinema. As mentioned in a previous note I am thinking of how for Barthes the picture (and its referential essence) stages a form of temporal spectrality being intrinsically related to death and the spectacle (1981: 9). The temporality delivered here through sound and (moving) image provides the ground for a different order of reflections on temporality (see Deleuze 1989)

[43]See my upcoming reference to Judith Butler's performativity (of gender) as a persistent and repetitive stylization of a form (1999)

[44]I am not arguing that infrastructure is visible, but rather that it is here rendered as such.

[45]I am using the term "incarnated" to resonate with the *carnal* phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and to render the idea of a farther difference between conceptualizations of the couple form and the couple image and the *concrete* couple that, somehow, always partially escapes the analytical gaze.

[46]See Chapter One.

In *Queer Phenomenology* Sarah Ahmed interweaves a phenomenological preoccupation about the 'always already' oriented body-in-space with the question of sexual orientation (2006). Reading sexual flows of desire between people in directional terms, she invites us to follow the straight and slant lines channeling the *sense* of intimate attachments.[47]

"Sexual orientation," Ahmed writes, "involves following different lines insofar as the others that desire is directed towards are already constructed as the 'same sex,' or the 'other sex.'" (*ibid*: 70). In this sense, for Ahmed "the normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward 'the other sex' can be described in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line" (*ibid*). The couple form, in this context, is then the home of a dyadic milieu premised "on the 'naturalness' of the direction of desire,' which produces the couple as an entity, as a 'social one' (from two)." (*ibid*: 84). My constant reference to *the* couple mimics precisely this imagined unity of the compound.[48]

In this work I draw from ethnographic material that exclusively involves heterosexual couples, therefore it is important to frame this material as appearing within a spatial field which hosts always already oriented structures of desire – here stabilized within the couple form. A discussion of the genealogical relation between the couple form and heteronormative desire goes beyond the scope of my work.[49] However, the couple form cannot be thought without conceiving it as channeling oriented flows of desire tied to a proliferation and deployment of hegemonic and normative practices and discourses of relatedness.[50] The normative background of the couple form (the two armchairs) can also be visualized as phenomenological background. That is, as "that which is behind actions that are repeated over time and with force" (2006: 87). This infrastructural background delimits what is available for "love" (*ibid*: 127) as it contains, shapes, and in/forms intimate flows of desire and attachment. The channeling background can be thought, with Berlant and Warner, also as an "heteronormative culture of intimacy" (2000: 326) which organizes and informs our narrative sense of having "a life" once desire is channeled through the family and couple form.

The normative core of the couple form, however, is not exclusively related to sexual orientation, although we can say that it is its *directional a priori*, but also to a modern orientation towards romantic relationships, which Anthony Giddens defines as relationships based on the premise that they possess "qualities intrinsic to that tie itself" (1992: 2).[51] In this sense we might

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[47]Here sense is both on organ of perception and a direction. As Henri Lefebvre writes, "we are concerned with what might be called a 'sense': an organ that perceives, a direction that might be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon" (1991: 423; also in Ahmed 2006: 12).

[48]I am thinking with Sarah Ahmed of chemical compounds and the image of "chemical attraction" in the couple form (2006: 84). This compound, however, is always already multiple and multiply fragmented while being sustained by a series of "thirds" (the therapist, the screen, the private public behind the screen, the ethnographer).

[49]Berlant and Warner write of heteronormativity in terms of a (differential) relation to heterosexuality and homonormativity (2000: 312). Lawrence Cohen underlines the tension within *queer politics* around the issues of homonormativity, marriage, and heteronormativity: "on the past decade of critical reflection on the wrong turn of a "homonormative" queer politics organized around the right of marriage as opposed for example to friendship or stranger sociability" (2011: 963; see Duggan [2003] 2012; Warner 1999). More broadly, these critiques share the earlier concern of Richard Sennett on the narcissism and antipolitics of the 20th-century which turned inward and towards the individual self and the private sphere as the proper site of experience ([1977] 1992; see also Berlant and Warner 2000: 326).

[50]See also Foucault on the *deployment of sexuality* in the Victorian age (1990)

[51]For Giddens, the romantic relationship is the "harbinger of the pure relationship, although also in tension with it." (1992: 2). Giddens identifies in the pure relationship, which is a relationship of "sexual and emotional equality" (*ibid*), the paradigmatic relational form indexing the modern transformation of intimate *liaisons*.

de-couple (only provisionally) this relational structure of intimacy from gendered desire. These 'intrinsic qualities,' as Eva Illouz writes, sustain and produce emotional practices intimately tied to consumption in modern regimes of the capital (1997)[52]. In a sense, the therapeutic scenes I am describing allow us to observe *the spectral spectacle* of these emotionally privatized and oriented flows of desire and consumption.[53]

There is something more, however: I am here referring to the couple *form* in order to keep in place a semantic relationship with, among others, the words "per*form*ativity" and "trans*form*ation."" The couple form is an historically contingent relational structure informing the way in which intimacy, desire, and attachments are re/produced in our present.

The re/production of the couple form within an incarnated present is allowed, among other things, by a performative repetition of the form. Performativity, as Judith Butler writes, is "is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (1999: xv). Butler is here specifically referring to a "gendered stylization of the body" (*ibid*), which can be also tied to the gendered *a priori* of the couple.[54] In this line, I am interested in understanding the couple form (as it appears through my video material) precisely in terms of a sustained temporal duration where a certain stylization emerges.[55] The repetition of the form is here also the necessary contingency of an habitus structuring the strictures of intimacy.[56]

In the video material I am using, this performative stylization allows us to see the couple as couple in its present tense. We see the couple as couple because it spectacularizes itself when given over to the gaze of the therapist and the optical apparatus. In this sense, there is here a doubling: the couple form, which is a performative stylization of an oriented and orienting structure of intimacy, is here performed again, and again, and again. The eye of the camera captures, produces, and imagines the repetition of what is intrinsically repetitive, the stylizing of a stylization. This, I would suggest, creates a vibration, a trembling which allows for the emergent availability of what I call the *couple-image*. The normative couple form, in other words, performs its performativity when given over to a series of "thirds" thus allowing for the flickering of a textural image exceeding the very stylization of that form. As I will explain, this image is an intensification of the couple form in the present tense. The image emerges from the form and renders a trans*form*ation of the form available to the incarnated couple. This image coalesces, stems from, but does not coincide with the present as lived by the couple nor with the couple form (which is here the performative matrix).

The couple image (as the virtual)

The real yet performative doubling of the incarnated couple as captured by the camera resonates with Deleuze's identification of a doubling and a split between the actual image and

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[52] I am also thinking about Zaretsky's *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (1986).

[53] I write about privatization of emotions also alluding to Friedrich Engels' seminal work on the relation between the family and private property ([1902] 2004)

[54] See Butler on the heterosexuality of kinship (2002)

[55] "Several important questions have been posed to this doctrine," Judith Butler writes, "and one seems especially noteworthy to mention… The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (1999: xv).

[56] I take from Bourdieu the notion of *habitus* aa an embodied praxis making historical contingencies necessary (1992, 2000).

the virtual image in the cinematographic "crystal-image." This split is, among many other things, condensed in a doubling between filmed theatrical characters belonging to the real while playing a role once given over to the camera-consciousness (1989: 84). Without the ambition to offer an orienting navigation through Deleuze's enterprise, I want to dwell briefly on his notion of the crystal-image as a cinematographic condensation of a temporal split and a doubling.

In his second book on cinema, Deleuze invites the reader to turn into a cinematic viewer and to see through his concepts the visual materialization of the not always perceptible movements of Bergsonian time (1989).[57] This expressive condensation of "time itself" emerges in what Deleuze calls the *time-image,* a cinematic image expressing (the workings of) time rather than representing it indirectly through movement.[58] In my previous description of the video of Romina and Julio, I have hinted at the capacity of the image to express a temporal tension between form and sound.[59]

The crystal-image is a time-image which, specifically, "make[s] visible the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of present which pass and that of past which are preserved. Time simultaneously makes the present pass and preserves the past in itself" (1989: 98). Deleuze is using Bergson's idea that the past always co-exist with 'the present it has been' and that "at each moment time splits itself into present, and past, present that passes and past which is preserved" (*ibid*: 82). Bergson articulates this split in terms of a tension between the unfolding movement of the present and the coalescent presence of the past that refracts and filters our access to the moving present (2010). This is the ground of the tension between the *actual* image, which is the *present* tense of the image, and the *virtual* image, its coalescent past. Deleuze writes that "the present is the actual image and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror."[60] This image in a mirror, this crystal-image, is a virtual presence that does not co/incide with the present but coalesces with it.

This split, more generally, is at the core of Bergson's conception of time and existence. "Our actual existence," he writes, "whilst it is unrolled in time, duplicates itself along with a virtual existence, a mirror-image. Every moment of our life presents the two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception of the one side and recollection on the other… Whoever becomes conscious of the continual duplicating of this present into perception and recollection… will compare himself to an actor playing his part automatically, listening to himself and beholding himself playing" (in Deleuze 1989: 79).

Thinking about the role of cinematic images condensing this temporal split, Deleuze suggests that the crystal-image cinematically expresses a similar tension between an always unfolding actual image and *its* virtual image. As he writes,

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[57]Viewer and thinker because cinema is expressive and expressed thought (Deleuze 1989)

[58]I am oversimplifying Deleuze's baroque taxonomy of the image. Broadly, he understood the "movement-image" as an image that presented (and dealt with) time indirectly through physical movement (1986).

[59]There should be a differentiation to be made between the video I commented and Deleuze's work because I am not working with cinematically edited material. However, I find legitimacy in this qualitative jump when reading Deleuze's allusion to a camera-consciousness able to make "mental connections" and his citation of Rouch's idea that in a *cinema vérité* we can also find the *vérité du cinéma* (1989: 23)

[60]See also: "What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past (1989: 81).

we can say that the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a double or a reflection. In Bergsonian terms, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is 'coalescence' between the two. There is the formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or the photo, *following a double movement of liberation and capture* (*ibid:* 68; my emphasis).

The relationship between the actual image and the virtual image in the crystal-image is an indiscernible bundle of chiasmic splits that follow a never complete movement of "liberation and capture" (*ibid*). The split, thus, is an in/finite splitting where the poles on each side of the cut are in/separable.[61] While it expresses a split of temporal flows between an actual present and a virtual present retaining the past, the crystal-image is an "indivisible unity of an actual image and 'its' virtual image" (*ibid*: 78). As I will write later, I take the relationship between the couple form and the couple-image in terms of never completed splits, of incessant and gushing waves expressing the chiasmic tension between liberation and capture. I draw a great amount of inspiration reading Deleuze's work on cinema, precisely in light of my attempt to think about the emergence of a split between form and image when the incarnated couple gives itself over to the production of a(n almost) cinematic image. The split, in this terms, is a present vibration texturing an incessant intertwining between the incarnated couple, an emergent and virtual couple-image, and the couple form. With Deleuze the reader is turned into a seer that sees through the cinematic image a crystal in which the visionary seer can see the "gushing of time as dicing in two, as splitting" (1989: 81).[62] In this chapter, I ask the reader to be just as much of a seer in imagining a flickering and virtual couple-image splitting from the couple form while the incarnated couple performs and repeats the oriented stylization it inhabits. I am here visualizing the incarnated couple (as Julio and Romina) as folded between the discursive structurality of the couple form and the couple-image, which is an emergent flickering of the form *qua* form which thus *presents* a temporal excess/difference/split in regard to the form itself. I am compelled to imagine that this analytic separation will allow me to think both about the present of the form in its *figuration* during therapy and the virtual possibility of change as available to the incarnated couple.

The couple image (as membrane of the entre dos)

While I saw for the first time the flickering of this image through Romina and Julio's video, I am interested in asking how this image is positioned in respect to the couple-form. As I tentatively suggested, the couple-image is a virtual image attached to the actual (incarnated) couple which performs the couple form. Through this very per*form*ance the couple allows the flickering of the image, which might (or might not) have different qualities than the form. The *existential* (and ec-static) space of this virtual image, which unfolds exclusively in the present, can be defined as the *entre-dos*, the between-two (or between the two). I have explored in the

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[61]This makes me think of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "dehiscence" especially as Deleuze (1989) often talks about seeds and the environment.
[62]He writes: "Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves the past. Time consists in this split, and it this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*. The crystal image was not time, but we see time in the crystal" (1989: 81).

introduction Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *flesh* as a form of this in-between the two (see Vasseleu 19998). Here I am interested in outlining this space in more Deleuzian terms. As I mentioned above, also in Bergson (from whom Deleuze draws) we find a certain quest for a thirdness, an in between the two poles.

The notion of the entre dos, emerged during my fieldwork. In Buenos Aires, I had few conversations with a psychotherapist who was inspired by Deleuze in her work with couples. Milena, who has been practicing for more than three decades, once told me that her work with couples was essentially about putting them in connection with their becoming, their possibility to "become different."[63] "We need to let them see their own *entre dos*, and put them in contact with the *vital*," she continued, referring to the fertility of the Deleuzian notion of the "fold" to understand the in-between.[64]

In this line, I conceive the entre dos as empirically contingent and relationally immanent to each single couple. This entre dos seems to me essentially (we can say ontologically) tied to the form of the intimate two. Provisionally, thus, I would say that the couple-image is the virtual space emerging from the entre dos, an image impinging, pressing, coloring the present as lived by the couple *as* couple. Just as we have seen with Deleuze's virtual image, the couple-image is coalescent with the couple's lived experience while not being coincident with it.

Above I wrote how Bergson considers matter as an "aggregate of images" which have an existence "placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation'" (2010: 5). At the same time, for Bergson the image is a virtual existence we *pass through* when accessing and actualizing our lived present. The image is a "present state" bearing the temporal trace and weight of the past and the future. The image only partially coincides with the heterogeneous quality of the moving present (2010: 77). The expression of *passing through* helps me to visualize the (temporal) non-coincidence between the emergent image and the lived *duration* of the present of the couple.[65] Duration, at the risk of over-simplifying it, is here to be intended as an always in/accessible becoming, a continuous flow "in which we pass insensibly from one state to the other: a continuity which is really lived, but artificially decomposed" (*ibid*: 100-101).

The non-coincidence between the virtual image and duration for Bergson is a temporal question because the virtual (image) is in great part the *work* of memory, of a past impinging onto the present and of an almost-present future (*ibid*).[66] As I will suggest, it is this non-coincidence, this *décalage* (time-lag) that allows a form of therapeutic labor on the couple's relationship. Milena, that is, conceived her work as an attempt to indicate the presence of this image affecting the present of the couple and thwarting the possibility of the couple to be in touch with their "becoming" (that is, with change).

The couple-image in its *décalage* with the present as lived is thus rendered *available*. We can think of this image also as non-subjective screen filtering the couple's relationship. As a

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[63]"Taking his lead from Friedrich Nietzsche's early notes, Deleuze uses the term 'becoming' (*devenir*) to describe the continual production (or 'return') of difference immanent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise. Becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events… becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state" (Parr 2010: 26).

[64]It can be precisely starting from Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty's *entre deux* that I would articulate a difference between this concept and the one of intersubjectivity which tends to assume an "already formed" subjectivity (see next chapter and my previous arguments on the radical non-coincidence of the subject with itself).

[65]However, Deleuze argues that *duration* is "not merely lived experience" (2006: 37).

[66]In this sense, as we live in a present always already mediated by the virtual: "*Practically we perceive only the past*, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future" (2010: 82, original emphasis).

screen it can be understood in terms of a relational optic filter affecting the way couples experience themselves *qua* couples and understand the other partner as the other pole of a couple form. In my working hypothesis, the image of the couple *qua* couple emerges within this therapeutic setting in relationship to the optic apparatus that constitutes it, but also in relation to the exclusive attention given to the couple as couple throughout therapy. In addition, thinking of images underlies an optic dimension that seems to me fundamental to conceive the couple itself.[67]

The therapeutic labor performed by both couples and therapists, I suggest, aims at untying relational knots sustaining relational *ways of seeing*. Rephrasing Lacan's sentence "you never look at me from the place from which I see you," (1998: 103), the therapeutic space sustains the poles of the couple form to learn how to *see myself looking at you from the place from which I see you*.[68] The image, then, is a *present* screen between-two that can allow for transformative and creative lines of flight in relation to the couple form itself.

To conclude this conceptually ambitious and fundamentally tentative section, I want to bring back the also Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the image. Following Merleau-Ponty's idea of a textural in-between we can conceive of this image, a certain existence between thing and representation, as an interstitial *membrane* that absorbs, reflects, and refracts the proximities and distances of the two poles of the form. This membrane, in my imagination, is thus an incarnated relational medium virtually in/forming the immanent flesh of contingent relationships actualized "in the name of the two." In a sense, the couple image is a synthetic and emergent result of the work of the imaginary when operating as incarnated medium, a refractive and reflective screen *between* two people (and made possible only through their encounter).[69]

If we consider the couple image as an abstract and concrete membrane condensing, filtering, and imparting the immanent qualities of a specific couple to the couple itself, we can imagine that in this model the partners of the couple never "meet" as always already filtered by the image (always already to the extent allowed by the structural a priori).

Notions like the *entre dos* or the *couple-image* are not critical concept illustrating the socio-historical and economic contingencies informing the late liberal couple in therapy. Conceiving of this virtual membrane(s), in fact, is a phenomenological attempt to descend within an always already channeled bundle of desires and describe, notice, and think through the affective, imaginific, and toxic work of virtual images within the contingent present of the couple in therapy. In this chapter I follow the empirical declinations of this image, which acquires different qualities in every couple.

From the view point of a relational membrane between-two we can develop a way to see how and where couples intoxicate themselves through images making the otherness of the other impossible, making the couple form un-bearable. Or, differently, how and where the couple finds a way to *see* the image filtering their encounter to then progressively transform it.

Descending into the exhausting ordinariness of disenchanted refrains and prismatic entanglements of couples in therapy will allow us to imagine the limits of the couple image itself, which is a way to understand the work of any virtual image impinging and in/forming the incessant labor of our situated, determined, and uncannily open becoming.

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[67]Here, then, the couple is a compound of couple form, couple image, and incarnated couple
[68]Lacan's sentence was offered by Ian Whitmarsh in the context of our conversations on vision, love, couples.
[69]This can lead us to conceive of this membrane, this textural and porous in-between, as fundamentally affective (once we understand affects as immanent emergences that come to being when bodies *bump* against each other).

The purse mirror: Gala and Jorge

In Buenos Aires, I had access to a small archive of videotaped therapy sessions available to psychotherapy students inside an institution offering training in systemic psychotherapy. Together with Denise, a Venezuelan psychotherapist in training at the school, we had the possibility to rearrange the archive and watch most of the available videos (a little less than one hundred). We had the task, as informal interns, to synthetize the content and identify the possible pedagogical use of the filmed therapy sessions. Most videos weren't connected to each other, others were interrupted, and others contained no information about the date of the therapy session. Amidst the first set of videos I synthetized there were two DVDs that attracted my attention. These videos contained no more information than the title *Jorge y Gala. Problemas de Comunicación*[70] and the name of their psychotherapist, Dr. Sánchez. In addition, the videos were broken in various parts, which made the understanding of the sessions very difficult. However, both the information given by the couple in therapy and the name of the therapists allowed me to hypothesize that the DVDs were copies of videotapes recorded, most likely, in the mid 1980s.[71] In the first of these two videos there is a scene that reemerged in my memory once I started to think about the couple-image as reflecting and refracting the relational gazes of one pole onto the other. As it will be clear, a quite abrupt intervention of the psychotherapist during one of the couple's arguments *literalizes*, as it were, the question of the image.

Gala and Jorge are probably in their thirties. The camera is already running when they enter the room. Two chairs are at the center of the frame and we can see that behind them there is a one-way mirror. We can assume that other people were/are behind that mirror. When they enter the room, Gala and Jorge's figures occupy most of the frame. The therapist is out of frame but we can see his outline reflected in the one-way mirror behind Jorge and Gala. While Jorge is adjusting his jeans Gala is already sitting and starts commenting a public protest happening downtown Buenos Aires.[72] As therapy unfolds we can notice a certain rhythm between Gala and Jorge. Every time he begins responding to the therapist's questions Gala interrupts him correcting or negating what he is saying.[73] Gala speaks over Jorge's insecure tone while he tries, almost listlessly, to gain communicative space: they seem to be performing a fast paced dance of gendered castration[74] where every sentence is punctuated by the other's rapid comment on it.

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[70]Jorge and Gala. Problems of Communication.
[71]Maybe between 1982-1984 considering Gala's quick comments at the beginning of a session about a public protest regarding the Malvinas (Falkland Islands), which were briefly occupied by Argentinean troops in 1982 (under the command of the Military Junta). Interestingly, the therapist responds to Gala's comment saying "*yo estoy acá y ni me entero de todo esto*" (I'm here [in the therapy room] and I don't even notice all of this). This sentence can be understood as the therapist referring to the fact that that very day the therapist didn't notice the protest because he was at work. However, it can also evoke a certain detachment in this setting from the workings of contemporary history in its unfolding.
[72]See previous footnote.
[73]If we read this session "emically" through the systemic literature, we can observe a constant rejection of Jorge's statements by Gala. These constant rejections and disconfirmations create communicative loops of "pathological communication" which are "vicious circles that cannot be broken unless and until communication itself becomes the subject of communication, in other words, until the communicants are able to metacommunicate" (Watzlavick et al. 1967: 95).
[74]I am here thinking of the gendered dance between Gala's disconfirmations of Jorge's statements as a form of castration which intertwines with a possible desire of/for castration in Jorge. It is gendered as always already falling onto one gender and/or the other.

The more Jorge tries to explain his points of view the more Gala contradicts or rejects what he is saying.

"I don't know I think she…" Jorge starts saying, "Me? What do I have to do with anything! As if I could have a say in your life!" overlaps Gala. "But I was saying that you were also happy we decided to come here, as…" Jorge continues, "You said you wanted to come!" says Gala. "Yes, this is what I am saying," continues Jorge.

"So… it is always like this? You talk over him while he talks to you?" Sánchez asks commenting the explicit *juego relacional* (relational game), but also emerging in the scene as the director of a dysphonic orchestra playing interrupted and over layered communications. "But I already know what he thinks! He doesn't need to explain it," Gala replies.

Therapy quickly unfolds and the tone of the arguments envelops and delivers a 'performative complicity' between the partners that draws in the viewer as if he was watching a well rehearsed scene of a situation comedy[75]. In the midst of an argument between Jorge and Gala regarding Gala's intrusion in Jorge's relationships with his larger family, Jorge attempts to explain how much he owes to his uncle's family but Gala interrupts him saying that she needs to know what's the problem. "Just tell me what is the problem!" she says. Then she adds that nothing of what Jorge just said is true, that she doesn't interfere in his relationship with his uncle, and that she only thinks that he shouldn't call his uncle that much. In the very moment Gala is about to say more, Sánchez abruptly interrupts her, almost mimicking a play of communicative interruptions and contrapuntal punctuations.

"Do you have an *espejito* [purse mirror]?" Sánchez asks Gala. She stares at him surprised, she smiles, "Yes…?" she responds with a curious tone. The therapist asks her to take it out. Gala takes a small mirror out of her bag. She gives the mirror to the therapist. Jorge is looking at the scene amusingly surprised. Gala smiles more curious than amused. Sánchez, whose face we see for the first time and only for a couple of seconds in the video, leans towards Gala to take the mirror, looks at himself in the mirror then gives the mirror back to Gala.

"Ok, now… Jorge you can say whatever you want to say and you, Gala, look at the mirror, focus on your lips and facial expression as you see them on the mirror, listen, nothing more" Sánchez asks Gala. Gala is lost for a few seconds, she passed from being curious to being startled. Jorge starts talking again about his uncle. "But… so I have to look at myself in the mirror?" Gala interrupts. Sánchez doesn't reply. While she begins looking at herself in the mirror, she looks uncomfortable. She restlessly moves on her chair. Then she begins cleaning the mirror with her white bottom shirt. "You have to understand that my uncle is almost dying, he is old, you could just call him every now and then, I mean…" Jorge keeps talking but he is not looking at Gala, nor at the therapist. He seems to be talking to himself but the trajectory of his gaze almost touches the eye of the camera. Gala seems progressively absorbed into her own reflected image in the mirror. She is looking, it seems, at her reflected lips while touching them. While Jorge keeps talking, she is suspended between the reflected image of herself and the therapeutic setting. He slowly starts looking at her, again. She glances nervously at him while trying to focus on the mirror. She looks at Jorge, then the mirror, then the therapists. Jorge keeps talking. He explains that he needs to call his uncle because he is family, because he helped him

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[75]I am thinking here of the repetitive refrains of situation comedies. But also to the lurking genre of the "situation tragedy." As Lauren Berlant writes, in the "situation comedy, the subject whose world is not too destabilized by a 'situation' that arises performs a slapstick maladjustment that turns out absurdly and laughably, without destroying very much. In the situation tragedy, the subject's world is fragile beyond repair, one gesture away from losing all access to sustaining its fantasies: the situation threatens utter, abject unraveling" (2011: 6).

out when he had economic issues and that his uncle always invites him over even if he never goes.

Then for the first time in the session there are four full seconds of silence. Jorge and Gala's gazes intertwine as mediated by the mirror-image held into Gala's left hand. Four seconds of silence. The dance of interruptions is interrupted by the irruption created by the intrusion of the mirror. Then, as if dodging this moment of mediated intimacy, Jorge starts talking again without looking at Gala. *Having now the possibility to address her without being interrupted, he looks elsewhere.* His gaze briefly addresses the relational interstices between Gala, the mirror, and the therapist to then lend over the therapist. *Pero habla con ella cuando hablas!* (But...Talk to her when you talk!), Sánchez says. Jorge looks at Gala while she seems to be struggling to contain/retain her voice. She keeps glimpsing at the therapist, at the mirror, and at Jorge as if asking for how much longer she needs to be trapped by the mirror image of her silence. She rubs her eyes, she coughs. When Jorge says his uncle's wife doesn't interfere that much in their life Gala laughs talking over him and breaking the silence, "*no está metida? Pero de que hablas Jorge!*" (She doesn't interfere? What are you talking about!) Jorge quickly responds, "But she doe[sn't]…" The DVD is broken here and the video jumps a few minutes forward.

This session, of which we will see/read more later, will end up with a slightly paradoxical *tarea* (homework) that Sánchez gives to the couple: "I want your dialogues to be monologues. Don't try to rectify each other's monologues. Just listen, let your dialogues be monologues."

Sánchez interventionist style is greatly influenced by the early days of systemic and strategic psychotherapy where the therapist focused on present and visible interactions of the couple or the family and attempted to interrupt and reformulate the relational "games" sometimes with explicit interventions, in this case the use of the mirror (see Watzlavick et al. 1967; 1974). We should notice his gendered action somewhat castrating the castrator and silencing momentarily Gala through the use of the small mirror. What interests me, however, is to extract from this video a further conceptual guideline to think about the role played by the image in the couple form.

The mirror in Gala's hands creates a pregnant break within their couple image (as the lived *entre-dos* present in the present of the couple form). We can imagine Jorge and Gala caught in a relational texture rendering difficult any communicative space outside the argument, the quarrel, and the fight. There is here an optic operator that literalizes the role played by gaze within the couple. If the couple image is a reflective/refractive screen between the two poles of the couple, here Gala is looking at herself reacting to Jorge's words. She is seeing her relational self through the mirror. She is putting into figuration the central problem of the gaze within this relational form – and she is doing it for Jorge, the therapist, the eye of the camera, the viewers behind the one-way mirror, and the viewers behind the screen of the video. In this sense, she is im/personating herself while she also escapes her own self as she is given over to the optical apparatus.[76] Her im/personation is thus refracted through different mediums and undergoing spatio-temporal transformations, while she is confronted with a relational *truth* that exceeds this scene: there is something about couples that is intrinsically related to vision. A vision mediated by the image of the entre-dos, a vision that is here disturbed through the interference of a reflective device. The relationship between the couple image and this scene is open. Again, here I am following the flight of my imagination as triggered by an in/visible flesh emerging within

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[76]See my first chapter on the relation between the apparatus, the formation of the therapeutic subject, and an explanation of the image of refraction.

the picture. Deleuze's words resonate here on the actualizing role played by the mirror in a cinematic scene: "the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field" (1989: 70)

I am drawn to one specific question here: what is the relationship between the irruption of a mirror and the communicative silence that for the first time is somewhat shared by Jorge and Gala? In what way the fact of Gala *literally* seeing herself reacting to Jorge allows for an opening, a relational potentiality that for a few seconds leaves both of them dis-oriented? Jorge, after all, seems also quite lost when Gala stops interrupting him when she is seeing herself in the mirror. He stops looking at her, finding a focal point in-between the camera and the therapist. Something is made both possible and impossible. *Look at her when you talk!* Sánchez tells Jorge. But as the couple image is here troubled through the insertion of another image (Gala's reflected lips) both Jorge and Gala need to reposition their gazes to find a new relational space.

Although this might (or might not) have happened in the space of a few seconds, when I am caught visually into this scene I sense the trembling of a shared image, the flickering of the *entre dos* membrane that, in the present, absorbs an interference and opens to something possibly, potentially, new. In this trembling, in this in/visible flickering, I find another aspect of the couple image and I am drawn to imagine its intrinsically optic features.

Now, following Almibar's most frequent suggestion to other couple therapists: *hay que meterse en el drama*, we have to descend and get into the drama, to get lost into everyday details and quotidian victories or disappointments, in order to be confused and forget about the couple image as a concept and find it again, as the relational kernel of an always already refracted intimacy.

Stay here, but not too close. Ruth and Eliseo

"You know, it's more than five years that we don't go to the mountains…" says Eliseo.
Ruth bursts out, "*Pero que sí!!*" (Yes we did!).
"How long ago did we go last?" replies quickly Eliseo.
"And Cafayate? Cafayate is not in the mountains?"
"It was like four years ago!"
"And Cordoba? Cordoba is not in the mountains?"
"But… When? When? What are you talking about!"
"And Salta? Where do you think Salta is? You are wrong, you are just forgetting"
Wanda, the therapist, breaks the argument, "In this sense…. there is no disagreement between you two, no disagreement in the way you perceive the couple… no? Always disagreeing, with an affective life to improve and the desire for a common project…"
Ruth interrupts Wanda, "We went to see a sex therapist, but he gave up!"
"She wasn't a sex therapist!" Eliseo protests, "we were doing the same thing we are doing now!"
"But I told you she was a sex therapist!" says Ruth.
"We never talked about sex with her!" responds quickly Eliseo.
"But I told you she was a sex therapist!"
"Oh well, I guess I forgot she was! And in any case you took every session so poorly! You were so miserable after the sessions! No? No?"
"What?! What?! The therapist asked *you* to leave!!" shouts out Ruth.

"It wasn't working, you talked and you talked but nothing changed! The therapist was saying '*si, si, si, si claro,*' but nothing changed! It wasn't good!"

"So you wanted *me* to change?! That's it? You were there only for *me* to change?"

"The couple, the couple wasn't doing good!"

"That's it! You just wanted me to change and leave me alone with the therapist!"

"I said the couple! The couple! And I didn't leave nor abandon the sessions," explains Eliseo to Wanda, "and she didn't ask me to. It was… a problem of wrong interpretations, I had to accept what she was telling me and I didn't have the choice!"

[Ten minutes before]

Ruth is waiting for Eliseo to arrive. She is nervously looking at the phone. Eliseo runs into the room. Wanda, their therapist, enters a little after him. The first of their ten session starts. "Ok, so you know already that we are filming you and that the team will be following the session in the other room… This is, actually, a way to work, in this way we can think much more on what we are working on," Wanda explains after presenting herself. Ruth nods looking quickly at the camera. Eliseo, looking at Ruth surprisingly amused, says "Yes, like little guinea pigs, that's fine but… what did we come here to do, really?"

"I was about to ask you the same question," replies Wanda. In a silent second Eliseo looks straight into the camera and giggles, "I know that we are doing some sort of therapy, that much I know."

"This is a conversation to see what is happening and to see if we can work together," Wanda explains, "how did you decide to come to therapy? When you agreed to come, Eliseo, what idea did you have?"

"We are drowning, we are doing bad, we are doing bad, we don't share anything… *mal, mal, mal* (bad)," Eliseo shakes his head. As therapy unfolds he explains that he has been with Ruth for thirty years and that things started falling apart during the past ten years. Ruth is looking at her hands. She moves her fingers through the air, drawing irregular shapes. Shape after shape her gaze lands back over Eliseo, then the therapist, then the camera, then a place in between. "At some point it will also be my turn to talk?" she says talking over Eliseo and addressing Wanda. "*Claro, claro,*" Wanda assures her. "We have problems with everything," continues Eliseo, "even when deciding about the floor of the new bathroom… and I never have a choice, I don't want to do traditional vacations… All my life I tried to do things differently… But *no me queda otra* (I cannot do otherwise), and now we don't even have a common project, I can only do what she wants me to do. *Si, claro, si claro* (yes, of course) this I can do, this I can say! I have two options with her: to say 'yes' or to say 'yes, my dear'!" Eliseo's account turns into a refrain: he has no space of maneuver, he feels cornered, he cannot do differently, Ruth and him have no common project. Then Ruth intervenes agreeing, "it's true we never agree, not even on basic stuff." Now that the three kids are older, she says things are worst than ever. "We also have different concepts about what a "couple" is… I say white, he says black, now we are older, I am… I am looking for… I want a companion (*compañero*), we suffer, we suffer (*nosotros padecemos*) always arguing and fighting when we could be better, but we never agree, before it was about the kids, now, now we need to find a project, we need to have a project, *padecemos*" Ruth's account partially echoes Eliseo's refrain: there is no common project.

The couple-image emerges here as a spectral void refracting the exhausted and exhausting repetition of the form. *Estamos ahogados*, we are drowning, sings the lamenting backup chorus throughout their intersecting refrains. The 'absent project,' the missing and missed common ground, emerges as the negative positivity of their refrains. The absent project that could inject new life back into the form, through a renewed temporal imagination of shared future-ability.[77] As Ruth keeps talking, Eliseo is holding his head, looking out of the window. "She never listens to me!" irrupts Eliseo, "no one listens, she talks and talks, and everyone thinks I am exaggerating, but no one listens! No one listens, the therapist didn't listen, she doesn't listen!"

"*Bueno*," says Wanda with a peaceful (and pacifying) tone. "Now that here you have all the attention, my attention, the team's attention, the camera's attention, and Ruth's attention, what would you like to be listened about?"[78]

Silence drops for a nanosecond. "That… in a way she could accompany me in some project, in something. *Eso no! Eso no! Eso no!* (not this, not this, not this)," he bursts out mimicking Ruth's disapproval of any of his propositions. "What can we do, then? Nothing! A trip? A vacation? We cannot do a single thing! We cannot go without planning things in the most minute detail… *estamos a la deriva!* (we are at bay)! You know, it's more than five years that we don't go to the mountains…"[79]

As therapy unfolds, the theatrical spectacularization of the couple-form on camera triggers the toxic repetition of what seems to be submerging (there are drowning) their everyday life. "It's true, it's true I have deep anxieties," Ruth says absent mindedly and speaking over both Eliseo and Wanda. "But we never ever booked a place in advance when going on vacation, the way he likes it! I hate it! But I got used to it… I understand him, but he is exaggerating, I would like someone that calms me down, I need something more 'on point,' I am a woman that needs security, and he… well he is more ambivalent…"

"*Bueno, Bueno.* Now… I don't know if you ever had the possibility to talk about this calmly, saying to each other what you need. I will leave you for a few minutes while I go talking with the team… Think about what you would like to work through in therapy, now that we have a *panorama,* a vista… Just think about what you would like to work on."

[the therapist leaves the room for the break]

Wanda comes back after a few minutes. Ruth and Eliseo tell her they couldn't agree on what to work on during their therapy sessions. After a few exchanges, the refrain about the missing common project takes shape again in the conversation. "We don't have a single project in common," says again Eliseo, "not an *inversión* (economic investment) with the little savings we have, nor a *diversión* (diversion, recreation)." Eliseo's refrain, *ni inversión ni diversión*, expresses an explicitly temporal demand he is addressing to the couple-image. Here the image emerges as a dried and intoxicating membrane that absorbs the relational imagination of their between-two and uses their breathing space (they are drowning). Their imagined horizon of intimacy is temporalized in two different movements. The absent *inversión* is the missing capacity of their couple to (literally) invest in the present in the name of a future to come. At the same time, the absent *diversión* is their incapacity to turn their repetitive present aside from its

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[77]On temporal imagination and phenomenological horizons see Crapanzano (2004).
[78]And the ethnographer's attention, and the reader's attention…
[79]The dialogue opening this section begins here.

course and find a recreational milieu where to meet. In both cases, Eliseo is indicating the temporal aridity of their disenchanted present. Their lived present is disenchanted both in its temporal repetitiveness (fight, after fight, after fight) and in a longing for an enchanting diversion that would awaken the sleeping vital lymph of their relationship. The vital current of their couple-image, I suggest, draws its strength from forms of temporal imagination.

At the same time, this imagination is a form of consumption of the present (and in the present) as mediated by the couple-image. "We are going on vacation now, *Mar del Plata*, she will be with three cell phones at the beach, obsessing about our kids and talking with her mother!" Eliseo bursts out.[80] The being-with of this present to-be consumed keeps repeating the temporal stasis of their relationship.[81] "Why don't you decide to take some time together during this vacation and talk about possible shared project," suggests Wanda taking the diversion of the vacation as the potential milieu of emergence of a shared temporal horizon. "You come very well 'rehearsed' in arguing so don't ask yourself too much, just follow your rhythms," she continues, "but you could take some time to talk about something you want to do, something small, a little project… how much time are you willing to spend together to do this? Like everyday, a little time you set apart for you two"

"What do you mean?" asks Ruth. "I don't understand, what do we have to do?" echoes Eliseo.

Meet me at the house: from toxic atmospheres to re-imagined images

Clara, Almibar, Micol, and I are watching the blue screen that will soon project Ruth and Eliseo's second session. While we are waiting, I am telling Clara how often I notice that there seems to be no continuity between different sessions of the same couple. "Every session of therapy is different from the previous one, we can only take what they give us," she responds, "sometimes there is no continuity between sessions, they develop around a different theme. Other times the session produces constant variations on the main, recurring theme, it is like in classical music… but I don't know who is playing and who the director is." Then the screen flickers turning gray and black until the image of Eliseo and Ruth appears. Wanda, on the other side, is tinkering with a cable connecting the close circuit camera to the screen.[82] "This is to connect the camera to the screen on the other room," she says to the couple. The exchanges between the therapeutic team quickly fade out. The team turns into a private and intimate public witnessing the performative repetition of Ruth and Eliseo's *entre dos*.[83]

After their vacation things seemed to go slightly better, Ruth and Eliseo comment, but they were unable to find a common project. As therapy unfolds, the session's theme seems to revolve around the house, their house. Ruth says he is always late for dinner and that he has no notion of time. He says he is working and that he feels cornered by her constant forms of

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[80]Mar Del Plata is a popular destination on the Argentinean cost, which also symbolizes the modern development of the "family form" in relation to the consumption of planned leisurely time. In this regard, Pastoriza and Torre explore the democratization of tourism and the development of Mar del Plata as a destination for the emerging popular and middle classes of the second half of the twentieth century (1999).

[81]I am thinking with Illouz the relationship between romantic couples and consumption (1997). The aridity of their static present, in this sense, is also due to the impossibility to consume it *as* present through the couple-image.

[82]See my first chapter on the tinkering, the optic apparatus, and Latour's "oligopticon."

[83]Here there is an explicit twist (or paradigmatic example) of Berlant's notion of "witnessing genres" related to an intimate publicity actualized by therapeutic cultures (2000: 1).

control.[84] You always tell me "*Ya voy* (I am coming), but you never arrive in time," screams Ruth. "What else should I tell you?! I cannot tell you anything else! If I tell you 'I will be there in twenty minutes' instead of '*ya voy*' you will be asking me 'why? What do you have to do? Do you have to play the harmonica?'! This is control!" Eliseo bursts at her.

"But so, do you…" Wanda starts asking. "Words have a meaning! You cannot tell me that you are coming if you are not!" interrupts Ruth. "I told you I am busy at work!" Eliseo shouts back. "How can you know what I would tell you?! What are you… God?!" says Ruth. Wanda tries to intervene, "Ok so, we have to understand how it is that Eliseo feels this control…" "This is not control!" interrupts Ruth again.

"It isn't?! This is control! It is control! Say it! Say it is control!" Eliseo looses his temper. "I am not controlling you! It is not control" Ruth's voice is now overlapping with Eliseo's. "It *is* control and you know it!" this time Eliseo's pitch is almost trembling. Wanda is cut out, rendered an external spectator from within. "I am not controlling you!" Ruth doesn't back down, "How can I control someone that is out at 7 AM and comes back at 10 PM?!!" This time her question is addressed to both Eliseo and Wanda, who thus gains a temporary space in the interstices of the couple's argument. "When do you feel the most controlled and 'cornered,' as you say?" asks Wanda to Eliseo.

"When we have to meet," Eliseo whispers. Eliseo feels cornered by Ruth who wants him more connected to his family. "It is about connection," says Ruth after a moment of silence, "for him every weekend with us is a lost working day." Eliseo shakes his head, "If I have to work I have to work!" Ruth barely leaves him finishing the sentence, "this is not at all what I am talking about!" Their accelerating rhythm anticipates another argument to come. "I am a little soldier that's what I am for you!" Eliseo shouts at Ruth who replies "Cut it with this show! (*pará con este espectaculo*)!" Wanda decides to take a break to go debriefing with the team, after having been an internal spectator of their heated exchanges. Wanda was here the intimate third of a fighting dyad keeping her at an ambivalent threshold between spectatorship and participation. (Here, possibly, the *jouissance* of the dyad is to keep the 'third' close enough to be a distant witness of their intimate publicity)

Wanda leaves the room. Ruth and Eliseo fall immediately silent. Eliseo holds his head with his right hand while looking at his feet. Ruth turns onto the armchair and looks out the window. On the other side, Wanda enters the room of the therapeutic team, finding in Clara, Micol, Almibar, and me [or I] exhausted spectators of Ruth and Eliseo's restless fights. As the sound of their arguments resonates in our heads, the screen projects the couple's silence. We also fall silent contemplating the screen. While the video keeps recording, the absence of sound coming from the other room makes them look like a still image. The troubling spectrality of soundless motion, a speechless figuration of the couple form. Wanda is apologetically (and amusingly) surprised, *"Mira vos!* (Look at this!), now that I am out of the room they cannot fight…!"[85]

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[84]See Hochschild's "Time in Balance" in *The Time Bind* (1997) in relation to the "extra-work" keeping family man/women out of the house.

[85]I have gathered multiple cases narrated by different therapists about similar scenes where the couple stages its fights only in the presence of the therapist. "The funniest part is to witness their fights for the whole session and then see them walk out hand in hand, as if nothing happened," commented Marisa a family and couple therapist I interviewed. In another situation, I have watched a videotaped session with Milena where she was progressively left out by the couple which kept cutting her off throughout their ongoing arguments. Milena, to break the argument, also took a break to go behind the one-way mirror (although she knew that no one was watching the session). In the video, we both saw the couple literally fall silent in the very moment she left the room. This relational situation

In the video recorded material of this session, after three minutes of silence between Ruth and Eliseo the screen turns black for two minutes. The black screen, in my imagination, evokes the absorbing texture of the couple's petrified silence. Silence shapes their performed pose and temporal pause, *it* speaks of Ruth and Eliseo's impossibility to stage and live-out their fight without the presence of Wanda, the intimate spectator always on the threshold of exclusion.

Then, in the video, the screen flickers again while Wanda, already with the couple, wires back the cable on the camera. Ruth and Eliseo are waiting for Wanda to say something. "It seems to me that you both agree on the fact that you need to connect, you want to come back together but you don't find a way. He feels pressured and controlled, she needs to know when are you coming back home…The atmosphere between you two is intoxicated, contaminated…" as Wanda develops her thought Eliseo laughs affirmatively at the idea there is a 'toxic' atmosphere in their relationship. "You see," he interrupts, "the problem is that she calls me only because and when she is bored! That's all!" Ruth is taken by surprise. The quiet silence of their break unveils its fictional texture while Eliseo calls her back on stage. "When I call you because we are waiting for you at home… it is because I am bored!? This has nothing to do with it! What are you talking about!" Ruth explodes. The problem is that she spends her evenings waiting for him to come at home for dinner. She calls him, he rarely picks up the phone or says that 'he is coming' when he is not. When they meet at home either they fight, or he disappears downstairs playing the guitar. He just wants to come back to a quite home.

The shared silence of their pause vanishes while they are caught again in the rhythm of their arguments. Wanda is pushed rapidly into the spectator position. "And what happened yesterday?! He?! What happened yesterday?!" Ruth shouts at Eliseo who is talking over her, "Yes, what happened? What happened? Tell us! Tell us!" Ruth is furious, "What happened? This guy never notices anything! What happened?! What happened last night?!" The fight continues as they both repeat the same refrain, formulating a question that seems to be addressed to the temporal dimension of their relationship. What makes our present present, what is that present that is past that makes our present so bad? What happened, what happened last night?

As they perform in the present tense and make the present *tense*, their couple image emerge as a flickering membrane absorbing the air in the atmosphere and burning their oxygen. They are drowning, breathing toxicity. The air is toxic because the couple image is toxic and intoxicating. The toxicity of the image is entangled with the aridity of their temporal imagination. *Ni inversión, ni diversión*, what happened yesterday, what happened?

Their fight is escalating again and Wanda cannot find a point of entrance in the communicational exchange. The interphone buzzes. The private public on the other side of the wall is calling the therapy room, producing a buzzing sound that pierces the screen, the eye of the camera, and the wall. The ongoing argument between Eliseo and Ruth abruptly interrupts as the buzzing catches everyone in the therapy room by surprise. "Sorry, one second," says Wanda who can finally talk. "Yes?" she says with the handset close to her right hear. "Is everything ok? Are you having fun watching the fight? Do you like fights? What can we do from here?" Almibar is on the other side of the interphone. His amused and sharp comment makes Wanda chuckle with a serious tone. She knows, as she would have told me later, that she needs to interrupt the repetitive rhythmic of their arguments. She also knows she is being pulled in and left out at the same time by the couple's staged arguments. "*Sí, sí, todo bien,*" she replies to Almibar. Eliseo and Ruth are looking at each other. They hear the sound of Almibar's voice but

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sustains even more explicitly the spectacular dimension of the couple form in therapy and the intensification of the intimate publicity of this specific channeled and channeling structure of desire.

they cannot understand what he says. In a sudden instant their curious gazes cross and intertwine. They smile at each other, as if commenting the oddness of an interphone intrusion in their therapy session. They smile, relieved by the interruption of their communicative toxic loops. The private public, on the other side of the wall, exited momentarily from the position of the absent spectator and acted as a public proper making an intervention in a shared communicative space.[86]

Wanda puts down the handset. For a few seconds silence circulates in the room, caressing the contours of the therapeutic triad. "*Bueno*, it seems to me that today the image of your encounters at home can help us. We are not yet seeing a way for you to exit this fights (*salir de las peleas*), but in a way you might be beginning to listen to each other, through the communicative space opened here… You, Eliseo, elaborated an image of how you would like the situation to be at home when you come back. You, Ruth, articulated an image of how you would like to meet him at night." Wanda, who is talking uninterrupted for the first time of the session, takes her time. "*Bueno,* take notice, look at how you can improve this specific encounter, this specific image of the encounter. Think about the image of your encounters at night, how do you imagine encountering each other? What is the image of your encounter? Every time that an image that could bring you distant from each other emerges, ask yourself 'how can I change that image'? Do you understand what I mean? How can you change the image of that encounter that is keeping you so close and so far from one another? 'How do I want to meet Ruth, to meet Eliseo tonight? How can I modify this encounter changing the image of that encounter?'"

Closing the session on this question, Wanda repositions herself at the borders of their interactions, indicating the presence of an image, in this case the encounter-image that is standing in their way, intoxicating their encounters. What does it mean to meet the other through an image of that encounter? What is the temporal tense that would allow a modification of that image?

Coda

Eliseo and Ruth did find a way to reshape their couple-image and to inject new oxygen in their relationship. Session after session, they began to observe their own couple image and started playing with it, through new forms of relational imagination. They found a series of project together, renovating an old house they were renting and finding new diversions outside the house and buying a *perrito* (little dog). Therapy has been for them a form of temporal rehabilitation. Injecting the future in the present tense of the image, they found new ways to look at each other being seen by the eyes of the other.

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[86]As I wrote here the Spanish *publico* is a "viewing public" performing observant participation (see also Minuchin et al. 1967)

IV. From reflexive modes to refractive moods

Fig 5. Annika Von Hausswolff. Attempting to Deal with Time and Space, 1997.

Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind. Even Descartes had his dream. To think is always to follow the witch's flight.

<div align="right">Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 41)</div>

Affection [affectedness] is nothing but the possession of alteration as a property

<div align="right">Jean-Luc Nancy (1993:18)</div>

The error of reflective philosophies is believe that the mediating subject could absorb the object into his mediation or grasp the object upon which is meditating without remainder, or that our being reduces down to our knowledge

<div align="right">Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2014: 64)</div>

[The perception of our inner life consists] in a sort of refracting of pure duration into space, a refracting which permits us to separate our psychical states, to reduce them to a more and more impersonal form and to impose names upon them – in short, to make them enter the current of social life

<div align="right">Henri Bergson (2010: 100)</div>

Navel-gazing, or looking at the carnal trace of the (m)other[1]

It is the end of June. Buenos Aires is getting cold, wet, and wintery. I am walking up the stairs of an old building located in *Villa Freud* for a last session with Alicia.[2] She is the hypnotherapist who allowed me to be her patient and video record our sessions during my fieldwork, while I was following teams of systemic couples therapists.[3] Alicia, a motherly figure in her early seventies, has been practicing Ericksonian hypnosis for about 45 years in the capital.[4]

A year before our last meeting I came to her saying that I wanted to learn more about hypnosis, which I understood as a relational space where to experiment a certain form of being-in-affection, a form of surrender to a passive register of presence that would and could shed some light over an ethnography of affects. I explained her that while researching other types of relationships (intimate couples in crisis), I also wanted to explore the aesthetics of ethnographic knowledge production and the relation between affects, the imagination, and the production of qualitative concepts. I wanted to embark in such a journey through clinical hypnosis.

After I explained her such intentions, she warmly stared at me while stirring her coffee. For a moment, I thought I went too far with my explanation. The teaspoon, turning clockwise, seemed to restlessly look for some meaning, while touching the borders of the small cup and ephemerally producing a clear-cut sound. She then smiled and said, "*Mira vos! Que interesante.*"[5]

Her curious and patient attempt to understand what I meant by what I said, quickly transformed into her commitment to help me understand what I meant by what I said. It was the beginning of a shared journey: she walked me through her techniques of trance induction, and she weekly took the role of my hypnotherapist, navigating with me through the creative and imaginative spaces of mild trance-like states. Alicia provided me with the inter-subjective context to develop a first series of experiments entangling the question of the body-as-medium with the phenomenological tradition, affect theory, and ethnography.

In the introduction of this work, I have outlined the theoretical connections between affect theory with philosophies of hypnosis. Essentially, I propose that mild trance-like states of

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[1]In this chapter, I refract and reformulate shared intuitions and conversations that have Yanina Gori and Stefania Pandolfo as primary interlocutors. While being particularly prone to think-with trance-like states of absorption it is through Pandolfo's work that I imagined the link between affects, hypnosis, and a psychoanalysis of the (m)other. The latter notion, together with "oceanic feeling" and forms of "womb syndrome" has been widely "imparted" through the empirico-conceptual explorations of Yanina Gori. See also Lacan (1998) on the "m/other."

[2]Villa Freud is a non-official section of Palermo, a middle-class *barrio* in Buenos Aires. It earned this name because a vast number of psychoanalysts lived or worked there especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

[3]See previous chapters.

[4]See my introduction on hypnosis and Milton Erickson (1901-1980), who was an American psychiatrist and hypnotherapist who came to be known especially through Jay Haley's book *Uncommon Therapy* (1973). Erickson was a pioneer in reformulating contemporary hypnosis through the use of indirect suggestions and heterogeneous techniques of mild trance induction (see also Yapko 2012). His work directly influenced the Palo Alto school of systemic therapy, having caught the interest of people like Gregory Bateson and Jay Haley (Haley 1973; Erickson and Rossi 1980; Roustang 1990). Milton Erickson defined hypnotic trance as a "spontaneous" process happening in the patient, a state of (un)consciousness in which patients could modify their relationship with their environment, their therapist, and themselves (Roustang: 1990: 43).

[5]What about that! How interesting.

absorption and imagination are suitable venues to consider how we can phenomenologically study affects. In the first chapter, I wrote of the ethnographer's body as a contact zone, a mediating surface, that enfolds the affective atmosphere of contingent encounters producing (refracting) the material that becomes available to the thinking-machine. Through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan, in the second chapter I have argued in favor of a fundamental non-coincidence between the reflexive subject of knowledge production and itself (see also Song 2066, 2011).

Such non-coincidence, I suggested, provides a conceptual ground to reframe the critiques that have been advanced to different forms of reflexive anthropology. A common critique against anthropological reflexivity and the *reflexive turn* is that while it has provided a post-colonial questioning of ethnographic authority (Clifford and Marcus 1986), it also provoked literary endeavors considered too writerly and narcissistic (see Boyer 2015; Marcus 2009).

Such anthropology, the detractors argue, has centralized the personal life of the ethnographer to the detriment of the "other others," who were the ones supposed to regain their voice in the first place. After the so-called crisis of representation (Marcus and Fisher 1999), that is, the "subjects supposed to speak" surfaced, in fact, as a mute presence within the textual apparatus of post-modern anthropology: the anthropologist was too pre/occupied by his "navel-gazing" (Stocking 2001: 119).[6] As Viveiro de Castro suggests, in this period the ethnographer has been imagined as capable of literally (re)inventing the "other" (2014; see also Fabian 2002).[7]

However, both the ethnographic "diary disease" (Geertz: 1987: 90; also Bourdieu 1992) and the related critiques of anthropological navel-gazing have often assumed that the reflexive ethnographer could be transparent to itself and that, with a "good enough" reflexive effort s/he could unveil the gaze of power (see Song 2006).[8] The radical non-coincidence of the reflexive subject (in respect to itself) within the phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and systemic traditions challenges such assumption. As Chertok and Stengers suggest, the practice of hypnosis has inflicted a "narcissistic wound" to the (psychoanalytic) subject providing an experimental and sensorial platform to explore the limits of interpretation, but also of the western *cogito* (1999).

I am interested in the image of the navel-gazing as it exemplifies quite literally my argument. The critical *j'accuse* through the idiom of "navel-gazing" expresses the fact that the ethnographer cannot see farther than his own knotty depression in the center of his belly (the navel). However, the navel is precisely the carnal trace of the (now absent) umbilical cord that connected the fetal being to the mother. The navel is the exposed yet intimate trace of the m/other.

At the same time, in Freud's interpretation of dreams, the navel is the dark vanishing point, a "contact with the unknown" that thwarts hermeneutic intentionality (1998: 143). "This is the dream's navel," Freud writes, "the spot where it reaches down into the unknown" (*ibid*: 564). Thinking with Stefania Pandolfo (via Lacan) the navel can also be a "knot," a psychic signifier incarnating the trace of the Other (see 2017).

Finally, the navel brings us back to hypnosis: as I have written, different philosophies of hypnosis interpreted trance-like spaces of consciousness as the emergence of an affective tie, an

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[6]I write "his" also to resonate with the feminist critiques to the "writing cultures" moment and of the male-gaze. See for example Behar and Gordon's edited volume on "women writing cultures" (1995).
[7]Let it be noted that during this period there has been a vast attention to the heuristic role of affective and imaginative modalities of "getting caught" by forces in the field (Favret-Saada 1981; Pandolfo 1998; Rosaldo 1993).
[8]I take the expression of the "good enough" from Scheper-Hughes' use of Winnicot (1995).

oceanic feeling bring the subject back to the space of the womb (see Borch-Jacobsen 1993; Nancy 1993).

I do not wish to reduce anthropological reflexivity to a hypnotic practice of sustained navel-gazing and I agree with Dominic Boyer who writes that reflexivity needs to be understood first of all as an attempt to render explicit the contingencies of knowledge production (2015). However, in this chapter I am interested in exploring the embodied medium of the ethnographer in relation to his intimate exteriorities (the ethnographer's navel, quite literally) and the related production of images.

In anthropology, a wide literature has considered the role of the ethnographers' unconscious and the imagination in ethnographic research. From the classic work of George Devereux (1967), to more recent works on the inter-subjective and ethnographic role of dreaming, dream-interpretation, and reverie (e.g. Borneman 2011; Hollan 2008; Miškolci 2015; Mittermaier 2010; Pandolfo 1998; Proudfoot 2015). I also refer to recent turns to emotions (Davies and Spencer 2010) and sensuous scholarship (Stoller 2010) and to anthropologies of the image and the imagination that consider non-linguistic forms of knowledge production (e.g. Desjarlais 2016a, 2016b). In a sense, my main question is pursuing Lisa Stevenson's idea of an iconophilic anthropology through images (2014).

In this chapter, I apply the conceptual apparatus developed through the dissertation and consider the ethnographic "first person" as never fully coincident with itself. I take from Merleau-Ponty (1968) and Bergson (1990) the idea of a refracted "inner life" in which the self-reflexive ethnographer undergoes imaginative and sensorial changes between mediums and temporalities in order to produce qualitative insights. As we read in the opening quotes of the chapter, for Bergson the perception of our inner life consists "in a sort of refracting of pure duration into space, a refracting which permits us to separate our psychical states, to reduce them to a more and more impersonal form and to impose names upon them – in short, to make them enter the current of social life" (2010: 100). Refraction, which describes the bending of a wave that travels at different speeds when passing through different mediums, is an image to indicate the processes of mediation and passages between mediums.

This said, what is that the ethnographer refracts and transforms (and, in the upcoming case tran*ce*forms)? The navel of the ethnographic dream, I would say. The space of this dream emerges in the phantasmatic tension between the presence of the ethnographer in/to the field and its subsequent practices of re/presentation.

Intensifying the descriptive genre of the previous chapters, I provide ethnographic scenes that entangle the phenomenal with the phantasmatic. [9] In the transcriptions of my video recorded sessions of hypnosis I undergo mild states of trance with Alicia. These are phenomenological adaptations of the video recorded transcriptions of the ethnographer's oral recounting of visual images. In a sense, these sessions condense an explicit and incessant passage between mediums and subsequent "remediations" (Bolter and Grusin 1999).

The overall aim of this chapter is to consider the relation between mild states of absorption, affective attachments, and "ethnographic perception." Far from providing any general claim, I am mostly interested in understanding how my own ethnographic project has been sustained by a specific form of attention and perception. As I write, I understand ethnographic perception also as an affect that swings between reflexive modes and refractive moods. This delimits the ground for future work on the *conceptual persona* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) of the ethnographer as conscious/nonconscious milieu of knowledge production.

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[9]See my reference to Desjarlais (2016) on phenomenal phantasies in my previous chapter.

As literatures on clinical hypnosis argue, the hypnotic mild trance is characterized by a paradoxical co-presence of a dreamy ad fuzzy state and a subjective sense of lucid awareness and presence (see Yapko 2012: 185-187). Clinician and philosopher François Roustang calls this state a form of *veille paradoxale*, a paradoxical waking state that rather than being related to sleep (from the Greek *hypnos*) should be related to a creative hyper-focus (1990, 1994).

In hypnotic experience we find the tension between an imaginative state of affectedness and a conscious state. This irresolvable tension is what makes it suitable as a thinking-venue where to explore the limits of and within the *cogito*. "In any case," Roustang writes, "it's the persistence of a certain degree and a certain from of vigilance that paradoxically offers hypnosis to the possibility of its description (1990: 83, my translation).[10]

Along with the hypnotherapist in this chapter, I enter what we can consider as profound states of relaxation where my imaginative capacities are enhanced through an affected state. The closer subjective description I can offer is that it often felt as if being in that moment in which, still in our bed, we are half awake, half asleep, and half dreaming. When I was a child, like many people I know, I remember being aware of the fact that I was dreaming. I remember enjoying this state and being capable of playing with the dream, somehow orienting its processes of image production. Here something similar happens. However, my intent was to follow the emergence of images, rather than to modify them intentionally.

The induction of hypnotic mild-trance, often builds on conversational detours and drifts, on linguistic alliterations, paradoxical or chiasmic expressions, vague repetitions of sentences, and a constant distinction between the inside and the outside, the left and the right, the cold and the warm, the here and the there, the ethnographer and her field, the intimate and the public, the writer and the reader.[11]

Alicia's last gift: hypnotic farewells and the logic of trance-formation

As I walk up the stairs before our last meeting, I intuit Alicia's outline. She is at the door. We smile gloomily mentioning my upcoming departure. I am actually happy to leave. I am drained and ready to re-conceptualize this experience from a different standpoint. I am exhausted and Alicia knows it, or better, she might know in what sense.

We sit down, in front of one another. She turns on the camera while I mumble something. This is our closing session and we talk about how depressed I got during my fieldwork and how seeing so many psychotherapy sessions threw me into a constant state of exhaustion. I called this exhaustion a form of *gripe depresiva* (depressive flu): it is like having the flu without having it. However, Alicia thinks that I also bumped against something else. She suggested that I came to Argentina, among other things, to give a sense of closure to a mourning I started (and masterfully avoided to finish) in Argentina, seven years ago.[12]

"It has been a good idea coming here. Here you connected with something more emotional," she says while looking through her notes on our sessions. "You haven't really been

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[10]*En tout cas, c'est le maintien d'un certain degré et d'une certaine forme de vigilance qui rend paradoxalement l'hypnose à la possibilité de la description.*

[11]See Erickson (1980); Haley (1973); Yapko (2012).

[12]Throughout the chapter, like in the previous ones, I insert the Spanish words that didn't find an happy translation or that deliver a sense of the spoken Spanish or that contain specific alliterations or idiomatic expressions. These words *do not* indicate any code switching: everything happened in Spanish and I transcribed it directly in English from the video material.

depressed, just more receptive… when you will write about this, you will find your closure… but now, this is still a moment of openings, of receptivity, this is how you get information, this opening connects you with your affectivity (*afectividad*), this… you had to do it...”

I look at her and mumble, “Yeah… I am not sure this is what happened.” She is looking through her notebook. “I have been reading my notes,” she says softly, “and… my notes are different than our video recordings… they know better, somehow… so… throughout this year I find in my notes many strong emotions, a lot of fears, quasi-depressive states, euphoric moments, *de todo* (a little of everything), something coming from your research, something from a deeper space…” As she repositions her notebook on her laps, she looks at the clock on the wall and decides we have time for a last short “induction.” Her voice is slow and soft. I reposition myself on the couch, sitting comfortably.

“Ok, very good, *ya vemos* (let’s see) ... very good… exactly, Samuele, close your eyes… this, *exaaaactly* like this, feeling comfortable, really comfortable. You know already what is the best way for you to enter in a different state of consciousness… we can use many techniques you know already, or none in particular… I want to tell you… remember Samuele remember and recall your past trance states, a different state of consciousness. It is raining outside, the rain is falling down, and we can hear the raindrops, drop after drop after drop after drop. Do you hear the rain? Outside is Buenos Aires, the street where you live, the sounds of the cars, the city, outside is the rain, drop after drop you can hear it. Can you hear it? Maybe you can close your eyes, as you know… the visual world drives us outside, outside… But you are here, inside, you are inside, sitting on the couch, trying to find a comfortable position, yes, like this… trying to find… to find a meaning to all this, to all the things you lived this year. Yes, like this, put your hands over your lap, sit comfortably… I am asking, I am going to ask your unconscious mind…”

The pace of her voice slows down again, while I close my eyes and get slowly lost in and through her voice.

“Samuele, I am going to ask your unconscious mind to produce a very quick overview, very quick… *muy a vuelo de pájaro* (bird’s-eye view), since you came here in Argentina, only relax and be comfortable where you are, let images come through you… When you came here, where you went, who you saw, who you talked to, Cordoba, Buenos Aires, the places you went to while thinking about your work, you projects, people you have met here, moments you shared, things you have thought, friends you made… and your observations, your activities [she pauses talking very slow], what you saw, what you lived (*lo que viste, lo que viviste*), what you ate, what you drank… everything, everything is now passing through you like a series of little images representing what you lived throughout this time… Often we don’t realize… sometimes a long time passes for us to understand with clarity what we went to do in another place. Even though it was a conscious choice…your unconscious mind knows what else happened… the consciousness of unconsciousness, the conscious ways of the unconscious.”

“Let the unconscious be unconscious,” she continues, “while your consciousness falls into an absorbed state… The unconscious, it knows why you chose this; your unconscious knows what for and why you came here. You lived what you lived, you felt what you felt, you lost what you have lost… You have lost, you have absorbed, you lost, you absorbed, let the images pass through you in a rapid succession. Different images of all the things that happened here… Soon a new stage will come, a different phase. This was a phase of incorporation, of embodying information, situations, smells, colors… a phase that will be ordered and codified later. Here you lived personal processes, yours, internals, then externals, then internals, then maybe personal processes with your couple… life in couple… the couples you have seen… everything is passing

through you now, and it's forming the *materia prima* (raw material) with which you will build something more, different. What has been lived, listened, heard, forgotten… all is the raw material you are bringing with you… and with which you will build something new… something different… you have the capacity… to transform this into something else, a work. And you will realize when you will start to do this different work, to articulate and put together (*armar*) your work, you will realize clearly what was the use of all this…"

Alicia stops, as she often does after fuzzy forms of inductions. She could also be entering into a mild state of absorption. "What's happening in you, Samuele, now, right now, what images do you see?" she asks me.

My eyes are closed, and I am in deep relaxation (I remember this "clearly" because it has been video recorded). I have heard Alicia's question but I am having some troubles to speak out. My eyes are closed, my mouth half-open.

I suddenly apprehend a shape, an outline within the darkness of my vision. I begin seeing a spherical and greyish globule coming out of my chest. It moves, it flickers, and it is filled of *intensive* images moving through its *extensive* surface.[13] I weave my hands in the air, forming a spherical shape in front of my chest. In/finite (I cannot count them) and minuscule flickering images are filling out a series of intersecting planes cutting through the sphere. Gray is the dominant color, while bottles of Fernet Branca, the sidewalk of *Scalabrini Ortiz*,[14] a crying husband, la Presidenta,[15] and the unfolding therapy session I am living are filtered thorough a a watery plane of confusion.

"It is like," I start talking slowly trying to find my way into words, "I feel, it is like if I see, it seems I am seeing a sphere, a bubble, a globule containing everything, everything that happened to me, all my year. It is like a soap bubble coming out from my chest, but it is still attached to it… I can see it as outside of me but it is as if I was trying to *eat it back* in [I am weaving my hands, pushing the sphere back into my chest]. It is circular, it is a circular movement."

"Yes, like this, very good," Alicia encourages me, "yes it is circular, circular, it is outside and goes toward the inside, in a circular way, exactly." "There is, this ball, there is everything in it," I continue "but I cannot see it very well, it is like I have this pulling desire to introject it again." "Yes," Alicia murmurs, "it will be introjected, it will come out again, it will come out again… but with a different form. It's the sphere's process of coming and going. First you took it in, you incorporated it, now you project it… you see it? You incorporate it again and… the last time it comes out it will be different… after you eat the sphere back again, and out again."

"Yes," I mumble with a drowsy voice. I am following and not following, I feel heavy and sleepy, while I try to open my mouth to hear the vibration of sound. I vaguely think about the problem of "transformation," of a passage between forms of representation, but my body pulls me toward the sphere I am visualizing. I want to eat it back, it is not re-presentable. Not yet. My mouth is half open; I cannot even mumble. I hear Alicia's voice. Her voice's frequency is like a soft and foamy platform I am surfing through. Her voice lays out a plane of immanence, cutting through the thin air filling out our separation. Her voice is the vector, the channel of our relationality (relatedness). Her voice is the medium. I am attached to it like a sticky fly trying not to drawn into an oceanic storm.

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[13] I am here banalizing Deleuze's use of *extensive* to indicate divisible space and *intensive* to indicate qualitative spaces that cannot be divided without implying a change in their *kind* (see 1994).
[14] A street in Buenos Aires, passing through Palermo and Villa Crespo.
[15] Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was the then president of Argentina (2007-2015)

"Yes, still attached to my chest," I say, "then the sphere comes out and I see surfaces, horizontal surfaces coming out my chest, there are colors, they are colored, there is flickering paint on flat surfaces, words, writings. I see, I… it's liquid dark orange falling through the plane, 'transform', I read the word 'trans…', no it is just letters…"

"Yes, like this," Alicia's whispers, "more horizontal, of course, as you always said you lived many vertical experiences here, in this metaphor you use often, very often… yes, there is the need to horizontalize, in order to be able to transmit it, no? Are they artistic surfaces? How will you transform this?" I mumble something saying that I feel and see the transformation of forms as through a vibration coming out of my chest, a sound, a frequency.

"You voice!" she says, "precisely… now you have to integrate, to assimilate what then will become a sound, a frequency, color surfaces, sounds, concepts, and also part of your personal life. Everything transforms us, everything touches and affects us… now go on your way, knowing that you added a step more, in a journey you chose without much conscience but with deep reasons… and now… I ask to your unconscious mind of keeping and holding onto this knowledge (*conoscimiento*) you have been touched by, it is a knowledge that knows more than you do, and let it be a tranquilizing element… this is only a process, it is never more nor less than a process itself, it is only a part of it. Now, Samuele, I am asking to your unconscious mind to keep and hold onto these images, so that it can process them the way it knows how to process them, in the upcoming days and more than anything during your nights, when the mind is most at work. Good, very, very, good."

I breathe-in my drowsiness, and then slowly try to breathe it out. I cannot open my eyes, not yet.

The grayish bubble, a minimalist comment

The "grayish bubble," is a liminal space of intimate exteriority where what the ethnographer has absorbed un/consciously is about to undergo transformations of scale and temporality in order to become available to ethnographic discourse. At the same time, the bubble is still attached to the ethnographer's chest, in between him and the therapist. The bubble is a quasi-externalized relational intimacy. The bubble is the navel that needs to be incessantly mediated. The navel of the ethnographic dream is an imagined and affective tie to the m/other.

The bubble, in its fluid gluiness, is still resisting being fully delivered over ethnographic thinking. The transformation from affective traces to represent-able images is still uncertain, as suggested both by Alicia's words and my desire to "eat it back again." If we follow a more specifically psychodynamic route we might also think that these affective traces will try to find different venues where to erupt and emerge. The ethnographic venue of knowledge production could be the visible the symptom, what remains of the umbilical cord. The trace of an affective nostalgia for presence that drives ethnographic writing.

The bubble is also the image of the self, of an im/possibly self-enclosed self. [16]

Gray is a color that emerged throughout multiple sessions. In my imaginary it stands for Buenos Aires' urbanity, my *gripe depresiva*, an im/possible ethnographic research, the recursive crisis of intimate attachments. It is a color that is *weak enough* for me to imagine seeing through it. Grey is the color of a rainy window. The color of a flickering screen. The color of inescapable

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[16]Peter Sloterdijk (2011) offers a creative reading of philosophy and temporality through the figure of the bubble (as image of the self), the globe (as image of the world), and foam (as image of plurality).

mediation. The color of a sidewalk, to be walked sideways, while looking for other bubbles to look through.

Slant-wise.

Refractive cogito

During my experiment of experience with hypnosis I often visualized the paradoxical, paranoid, and masochistic pleasure of thinking (about thinking) as a chase through a dark forest.[17] I am uncoordinatedly running after of a nocturnal animal. I imagine it as a vaporous beast of the night. It comes to presence only to vanish behind itself and it is gluttonous of absent spaces: it is always present, always vanishing, always *in statu nascendi* (see Nancy 1993).

I identified this animal, session after session, as the flip side, the origin, or the parasitic companion of the *cogito*, the "I" *that thinks that it thinks* through which Descartes inaugurated modern western philosophy. The famous *cogito ergo sum* that identified the "thinking subject" as the origin and the vanishing point of philosophical thinking, was the finishing line of a series of radical doubts. I can doubt everything, Descartes ruminated, *but* the fact that I am thinking. I can be completely mad, *yet* I think (that I am thinking) and therefore I am a thinking-thing, a thinking medium, a *res cogitans*. This conclusion has encouraged the idea that in Descartes we find the birth of the modern, self-transparent, and rational subject that excludes whatever (or whoever) is *other* to itself, from delusions to madness to dreams to the unconscious (see Žižek 1998). In his initial formulation of the mirror stage Lacan writes that the experience of psychoanalysis (and the realm of the unconscious) is "at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*" (2002: 93).

However, Lacan's later return to the Cartesian *cogito* provocatively conceptualized it as the "subject of the unconscious" and as the vanishing point of the "I" that always already enfolds its own intimate other (Lacan 1998; see also Dolar 1998).[18] In this work, I have been more or less directly interested in thinking the question of the *cogito* and of the subject of thinking precisely through Lacan's image of an intimate exteriority or "extimacy" (1997: 139).[19] The extimate kernel of contemporary subjectivities surfaced especially in the intimate exposure captured and produced through the optic apparatus of systemic therapy. In the session above, the bubble I visualized during my last session of hypnosis can be conceptualized as an image recalling extimate spaces of rumination, loose cogitations, and affectedness.

The debate on Descartes' *cogito* between Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault delimits the terms of this question in a quite salient way. In a famous passage of his *History of Madness* (2006) Foucault indicates that Descartes produced an emblematic exclusion of (animal) madness from the history of western philosophy. After having doubted everything and passing through temporary yet maddening "delusions" the only remaining certainty is precisely the rational *cogito* which emerges from a radical exclusion that, while excluding, posits the Outside.

For Derrida, Foucault is misreading Descartes' (maddening) doubt: rather than excluding madness (the "other-of" rational thinking), the philosopher of the *cogito* is positing it as its originary (and extimate) kernel (1978). Perhaps rejecting the ethical promiscuity of such

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[17]On the relation between paranoia and "theory" see Jackie Orr (2006: 18), but especially Eve Sedgwick's "paranoid reading and reparative reading" (2003: 123-152).

[18]Ian Whitmarsh suggested me to return to Lacan's return to the *cogito*.

[19]The work of Stefania Pandolfo has been a fundamental initiation to "extimacy" as a figure, a form, and an analytical category (see 1998, 2008).

conceptual stance, Foucault responded that Derrida's critique was actually rendering explicit the very incapacity of western philosophy to think the Outside as a result of a radical exclusion (2006). Perhaps falling prey to the same sin, I am more interested in considering the enfolded other *within* the cogito.[20]

With an ambitious conceptual stretch, in the philosophy of the *cogito,* for Derrida, madness accomplishes the work of a Deleuzian plane of immanence. While the latter must be regarded as "prephilosophical" (1994: 40), the plane of immanence "*does not exist outside philosophy,* although philosophy presupposes it" (*ibid*: 41, original emphasis). Deleuze and Guattari write: "we will say that THE plane of immanence is, at the same time, that which must be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nonthought in thought" (*ibid*: 58), it is the "most intimate within thought and yet the absolute outside... Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy," they continue "not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane' (*ibid*). The unthought in every plane (of thought), I venture to say, is the extimate other of the *cogito*, the running beast of the night.

Following this line, Slavoj Žižek returns to the "specter of the 'Cartesian paradigm'" through Lacan in order to "unearth in the Cartesian subjectivity its inherent tension between the moment of excess… and the subsequent attempt to gentrify-domesticate-normalize this excess" (1998: 6).

In yet another resonating sense, the extimate kernel of the reflexive *cogito* (with its internal others) can be thought as the contact point with what Merleau-Ponty called the "pre-reflexive" realm, which backgrounds our reflexive intentionality. For Merleau-Ponty, the pre-reflexive is "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learn beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (2002: ix-x). The forest that hosts the running beast.

In a different vein but with a similar intention, also Michel Henry has revisited the *cogito* in western philosophy to rehabilitate the "affective other" of the *cogito* since its formulation by Descartes. Henry suggests that only through a form of non-reflexive "self-affection" Descartes can discover himself as *res cogitans.* For the French phenomenologist, the conscious *cogito* is always accompanied by a passive and affected cogito, which correspond to an immanent and relational presence he defines as *life* or self-affection and which dwells within the temporality of an ever-present present, an always already originating *statu nascendi* (1993).[21] The running beast of the night is the extimate animal running through the plane of immanence. The animal's run cuts across the (pre-reflexive) non-thought of every thought.

Following these conversations, I provisionally conceive the tension between the reflexive *cogito* and its extimate other as a "double movement of liberation and capture," to use an expression of Deleuze (1989: 68).[22] This double movement can be framed as a persistent tension between the reflexive thinking-medium and its constitutive excess. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the error of reflective philosophies is believe that the mediating subject could absorb the object

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[20]For the sake of this argument I am providing a rather simplistic version of the debate and, especially, of Michel Foucault's masterful response to Derrida in his "My body, this paper, this fire" (1979).
[21]For example, he refers to Descartes' "*At certe videre videor*" (I certainly seem to see), as the exemplification of an originary space of self-affection and passivity at the hearth of the Cartesian *cogito.* The latter, *senses* its seeing as a pre-representational affection of thinking. In Latin *videor* is the first person passive form of *videre*, "to see," translated as "to be seen, seem to" (Henry 1993: 14-21).
[22]For a different use of this expression see my previous chapter.

into his mediation or grasp the object upon which is meditating without remainder, or that our being reduces down to our knowledge" (2014: 64).

While this might read as unrelated to anthropology, I am interested in ethnographic modes of engagement characterized by the same tension, the same movement of liberation and capture. The methodological foundation of ethnography on Malinowksian presence (Marcus 2009) be it multi-sited (Marcus 1995) or para-sited (Faubion and Marcus 2009) or else, still begs for a philosophical understanding of the ethnographer's presence as heuristic figure that fuels our fantasies about our being in/to the field (see Borneman and Abdellah 2009).

As different forms of post-humanism are redefining the objects and methods of ethnographic research focusing on non/human realms, the return to a *cogito* that contains an "animal" excess within itself can actually bear interesting methodological consequences. I would suggest that if we engage with the "other side" of the *reflexive* subject of knowledge production rather than dropping it because we are now "beyond the human," we can actually renew our methods from within the ethnographic tradition and from within the western tradition of reflexive subjectivity. In a sense, recovering the extimate kernel from within western philosophy is also a way to decentralize the contemporary assumption that outside the western tradition we find more compelling models to understand and think the contemporary.

Throughout this work I have explored multiple optic surfaces describing their heuristic and affective role. Here, I want to understand the mediating interface of the embodied ethnographer as a phenomenological surface that cannot fully absorb the object of its mediation but that can, nonetheless, produce imaginific transformations of the objects it runs after. The grayish bubble is my ill-digested fieldwork and this dissertation the draft of many (many) ruminations to come.

In this vein, I consider ethnographic modes and moods of engagement as a run into the forest chasing the fragments of Merleau-Ponty's "ill-absorbed" (and ill-mediated) remainder. The dark beast of the forest which keeps escaping the thinking-medium. However, there is contact. A contact through mediating surfaces. A "navel-like" contact between the belly of the ethnographer and the lifeworlds s/he explore. The belly of the ethnographer in the belly of the extimate beast.

The image of refraction I have been using in this work, helps precisely to conceive of the relation between the vanishing affects and effects of the "other *cogito*" and the related processes of mediation. In refraction, the light wave is bent when passing, for example, from a fast to a slow medium. The thinking-medium cannot catch the infinite speed of the beast of presence, but it can refract the waves of presence the animal leaves behind. Such refraction involves a temporal shift, which we can understand as operated by the mediating work of the concept. Of course, as much media theory as shown, there is nothing "outside mediation" (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and the "immediate" effect of immanence is, precisely, a feature of mediums (see Meyer 2010, 2012).[23]

The thinking-medium – going back to our run in the forest – refracts an in/finite series of immanent and affective waves left behind by the running beast of the night. This, clearly, does not imply that the animal on the run is the "really real," as the very plateau over which the

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[23]The movement of my thinking towards this refractive *mediology* is interested in producing concepts that are similar to Mitchell's "metapictures," as mediums that bear "the sound of their own making" (Mitchell 2005: 210). At the same time, the accent on mediation keeps in place an ontology of the non-coincident subject of reflection: whatever the direction of its reflexive endeavor, the reflexive ethnographer always misses the eluding target. The *j'accuse* against "post-modern" reflexivity misses the fact that the ethnographer can only misapprehend *it*self.

animal runs is posited from within the thinking-medium itself.[24] However, there is distance, there is "a difference which makes the difference" (Bateson 2000: 459) between the thinking-machine and the running animal, even if such distance is posited by the realm of thought. That is where a certain insightfulness of the images I visualized under hypnosis might lie.

As I wrote, philosophers and critics of psychoanalysis have identified hypnosis as a relational space of affection (and tranceference) where we experiment with the flip side of the reflexive and *cogito* and thus get closer to the running beast, to the present of presence and, in some form, to the never-ending origin of the subject, always in *statu nascendi*.[25] If we follow Lacan's idea that at the very core of the subject we find an intimate exteriority that does not really belong to the subject, we can also imagine the interest in doing some navel-gazing: within us, an in/finite world of "other others." Hypnosis, in my view, is an affective interface, a surface of a contact between the two sides of the *cogito*.

Through hypnosis, I began conceptualizing my ethnographic perception as sustained by a certain mood. My weekly sessions of hypnosis, that is, progressively put me in what I call a "refractive mood" that was parasitically present within my reflexive modes of analysis. A mood, as philosopher Martin Heidegger suggests, "assails us. It comes neither from the 'outside' nor the 'inside,' but arises out of being-in-the-world, as a way of such being" (2008: 176). I define such openness to being affected as a generalized mood. For Heidegger, the *Stimmung* (mood) is one of the ways in which *Dasain* can be affected, it is where our being-in-the world finds its "thereness," its situationality.[26] This mood, I would say, sustained different modes of attention and mediation that transformed the lifeworlds I was exploring into images, concepts, sounds, and smells.

The refractive image of the *cogito* is not a way out from the reflexive one. As elicited by Descartes' intrinsically *mad* cogito, its refractive side is rather a vampiric companion to it. The refractive cogito is sucking out blood from a pale Narcissus that is trying to find his figure reflected in front of a vaporous mirror. I write of Narcissus in reference to the navel-gazing critique against narcissistic reflexivity. Sometimes the vampiric companion of the *cogito* can play some refractive tricks to reflexivity and steal Narcissus' mirror in order to break it into pieces and make little weapons to tear up the umbrella protecting us from the infinite speed of chaos (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). To steal the mirror, the thinking-medium has to experiment, to push itself to the limit of it-self. It needs to be ambitious like a hunter of nightly creatures embarking a lonely journey in search for "other others."

In mild state of hypnotic trance, I wrote, there is a constant tension between a state of affectedness and a waking state. What Roustang calls the "paradoxical waking state" (1990: 83)

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[24]I am quoting Clifford Geertz's expression of the "really real" in his *Religion as a cultural System* (1973) where he writes: "The religious perspective differs from the common-sensical in that, as already pointed out, it moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them […] It is this sense of the "really real" upon which the religious perspective rests and which the symbolic activities of religion as a cultural system are devoted to producing, intensifying, and, so far as possible, rendering inviolable by the discordant revelations of secular experience (*ibid*: 112).

[25]See my introduction and the works of Borch-Jacobsen (1993); Henry (1993); Nancy (1993); Roustang (1990, 1994).

[26]The mood is an ontic specification of affectedness, of our being-attuned (Dreyfus: 1991: 176). Heidegger writes: "Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of affectedness" (2008: 176). In anthropology see the close engagement of Jason Throop with the notion of "moods" (see Throop 2010, 2014).

of hypnosis is here the double movement of liberation and capture between the flip sides of the *cogito*.

It is in this precise sense that I read my most treasured quote from the work of Deleuze and Guattari:

> Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind. Even Descartes had his dream. To think is always to follow the witch's flight (1994: 41).

Reversibility: of two hands

It is the second session with Alicia. After one exploratory session focused on my personal history, Alicia knows how impatient I am to see her at work, to see *in vivo* if her hypnotic induction would make me enter a state of mild trance, a space of suggestibility, of vulnerability, of porous opening towards a being-in-affection. Hypnosis, for Alicia, is the intention (and in-tension) of being influenced by the presence of the other, of accessing a shared and relational space of affection (see Henry 1993; Roustang 1990).

"Now we will try something," she tells me. I am sitting in a white armchair in front of her and giving a quick look to the voice recorder. The battery is full, the SD memory empty: the ethnographic trace-machine is running.[27]

"Now I will try to induce you into a *trance de prueba* (test trance), to see your way to react, your way to enter into trance, to see how you react to a mild trance. Mild trance, it is always mild… Because every person has its rhythm, its reaction, its everything (*su todo*). After, later we will see where it will bring us, how we will apply what we learn from this. One thing, Samuele, I need one thing, I need you to feel comfortable, I need you to be comfortable, just try to notice what you would need to be comfortable. Are you ok? Do you need to go to the bathrooms? There is something you would change in this setting?"

I am trying to understand where this is going, while finding a comfortable position on the armchair. "*No, todo bien,*" I say.
"Very good, we are ready…" she responds.
"Is this to test… to verify…" I am confused about what she meant by *trance de prueba*.
"Yes, yes," she promptly reassures me, "it is to explore your style, your mode. Because there are so many things, after I can explain you, there are things that I have to respect in each person's style. People are so different… when I understand the style of a person, then I know how to proceed in upcoming situations, I will already know what I can and cannot say, how to do it, how do I have to modulate the tone of my voice, be it like this or like that. There are words that work and words that don't; it is a whole world, *sabés* (you know). I need to respect differences, it is an infinite world, and I have to follow it, I have to respect difference, to respect whatever is good for you, there is no other way. Good, like this, once you are at ease, I will ask you that you put

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[27]The ethnographic apparatus produces traces through recording: recording devices, the embodied presence of the ethnographer that lives always already considering the present as to be remembered, his refractive mood.

your hands in this position." Alicia is holding her hands in front of her chest, with the two palms facing each other. I look at her a bit surprised but I assent to her request.

"Very good, now… put your palms a little bit closer to each [other]… yes like this, now you will discover why." As I keep the palms of my hand facing each other, with 40 cm (15 inches) of void in between, I feel already tired of keeping them in such a position. "*Bueno Samuele*, would you mind closing your eyes? There is something bothering you?" she inquires. I tell her I am tired already of keeping my hands like this.

"Your hands are already tired? Wow (*Eppa*)! They are already tired," she says with a loving and admiring tone, "very good, *muy bien*. Now Samuele we will first go through your surrounding, you are surrounded by a lot of stimuli, sounds coming from the street, here, did you hear the ambulance? Sounds of cars, sounds of the kid crying in the street, sounds coming from this building, this room, and you… you, speaking a language you know [Spanish] but with a specific tone, accent, with a specific rhythm… As we go through this work you can follow my voice just as it is, or maybe your unconscious (*inconsciente*) prefers to translate it to one of your maternal languages. I don't know what can happen, your unconscious mind will decide, your eyes closed, in such a way… in order to keep the visual world outside, to keep it out of sight, the visual world brings us outside, very much outside (*para afuera*), but you are inside. You are here, inside, keeping your hands with your palms facing each other, waiting to understand the reason of such a request, your head lying and resting, and your feet on the ground. Perhaps you are sensing the temperature of this place, the texture of your clothes, the shape that the armchair is 'imposing' (*imprimir*) on your body, your hands up, waiting to understand. And now I will formulate two requests (*pedidos*), one directed to your conscious mind, I ask your conscious mind (*mente consciente*) to pay attention to the sensations you have and feel in the palms of your hands, from now on you will pat attention only to the sensations on the palm of your hands. And I will ask to your unconscious mind, if today it is inclined to collaborate with us, to bring your hands close, in contact… but by themselves, producing a phenomenon of… automatic movement, good, very good. From now on, then, pay attention to your palms, the sensations you have in your hands. I don't know what you can be sensing, but I can tell you what other people told me, for example some people felt tingling, tinkling, a vibration, a feeling of pressure in their palms, very curious sensations (*sensaciones*), some felt like streams of energy from the tip of each finger till their attachment to the palm and up to the wrist. Good very good, your hands produced a slight movement, perhaps is random, let's see, if your unconscious mind wants to do it now."

Alicia's pitch is lowering gradually, her tone is soft and rhythmic, silky and welcoming, she manages to make her repetitions not to seem repetitive, every time a slight change, a slight modification of tone makes her words as if coming out from an ancestral refrain I am drawn to.

"Your palms," she continues, "the particular feelings of your palms, conscious and unconscious feelings, tingling, vibrations… streams of energy, some people told me of a feeling of total absence of their palms and of their feeling only the fingers, like suspended in the air, oh, good, very good, a little movement is being produced… we will see how it goes. Other people had sensations related to temperature in their hands, heat or burning sensations in their hands… oh, another little movement of your hands, sometimes cold in their palms, sometimes heat, sometimes a burning feeling, sometimes nothing at all, oh, good, another small movement, your unconscious mind is listening to my words."[28]

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[28]From my notes when I was transcribing this session: "I have to stop to drink some glass of fresh tea or slap my face or something as I am falling into a mild drowsiness while I am as listening to this! I also slowed down by 10 %

I am falling into a colorless void while having difficulty in following Alicia's words. I feel tired having to keep my hands with their palms facing each other. In the perception-image of my body my hands are not moving and the more I focus on my palms the more I can feel my finger bones as if creaking in silence and moving through my skin, tired of holding up the muscles enveloping and supporting my bones, holding up my palms, supporting this induction, holding up my session, sustaining my desire to explore hypnosis.

I sense a mild incapacity to move my hands intentionally. "I cannot be that tired, maybe I am still hung over," I try to ponder the obscure and bleary plane of my thoughts thinking themselves. Then I lose the intentional capacity to follow my thoughts and end up focusing on my palms again, while I let Alicia's voice pierces through my register of presence.

"While your unconscious mind can drift (*divagar*), sail around, roam about, drift, roam, navigate through waves… it goes elsewhere, it is working in other ways, it is working on this theme, this topic, this experience, this getting closer to your goals… while it wanders, perhaps your unconscious will keep attracting one hand toward the other, as if a magnetic force would pull them together, but it will do it only if it decides to do so, if it decides to do it today… Ha, good, another series of small movements, typical unconscious movement, brief and scattered, they keep happening... there are people who sense temperature differences, one palm has one temperature and the other another, for example the right hand can be cold and the left hand hot, or the opposite, or sometimes both hands keep switching from cold to hot… and every small movement gets you closer, brings your hands closer, just like you like going towards (*acercarte*) your projects, your goals, the different places you have visited… How many places, in how many places you have been, in how many places and states, how many experiences… good very good, another little movement, your unconscious keeps producing small movements, soft, delicates, but clear cut, typical automatic movements, let's see what happens. We are going only where it wants to go, but you don't have to worry about anything. Only try to feel your palms, focus on your palms, you don't even have to try to remember this because everything is being recorded, so now you can be free from recording, remembering, remember to record, or recording your memories, so now you can focus only on your sensations, on the sensations on your palms."

"What is it?" Alicia asks, "Vibration? Pressure? Tingling? Rotating spirals? An absence of sensation? What do your hands prefer to do? Lie down? Rest? To rest, to lie down, to get closer, your hands can get closer, maybe your unconscious can produce an image in your mind, an image of when your hands get close to each other, when they touch each other, when you try to take something, an external object, to take it in your hands, touch it with both hands, like when you have to use it… Your conscious mind only has one task: to focus on your palms, focus on this and let your unconscious mind do the rest, let it decide if it want to keep producing these small movements, if it will bring your fingers closer, before your palms will touch, if it will bring the index of your right hand first… it seems that…"

I am exhausted. I cannot open my eyes, and I cannot move my hands. Is this the state of mild trance Alicia wants me to "test-drive"?

I am caught into a temporalizing vapor enveloping my plane of thought. It is temporalizing because it makes time, it expands it, it marks time enveloping its outlines. Every

the recording to transcribe it without having to stop too many times. Yet this transcription is becoming a challenge: stay awake!" (Buenos Aires, December 7th 2013). Interestingly, also while writing this paragraph and translating the session in English I am having troubles to stay focused. This long induction tests my patience.

small fragment of thought I attempt to catch slips away from my consciousness so slowly I cannot distinguish which thought or image is arriving and which one is leaving. I am suspended in a slow process, while having the exhausted sensation of having been into this sitting position for hours. I realize my hands are not joining and my palms are not touching, I have the vague desire to just join my palms in order to finish this first induction, but I am sinking into the armchair and falling into a state of lucid drowsiness.

As Alicia's voice slips into the background I realize that my mind is on fire (hyper-excited), while it is surrounded into a vapor of quasi-still images and thoughts. The sound-image of my two hands trying to reach a third object takes shape within my inner vision. How long have I been sitting on this armchair?

While focusing on my palms, which are somewhere in between black and orange, I realize I am lucid while being unable to open my eyes. Is this trance? I am glad I am recording Alicia's long induction, as I could never remember it. I find my self into a plane of immanent boredom while realizing there is a nucleus, a series of meaningful clouds grappling around the image of the two hands.

Sinking into the couch, I get caught into the phrase "reversibility of the hands" and simultaneously recall an example by Merleau-Ponty. It was about the impossibility of touching and being touched at the same time. But also about the latent reversibility of our horizons of being: the possibility of touching and being touched. I linger over the sentence I repeated to myself and to others an infinite series of times: "they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth."[29] The slow cloud of my thoughts disappears while everything in front of me is, finally, crisp and clear-shaped again. I see my palms, I feel my fingers, and I hear Alicia's voice again.

"The hands, recall the image of the hands," I tell myself. I must not get absorbed into a different plane of thought. Alicia – her voice finds its way beneath my skin – is telling me that she sees my middle fingers rotating around each other: "it is like they are weaving around each other, drawing small circles, they are leaving the other fingers behind. And while all this is happening you are only sensing your palms, the palms of your hand, only sensing your palms…"

I am getting restless on my position, I breath in deeply to find my comfort again, a series of images flipping like cards in the hands of a fast and faceless croupier occupy my sight. Alicia seems to understand I am getting into some space/place, she gets up, I cannot open my eyes but I smell her perfume as if stressing a progressive proximity.

"I am going to touch your forehead now, like this, like this, let it happen, let it happen. Also, there is no need for anything in particular to happen, just sense your palms, let the other part to do its part, you have another part, an unconscious mind, that is present, that keeps everything, every leftover, every surplus (*lo demás*), your unconscious mind keeps all your learning, and there is so much… even in your short life, maybe you don't recall them, all your knowledge (*conocimientos*), all your learning(s) (*aprendizajes*), it doesn't matter how much you want to remember, it's all there, a vast source of resources (*recursos*). It is nice to know that there is another part that can work beyond your will, it is nice, but we have (*hay que*) to summon it, we need to know how to talk to it, we need to ask for its collaboration, just like we are doing now, softly and respectfully, very good… And every time you need to move or roll your eyes, even if they are closed or every time you need to swallow, every time, every little movement you do, you can reach a deeper state, deeper state, a state of deeper trance, depending on what your unconscious mind wants to do…"

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[29]This is the last sentence of Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" (1968: 155).

Alicia's voice is transforming into thin air, thin air is transforming her voice into a magnetic field of presence. I keep focusing on my palms and realize I sense my hands like paralyzed, they cannot move and I *want* them to move, to touch each other, to find rest within a zone of contact, a field of immanent warmth. I can sense the heat of my left palm with my right palm. I can fell the heat of my right palm reaching the center of my left palm. I begin switching the focus of my attention from left to right, from right to left. Then, I try to feel them both.

Like a shrunken and shrinking paper ball thrown into a black ocean of thick water, I feel absorbed into the memory of Merleau-Ponty's example. I have it. There are two hands, the right hand is touching an object and the left hand is touching the right hand[30]. Both hands have the reversible capacity of being touched and being an object of touching, while they cannot be both touching and touched in the same moment. There is an oscillation in between poles. The right hand, once touched by the left hand, becomes an object for it, an "intertwining of bones, muscle and flesh" (1962: 92). I have the image of Merleau-Ponty's pages flipping in front of me while I find my way out of the thick ocean of black water I was thrown into. The blackness of the thick fluid I am leaving behind allows the emergence of a black ray of luminosity. "The secret blackness of milk," I find myself thinking. [31]

I am almost out of the water. I can see the image of my two hands, there is no third object to be touched but I sense the thickness of the water is still in between my hands. (The water is the medium, the milieu, the flesh). I recall the example of the hands as a clear image for Merleau-Ponty of a never realized coincidence between the touching and the touched. Merleau-Ponty's notion of reversibility, "always imminent and never realized in fact" (1968: 147).[32]

"Either my right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world by then I do not really touch *it* – my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering" (*ibid*: 147-148).[33] I am intentionally focusing on my two palms, now I cannot sense my bones anymore, there is a subtle warmth, getting sharper and shaper while piercing through my palms. I try to sense them both sensing each other's warmth. What is reflexivity? Sensing your hands sensing each other?[34]

I see the sticky black water transforming into a red flickering wire. It is going from palm to palm. It is like an immanent wire of relationality. Can I sense both my hands touching each other, from the point of view of both, at the same time? The phenomenological experiment as foundational feature of a specific *way of inquiry* envelops my ambition to pursue the experiment while in this state. Is the phenomenological epoché, starting from its origin with Descartes, an hypnotic exercise of absorption into a state of affectedness?[35]

The emergence of the *cogito*, in this case, is a run into the dark forest chasing after the flickering red wire of immanence. There is a tension here, a difference, a gap between conceptual

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[30]"If I touch with my left hand my right hand while it touches an object, the right hand object is not the right hand touching: the first is an intertwining of bones, muscles and flesh bearing down on a point in space, the second traverses space as a rocket in order to discover the exterior object in its place" (Merleau-Ponty: 1962: 92).

[31]Paul Valéry in Merleau-Ponty (1968: 150)

[32]See my introduction.

[33]"My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and one of two things always occur: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world by then I do not really touch *it* – my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering" (1968: 147-148).

[34]See my first chapter on *seeing oneself seeing oneself.*

[35]See Michel Henry's "affective *cogito*" (1993).

projects, the run after immanence and the logic of a latent reversibility, a present absence allowing for presence.[36]

I am lucid, I cannot move. I am in some sort of clearing. I am paradoxically awake, sleepy and sharp. [37] The point for Merleau-Ponty was not to reach the coincidence of the touching and the touched, but rather to posit it as a never realized reversibility, always imminent, always to come, always latent, never fully present. You can see only because you can be seen, touch because you can be touched. It is a passive reversibility of the gaze that can see only because it a being-seen. Reversibility is a porous being of latency where active touching, seeing, and hearing are allowed by their passive (and *pathos*-logical) condition of presence: being-seen, being-touched, being-heard.

As I deepen temporarily my state of mild absorption. I am focusing on the red wire connecting my two hands, I am feeling their relationship through the warmth of the connecting wire. Maybe you cannot experience active passivity (touching and being touched), you cannot palpate the immanent taste of reversibility, but you can imagine it.

My hands are pierced by the connecting red wire, while I sense their being affected by each other's presence, they are caught into a relation that seems, rather than reversible, determined by presence. Reversibility is the being of latency, while the connecting wire is the heat of presence. I am swinging between conceptual poles as I try to focus on my right hand, then my left hand, then my right palm, then my left palm.

While going through this series of ideas, I realize I am slowly snapping out of the mild trance state. "Wait, wait," I say to myself. I want to *see* if I can sense my two palms touching each other's from both sides. Before they become one. But now I lost all images, I am only breathing in and out my own mild dizziness. I realize that Alicia is still talking, I clatch onto her voice to use it as a springboard in order to get back into a state where to be fully absorbed by the image of my two hands.

"*Bien, bien* (good, good)," she is saying, "your hands are getting closer, you are getting closer to experiences you want to have, how many experiences, Samuele, so many languages, so many tones, so many ways to talk, so many cultures, places, everything is with you now, everything will be kept and protected by your unconscious mind, or what we are used to call as such [unconscious mind], this construction, this construct that makes us talk about another state of consciousness, another hidden but present part, good, good, I see your fingers dancing around each other's now, maybe there is a part of you that is observing the other now, maybe you are observing your observation, it can be (*puede ser*), it's fine, it's fine that one part observes the other, it is a personal experience but also your research, find your way to observe and experience your observation, in what way this is happening, you can see it for yourself, let it happen, let your hands find each other, let them find their way like you are finding yours, let them look for each other's like two persons that have been separated for a long time, like two persons finding themselves again in an embrace (*abrazo*), like two parts of the same person that try to intertwine and integrate into each other's, like two languages existing at the same time…"

Alicia's words make me think she sees what I am thinking about, and she gives me what I want to be given, after all that's what she said this test was about: understanding what I re-act to.

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[36]See my introduction of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of vision. Seeing, for Merleau-Ponty, is possible only because of the latent depth of a quasi-present "being-seen." Vision itself emerges from a "fleshy" latency of porous being which is a form of always-deferred carnal condition of possibility. See also my first chapter, and Lacan's reading of Merleau-Ponty's "inside-out structure of the gaze" (Lacan 1998: 82).
[37]Roustang's *veille paradoxale* (see above).

But in some ways she is also already accepting my attempt to tun our hypnotherapy into a venue for thinking about thinking through states of affection and porous openness to relational fields of immanence. There is a moment of silent suspension.

Alicia seems to be looking at me but I have my eyes closed, I only sense the palpation of her gaze. I am still wrapping my presence around my two palms, I am tired to focus on them and tired of keeping them up in the air. Alicia dwells within our silence for a moment then starts again to interweave sentences, mingling injunctions with vague suggestions, as if caressing the contours of my being in order to peel it out from its own background, to throw it again inside the womb-like background.

In this induction, the longest induction she ever used with me, Alicia gave me the length and the stretch of the hypnotic weaving around, mingling around, constructing a chain of sentences allowing the patient to progressively "double his presence:" that is being where s/he is, thinking what s/he is thinking, sensing what s/he is sensing.

"Good, only rest, learn how to rest, to sit comfortably and to rest within yourself, let it happen, let it pass through, let it happen the way it is happening now, softly and gently, your hands are getting closer, exactly, like this, only sense the palms of your hand, there is nothing else you have to do, nothing else, nothing more, nothing, while you are surrounded by your surrounding, being where you are, taking the time necessary to your unconscious mind, you would have done this very quickly with your conscious, but the unconscious, this conceptual construction, has its ways, its own reactive forms, its timings, its modality, its states, let it continue its work… very good, yes, very good."

I am falling back into a state of absorbed absorption.

"What sensations you have on your palms? Temperature? Pressure? A vibration? A form of fatigue? Or something I don't know… I don't know your sensation, but you know what's happening to you, and while your fingers draw in the hair strange circles, let what's happening to happen, let your unconscious bring them together, or if they want to rest let them rest, while a particular form of consciousness, while a state of being happens through you. You already know different states of consciousness, many of them, so many states, this is just another one, very similar to the others, your hands are so close, very close, it seems your unconscious decided to bring them together. And when your hands will touch, you will live a particular experience, or not, a particular experience, your experience, don't try to control anything, simply let it happen, the way it needs to happen, let your experience be what it needs to be, I have no idea about what it will be, maybe it will be nothing, maybe it will be the most natural thing, maybe you will feel an integration of two different parts. As your fingers dance around and through their encounter, your palms are almost touching, some people live this as a particular experience, other as something natural, other as nothing at all…"

I cannot sense my hands or fingers moving, I am falling again into the dark ocean of sticky water. My hands are immersed in it. Then I feel a heat weave and I am split between the intention and in-*tension* of shouting out something and bring my palms together. Then I feel the heat of the wire in between my two palms, shaking off the black and sticky water they were immersed into. I'm in a clearing again.

A green plane is backgrounding my two palms. I am heavy as metal and exhausted. I focus again, thinking of the experience Alicia is mentioning. What is this experience? What is to be triggered when the touching hands become both touched by their reversible touch? Maybe if touching is possible only because of the reversible latency of the being-touched when you are touching and being touched simultaneity you are not touching at all, you are only in a fleeting

and immanent state of affection. Like fending into dark matter while being penetrated by it. From concept to concept, while visualizing my palms and feeling the wire pulling them together, I realize these are two different concepts. The concept of immanent affectivity and the concept of latent reversibility: the immanent wire is burning off any possible being of latency. Reversibility lingers behind it, through a quasi-present absence. But concepts themselves need to be reversible, while they run after immanent wires. I smile, surprised I can think so clearly in this state. My smile accompanies a brutal disappearance of all images. I am unable to discern the state of my palms. Am I sleeping? Alicia's voice is still surfing through presence, and I can hear her silken and relaxing tone, almost a whisper. It is a whisper of the forest.

"A small phenomenon of trance, a small phenomenon, in this moment, with your joined hands, let the best sensation occur, the most likable sensation you had during this mild trance, you can rest your hands now, over your laps, over your knees, over the armchair, while they come down to rest, your trance state can deepen, or turn into a lighter state, lighter, deeper, as your unconscious prefers, what is better for you? You have a wise and knowledgeable side, like everyone, it knows, it knows, you have to trust that it can give you the feeling and sensation that it needs to give you, very good, your hands are resting, the experience it needs to give you… maybe an experience of many intersecting thoughts and concepts, maybe a nullification (*anulación*) of your thoughts, of pure sensation, very good, good. Now I will ask your unconscious mind to recollect and gather from the very simple work we did, to recollect and gather all the elements that could be of some use, we never know what we will use, I will ask to your unconscious to keep whatever it needs, as it knows what it needs, and to keep and safeguard the best state it reached during this work, a state of well being, of tranquility, or who knows, of many thoughts and images… Good, very good."

My hands are wet and perspiring, I am having difficulties to understand where they are. Then I bring myself to presence and feel them on my laps. I breathe in. Everything is black. "Respiration in being," I find myself thinking. Echoing Merleau-Ponty: "[w]hat we call "inspiration" should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that we no longer know who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted" (2007: 358).

I keep listening to Alicia. It is as if my ears were grabbing and clutching onto the sound-scape depicted by the sound of her voice.

"Now just take some time to absorb this experience, in some moments, in some seconds, I will ask to you to begin re-orienting yourself towards this place, toward this place, toward this world, in this moment, in order to come back here. Perhaps you are hearing the sounds of the street again, if you ever stopped listening to them, perhaps you are reconnecting with the external world, like this, yes, like this… Taking the most comfortable position, retaking your muscular tone, breathing, breathing, when you can, at your will, in your timing, in your moment, open your eyes to share this experience."

I open my eyes, caressing the right arm of the chair. It is like waking up from a deep dream after a night of fever. Those mornings, where you slowly regain your focus towards the world, only after feeling that the vaporous and dreamy cloud of the night is still with you, even if you are awake, even if just for a fragmented second.

I see Alicia's smile. She is offering me some water. She crosses her legs and looks at me, whispering firmly, *"Como estás, Samuele?"*

My arm is burning: relational poles

It is mid-April. I am sitting in Alicia's office, enveloped within a semi-conscious (dreamy but aware) state. We have been talking about creativity, receptivity, and knowledge in relation to hypnosis for a while now. I have been having a strange symptom for weeks: my arm feels like it is burning.[38] I have been having heat rushes concentrated on my left arm. As if some burning ants were running along my arm. An army of ants aflame is running up-and-down my arm.

Alicia, curious and smiling as usual, guides me into a visualization where she wants me to imagine myself to be front of a mirror. After slowly getting into our usual space of deep relaxation, I imagine and depict my figure as reflected into a mirror. I visualize my outline, I see my face, but my left arm is missing. "Interesting, strange, a left arm missing… what else?" Alicia asks. I spend some time focusing on my absent limb. The dark and empty matter replacing my arm suddenly turns on fire. My arm is on fire.

My left arm is on fire and my body progressively disappears from the mirror I was facing. I think of the Pink Floyd's *I wish you were here* album cover, where a man has his arm in fire. I think of Anna O. I move on the chair, feeling uncomfortable. Yet, I am too tired and heavy to bring my self back to presence. "My… my arm is on fire, I can feel it, it burns," I mumble, "my body is absent from the picture now and the fire-arm seems like a medium… through which I am communicating with… there is nothing around me, the arm is connecting me to something outside, it is reaching out, it is on fire, ah… no, but really, it burns!"

Alicia is silent. I think sometimes I overwhelm her with my metaphors and constant attempts to conceptualize these experiences. Then she exclaims, "*Claro!* This is your connection with the real, with affects and emotions, with the sensorial (*lo sensorial*). With the other arm you will write and codify. This arm connects, the other represents… writes, hum… two parts, one is on fire, it is a preoccupation, you are scared, it's a strange image, very emotional… the other will write about all the information gathered by your left arm on fire…"

I giggle. Alicia's dualism is a conscious and quasi-ironic way to frame things for her, and she knows how in/different (rather than critical) I am towards it. She giggles. "*Que sí!* I'm telling you! This connections… are data, they are impressions that are sensations (*sensaciones*), that are emotions, and that later will undergo a series of transformation in you (*en tu interior*)… but only when you will have absorbed enough, what you came here to absorb you will transform… you are already doing it, but sometimes it happens beyond your will, maybe there is an unconscious plan, maybe there was something you had to do, something you had to receive, at levels that may throw you into an anxious state because you cannot control it…" I am somewhere else while she is saying what she is saying. "My arm is on fire," I tell her, "I can feel it, this is too much for me maybe… It is a receptive fire… I… this is too stupid… but it is only on my left side, it's burning…"

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[38] There is much literature, originating with Freud and Breuer's *Studies Hysteria* ([1895] 2004)*,* about this specific symptom. As underlined by my colleague Michael D'Arcy the burning arm also recalls Freud's interpretation of the "dream of the burning child," where the father dreams of his child telling him, "father can't you see that I am burning?" (Freud, 1998: 572). Here I seem to talking to the m/other rather than the father while saying, "Alicia, can't you see that my arm is burning?" This neuropathic symptom (which was, in fact, related to a cervical herniation) is common across different forms of conversion syndromes, spinal cord injuries or disorders. Interestingly, it is also a very common symptom among people with the Chiari Malformation, amidst whom I did an ethnographic research on their experience of chronic suffering (*Essere-nel-Chiari, Corpi sofferenti, narrazioni, e processi diagnostici,* Università di Bologna 2009).

Alicia laughs softly. "Let it burn, let it do its work, you will bring this with you… when you have absorbed enough you will be able to use the other arm, that side of you that decodes, organizes, instrumentalizes, writes, produces… But you are still here, you are still receiving, you are still receiving/catching (*captando*) it… How many things happen and pass through our 'insides', you know them at a sensorial level (*lo sabes a nivel sensación*), but you don't know them yet at the level of thought. It doesn't matter, this is not the moment… the moment will come after…"

I am im/patient (bad patient and without patience), I want to snap out of this dreamy state and just go away from the visualization, the room, therapy, and my fieldwork. My left arm is burning: I can feel it. I manage to patiently focus on the threshold of my im/patience. I find some strength to follow the heat of the fire, I let it pass through my arm and sense it as a perceptive fire. The fire is "taking in" rather than penetrating the surrounding darkness. It is an absorbing fire. I breathe deeply. Inspiration is, really, a respiration in and of being. I am moving on my chair and I am not feeling too well. I am fully present to myself but I cannot open my eyes or make this image/feeling fade away. "*Tranquilo*, Samuele. Don't be scared… you got scared these months, don't worry… you only lived through this *a nivel sensaciones* (at a sensorial level), and you are scared that you will not be able to pass it and transform it at the level of thinking… a lot is happening to you… let the fire receive and burn."

My left arm is burning. I can feel it.

I let myself go towards the dark luminosity of my arm aflame.

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